

ITALIAN AND ITALIAN AMERICAN STUDIES



# ORAL HISTORY, ORAL CULTURE, AND ITALIAN AMERICANS

Edited by  
LUISA DEL GIUDICE



## Italian and Italian American Studies

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# Oral History, Oral Culture, and Italian Americans

Edited by Luisa Del Giudice



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—Luisa Del Giudice (Founder-Director, Italian Oral History Institute, 1994–2007\*\*)  
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\*\* The Italian Oral History Institute, a California nonprofit educational organization, was dissolved in 2007.

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**Alessandro Portelli** teaches American Literature at the University of Rome “La Sapienza.” He founded the Circolo Gianni Bosio for the study of folk and popular cultures and served as advisor on historical memory to the Mayor of Rome. He is the author of a number of books and essays on American literature including *The Text and the Voice* (Columbia University Press, 1994). His oral history work available in English includes *The Order Has Been Carried Out. Memory: History and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome* (New York, 2004, U.S. Oral History Association book of the year, 2005); the Italian version, *L’ordine è già stato eseguito* (Rome 1999), received the 1999 Viareggio Book Prize; *The Battle of Valle Giulia* (Wisconsin University Press, 1997); *The Death of Luigi Trastulli* (SUNY Press, 1991); and the “Essay in Sound,” *I Can Almost See the Lights of Home*, coedited with Charles Hardy, III, which received the U.S. Oral History Association award for nonprint use of oral history.

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Part I

# **Introduction**

# Speaking Memory

## Oral History, Oral Culture, and Italians in America

*Luisa Del Giudice*

### Introduction

Memory forms the “archive” of oral culture and oral history. Since it is the living members of a culture who are repositories of its knowledge, oral cultural and oral historical research share an interest in collecting oral testimony and examining spoken memories, and they necessarily pivot on the oral interview.

In November of 2005, the American Italian Historical Association (the organization most prominently representing the interests of Italian American scholars), held its thirty-eighth annual meeting in Los Angeles, California, titled “Speaking Memory: Oral History, Oral Culture, and Italians in America.” It was the first to formally focus on such themes. These are, in fact, emergent fields within Italian American studies. This chapter introduces oral history and oral culture in the context of Italian American studies, considers their application within academia (as well as the “public sector”), and situates the chapters in this volume (many originating as contributions to the 2005 AIHA conference) within this scholarly discourse.

### Italian Mass Migration to the Americas and Oral Culture

Mass migrations, from the late nineteenth century to the immediate post–World War II periods, brought millions of Italians from the economically depressed areas of Italy (especially the rural South) to the Americas. The vast majority were

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I wish to thank Dorothy Noyes, Alessandro Portelli, Joseph Sciorra, and Edward Tuttle for their critical readings of this chapter. A briefer version is forthcoming as “Oral History, Oral Culture, and Italian American Studies” (Del Giudice 2009a).

peasants and laborers, illiterate (or modestly educated) dialect speakers, firmly rooted in regional *oral* cultures. World War II, in fact, proved a watershed for many Italian traditional cultures, as rapid industrialization and modernization, literacy campaigns, and social upheaval (e.g., emigration and internal migration) profoundly changed the nature of local communities in Italy. Emigrants from such towns and villages, leaving before such change occurred, therefore never experienced it directly and, indeed, brought many archaic forms of folk culture and dialect to the Americas—aspects of culture that in their own towns of origin were to undergo such radical change in the post–World War II era. Paradoxically therefore, Italian immigrants abroad (the Italian diasporic “periphery”) have continued many cultural practices long transformed in Italy (“the center”), making Italian American communities a focus of particular interest to folklorists. Indeed, Italians searching for their own cultural roots may find them closer at hand than they might have expected—that is, in the New rather than Old World. This tension and paradox is beginning to produce interesting forms of Italian–Italian American collaborative research projects. As Italians rediscover their own immigrant communities abroad, many regional Italian entities have forged new links with Italian Americans (e.g., Milani, Chapter 4, “*Il Corriere del Pomeriggio* of the Gruppo Lonatese of San Rafael, Marin County, California”).

Given the specific nature of immigrant provenances, folklorists and oral historians begin with the premise that Italian Americans descend largely from peasant *oral* cultures and that this “deep” ethnographic background resonates within Italian American experience—even where it is neither acknowledged, known, nor understood. Indeed, it is the task of bringing this cultural information to the attention of Italian Americans generally, and to scholars more specifically, that frequently motivates the efforts of folklorists, oral historians, and “tradition bearers” themselves.

### Oral History

Oral history has variously been described as “the interview of eye-witness participants in the events of the past for the purposes of historical reconstruction” (Grele 1996, 63), as “hidden history” (Rowbotham 1973, 4), as “history from below” (Evans 1956, 1), or as “spoken memories” (Treleven). First-person oral historical narrative can frequently reveal alternative perspectives, particularly if collected from groups previously excluded from the historic record for reasons of political, geographic, class, gender, or ethnic affiliation. Given the distinctive nature of spoken memories, layers of meaning can be explored in individual modes of expression, in the processes of self-interpretation and meaning-making, and in the very reason for remembering or forgetting (cf. Portelli).

Just as the Slave Narrative Collection (Library of Congress), which recorded narratives of surviving ex-slaves from 1936–39 (for the first and last time), may be considered a “veritable folk history of slavery” (Southern 1983, 117), so too might a wide-ranging oral history campaign among Italian immigrants still today yield an invaluable “veritable folk history of immigration”—by allowing immigrants to “tell their own story, in their own way.” Such narratives can also give voice to an

unlettered “*gente senza storia*” (“people without history”)—in this case, the Italian peasant become immigrant. The “Italian Immigration Narrative,” assembled from *viva voce* testimonies of the *lived* immigrant experience (and literally told “from below,” since many of the earliest immigrants frequently traveled steerage class on trans-Atlantic freighters), would surely enrich and enliven the statistical record of the migration phenomenon.

Oral research may supplement the historic record: Luconi (Chapter 3, “Oral Histories of Italian Americans in the Great Depression: The Politics and Economics of the Crisis”), adds to standard statistical reports through oral testimony, thereby examining the *how* and *why* of the shift in Italian Americans’ political allegiance from the GOP to the Democratic Party in the wake of the economic crisis of the 1930s. Milani (Chapter 4) instead engages in a microhistorical account of the Lombard immigrants in San Rafael, California, originating in Lonate Pozzolo (province of Varese, Lombardy) in the 1880s, to demonstrate how trans-Atlantic links between an Italian village and its emigrants can be reforged generations later by the continuing historical narrative completed through oral research. This chapter also exemplifies how an interest among Italians to (*finally*, it might seem) take a more active interest in their emigrants, can creatively meet the opposite thrust of emigrants searching for their own cultural and genealogical heritages.

Oral history, however, not only supplements the historic record but may also create a historic record where none previously existed. And not infrequently, oral history research leads to advocacy, as a scholar attempts to come to terms with the question, why has *this* story been excluded from the historic record? In Italian American scholarship, *Una storia segreta* (a secret [hi]story; Di Stasi 2001), represents a notable example of giving voice through oral testimonies to just such a *hidden* story, in this case the internment of Italians as “enemy aliens” in the United States during World War II (cf. Japanese internment camps).<sup>1</sup> Around this field-collecting campaign grew lectures, exhibitions, and further collecting, and it eventually led to national legislation (Public Law No. 106-451; cf. <http://www.segreta.org>) to rectify the wrongs committed against Italian Americans and to the inclusion of this chapter of American history into the textbooks of schools and colleges, in order that ephemeral or impermanent oral stories might be converted into a permanent (written) history for generations to come: *scripta manent*.

As the adjective implies, “hidden” histories may result from omission or neglect (e.g., the unsung sagas of the “toiling masses”) or conscious avoidance on the part of those creating the official historic record (e.g., the wartime internment), but they may also result from a silence that is culturally imposed *from within*. In Saccomando Coppola’s contribution to this volume, “Breaking the Code of Silence Woman to Woman” (Chapter 5), the code of “*omertà*” or silence, recognized as a southern Italian practice, protects family (in this case) against the divulgence of insider knowledge. Much has been written about *omertà*, normally as it relates to criminality. More rarely has it surfaced with regard to gender and immigration issues. Here the author’s oral historical research creates serious family disruption resulting from misunderstandings across generational and linguistic barriers, and it takes a hard look at the Italian–Italian American divide.

Generally speaking, though, oral research normally validates personal experience previously suppressed or misunderstood (e.g., Amore, Chapter 6, “Filo della vita,” on immigrant oral narratives transformed into art, through second tellings; Herman, Chapter 13, “My Homer,” on seemingly ancient Homeric family tradition and mores). It documents emergent realities such as the Italian folk music revival in America (La Barbera, Chapter 8; Catalano and Fina, Chapter 9; Belloni, Chapter 14) or Italian American belief systems and practices, such as witchcraft (Magliocco, Chapter 12, “In Search of the Roots of *Stregheria*: Preliminary Observations on the History of a Reclaimed Tradition”). As a collateral effect, oral history may even profoundly empower socially, politically, or economically marginalized groups and can therefore be considered a democratizing force. Oral testimony, as well as autobiographical writing (both historical and literary) by and about Italian American women, feminists, gays, and ethnic and religious minorities has increased dramatically in recent years, producing new voices and constituencies within Italian American discourse. One of the inherent values of such multivocality resulting from firsthand testimony is its ability to qualify, even to counter and erode, prevailing ethnic stereotypes (the partial truths often reflecting narrow parochialisms or worse) promulgated by the media and often adopted by Italian Americans themselves.

### Oral Culture, Folklore

The complex relationship between oral and written culture that has occupied scholars of oral traditions since the nineteenth century, especially those emerging from literary disciplines (i.e., folksong—earlier referred to as “*letteratura popolare*” or “folk literature”)—is not unproblematic. Although oral and literate cultures have rarely been in exclusive opposition (cf. Del Giudice 1990), orally *produced* culture depended upon its own specific uses of oral techniques (e.g., oral formulaic theory) and may generally be identified by such specific stylistic features. Further, orality can be mimicked in orally sympathetic genres such as authored folktales, children’s literature, and revival folk music.

But what, precisely, do folklorists study today? Briefly stated, folklore studies cultural knowledge (lore) that is transmitted from one generation to the next by word of mouth or by example.<sup>2</sup> There are few areas of traditional knowledge that did *not* rely on *oral* transmission: oral genres, such as folksongs and folktales, of course, but also belief, celebration, and foodways, for example. The fact that this knowledge was communally shared and time honored across generations accounts for its appeal, its meaning, and its cultural “authority” (cf. Del Giudice 2000a, 2000b; on the oral process of transmission: Del Giudice 1995).

Primary Italian American folklore research has been carried out by scholars such as Carla Bianco, Anna Lomax Chairetakis (now Wood), Elizabeth Mathias, Richard Raspa, Giovanna Del Negro, Sabina Magliocco, Dorothy Noyes, Joan Saverino, Joseph Sciorra, Malpezzi and Clements, and others.<sup>3</sup> In this volume, Italian American folk culture as it relates to communal celebrations and the cultural politics surrounding them may be found in Di Virgilio’s chapter on the

“Alms-seeking Tradition of Sant’Antonio Abate in 1920s Western Pennsylvania” (Chapter 11) as well as Ferraiuolo’s chapter on the religious festivals of Italians in Boston (Chapter 10, “The North End is a State of Mind Surrounded by Waters”). As for oral genres per se (i.e., song and personal narrative), we return to the contributions on the folk music revival by Catalano, Fina, La Barbera, and Belloni. In addition, Zinni’s innovative Chapter 7, “*Cantastorie*: Ethnography as Storysing-ing,” considers the discipline of ethnography itself as an oral (and visual) genre and its practitioners as traditional street performers or *cantastorie*.

### Recovering Traditional Knowledge, the Folk Music Revival, Advocacy

It is through personal and collective acts of cultural recovery—field collection, recollection, or actual reclamation of cultural practices, commonly initiated through explorations of family life—that many Italian Americans encounter oral history and oral culture for the first time. But it is often direct experience of tradition, i.e., through dance, food, or ritual practice, or the experience of documenting such tradition in the field, that proves personally transformative to immigrants and descendants of immigrants.

Indeed, a major task assumed by scholars (and practitioners) of Italian American folklore is to recover traditional knowledge and often to present it to the general public via festivals, exhibits, and recordings in order that it might be experienced directly (and thereby to effect personal transformation in others), all the while answering the scholarly questions of *how* and *why* cultural conservation or innovation occurs. Yet, although performers (e.g., Belloni, La Barbera, Fina, and Catalano) and folklorists (e.g., Del Giudice 2005) may toil to bring little-known forms of traditional culture such as the *pizzica tarantata* (a form of “spider dance” ritual) to our attention, it remains to be seen what the long-term effects Italian Americans’ encounters and engagements with this culture will have on the general public (Italian American and otherwise), on artistic and literary expression, and on Italian American scholarship.

The Italian “folk music revival” of the 1960s presents a notable example of this process. Emerging from the sociohistoric context of rapid industrialization and the progressive disintegration of traditional society, it sought to both promote cultural preservation and advocate for sociopolitical change. Many scholars engaged in field recording campaigns in an attempt to document traditional singers and musicians and to make these vernacular voices available to a wider audience through commercial recordings. Some, such as Sandra Mantovani in Italy (or Joan Baez in the United States), performed this material as revivalist folksingers. Sound recordings and concert performances became powerful tools in a movement that had not only to do with a process of reviving cultural heritage “at risk of being lost” but with political advocacy. Scholars and performers brought the life struggles of ordinary “folk” (e.g., peasants, fisherman, shepherds, artisans, manual laborers, factory workers) to the attention of the general public in order that their plight might be ameliorated (and that they might not be forced to emigrate). Folk revival movements appear to be cyclical and recurring at varying intervals. We are in the very midst of a folk music revival today.

Indeed, the contributions by La Barbera (Chapter 8, “That’s Not Italian Music! My Musical Journey from New York to Italy and Back Again”), Catalano and Fina (Chapter 9, “Simple Does Not Mean Easy: Oral Tradition Values, Music, and the Musicántica Experience”), and the oral history interview with Alessandra Belloni (Chapter 14, “Alessandra Belloni: In Her Own Words”) all create new and primary documents in the history of the Italian folk music revival *in America* from the 1970s to the present, continuing this tradition of the engaged scholar and musician. The former (La Barbera, Fina, Catalano) are presented through the authors’ own personal written reflections on their activities as traditional Italian musicians in America, while Belloni’s is presented in the form of an orally recounted narrative captured on audiotape, transcribed, and translated, and it retains all the force of a speaking voice responding to directed and specific questions.

An earlier generation of immigrants, such as the Abruzzesi in 1920s western Pennsylvania, still practiced ritual begging songs for the feast of Saint Anthony (Di Virgilio, Chapter 11), and integral song texts could still be recovered. Aspects of this culture may survive only in memory and not as part of *living* culture. Much Italian oral culture, dependent on regional dialects (unlike culinary practice, belief, or ritual), has not fared well in America due to language loss but also to a host of other social and historical reasons (cf. Del Giudice 1994). Sometimes this heritage is openly repudiated. As traditional Italian musicians such as Belloni and La Barbera repeatedly attest, Italian Americans frequently do not recognize or accept these traditions as their own (cf. La Barbera’s reflection on Italian American audiences’ statement, “that’s not Italian music!”). Such musicians in America, therefore, also engage in public education about these musical cultures in order that Italian Americans might learn to recognize and claim them, as well as to help others appreciate its inherent merits within a wider World Music context.

But beyond the actual traditional practices themselves, traditional knowledge also lingers on in spoken memory *about* traditions and in aspects of a persistent peasant worldview embedded in such narratives. That is, even when apparently lost, important echoes remain even at some generational distance. Amore’s transformation of oral immigrant narratives, from public archives and from her own family, into art pieces and installations are one such creative example of cultural “retellings.” Herman’s personal narrative (Chapter 13, “My Homer”) draws on cultural imagination that reaches even farther back, that is, to ancient Greek times, creating an apparent chronologic time warp: “I was born in 1944 but raised in Homer’s time!” Other echoes remain in emergent forms of Italian American culture: some are without links to this cultural heritage, others have vague resonances of traditional culture, still others transform or “translate” such echoes into more contemporary idioms (e.g., Sciorra on rap and hip hop), and finally, at the tail end of this spectrum, are inventions (cf. Magliocco on witchcraft, Chapter 12).

If “deep ethnography” is so vital to an understanding of Italian cultural history and identity—and this is a position we are explicitly defending—why is barely a trace of this knowledge readily available to Italian Americans? And how might they especially benefit from the institutional support of oral history and oral culture? What, in fact, might advocacy on the Italian American front look like? Personal experience as a post–World War II immigrant to Canada and as a past-university

professor of Italian folk culture (at UCLA and UC San Diego) convince me that providing students of Italian heritage direct access to a more intimate knowledge of the forms of Italian culture in tune with their own family experience is indeed transformative. Despite the large number of “Italian studies” programs around the country, few support the fields of oral history or ethnography especially important to this group. At most, “oral” narrative may be mediated through literary paradigms such as the novella (e.g., Boccaccio or Basile) but rarely experienced through field-collected materials. (Experience with actual oral genres, furthermore, might even give a more nuanced understanding of the literary variant of an “oral” genre.) Personal narrative, folktale, proverbs, and song, are perhaps the most accessible modes by which Italian studies programs might introduce the field of folk or ethnographic studies. Yet, providing opportunities for direct experience of traditional culture (e.g., traditional music workshops and concerts, lectures or demonstrations on Italian traditional arts) is vital, as are fieldwork assignments whereby students come face-to-face with the variety of Italian experience and specific voices in their own communities or families.<sup>4</sup> What students do with this material can be creative (e.g., expository to creative writing, multimedia projects, photographic essays, sound recordings, dramatic reenactments, exhibitions, and so forth, cf. infra). They may even create (through oral history projects) documentation of the Italian presence in their own communities and thereby participate in civic activity beyond the academic community.

### Intersections Between Oral History and Oral Cultural Research

Oral history and oral culture or folklore research often intersect and prove mutually informing—as contiguous, porous, and overlapping fields. We are reminded (with reference to the impact on American culture of Alex Haley’s *Roots*) that “oral history recording taps into a vast, rich reservoir of oral traditions sustained through family, community and national memories” (Perks and Thomson 1998, 2). That is, it documents the oral forms while illuminating the oral process itself, i.e., how, why, and when, cultural knowledge is passed along orally and how individuals use spoken language to make sense of their life and times (see Vansina on the importance of oral historiography for nonliterate societies). Conversely, through “personal experience narrative,” individuals may offer insight into the uses and personal meaning of living traditions.

An exemplary study of the interplay between folklore and oral history may be found in Mathias and Raspa’s 1985 *Italian Folktales in America: The Verbal Art of an Immigrant Woman*. This collection presents the tales and storytelling practices of an immigrant woman, both in her native Dolomite village, Faller, and as they were transformed through immigration to America, where, for example, traditional “once upon a time [*c’era una volta*]” fairytales gave way to “personal experience narratives” on her life as an immigrant told in the first-person. Such research carefully analyzes the narrator’s art and the personal meanings of her tales while setting the narratives and the cultural practice of storytelling itself, within broader economic, political, and historic contexts. Thus, Mathias and Raspa not only

provide an individual's narrative repertoire (the tales themselves) but evaluate it against local and regional narrative traditions. They provide "hard" socio-economic evidence in order to separate out shared community experiences from what are unique aspects of the narrator's life and art. Therein lies the work's "added value." So too, Magliocco not only provides the personal beliefs and experience narratives of neopagans, she contextualizes them within broader comparative historical contexts and ethnographic belief systems and practices. The best current oral research engages in such "triangulating" discourse (cf. Lummis 1998, 269) thereby preventing essentialist distortions, as well as the "I am therefore Italians are" fallacy frequently encountered in inexperienced approaches to Italian folk culture.

Many intersections at the boundaries of ethnography, oral history, and personal experience narrative have been critical to my own work too on Italian and Italian American and Italian Canadian cultures (e.g., on wine [2001c], song [1994, 1995, 2005], architecture [1993], and belief [2001b]). For instance, while researching concepts of food abundance, I discovered historic "gastronomic utopias" (*Paesi di Cuccagna*, cf. Del Giudice 2001a) but also a deeper truth about research methodology vis-à-vis personal history: it was in response to specific immigrant experiences (e.g., the persistent search for abundance) that the need to search for traces of a coherent and collective cultural past was awakened—that I might find a historic narrative that would account for this deeply embedded cultural longing. Although it was in libraries and manuscript archives that I found the mythic land of plenty known as *Cuccagna*—which provided a historically sanctioned *topos* to which I might attach a collective cultural experience—it was through my own *lived* experience that I knew it to be *true*.

This dialogue between the present experience of traditional culture and written or visual documents (often spanning centuries), convinces me that a combined study of oral and written sources of knowledge has the potential to create a significantly deeper understanding of our cultural tradition, and that this methodology is critical to writing the history of a people who are, in large measure, without a written historical record. This work thus confirms the importance of gathering oral testimonies of personal experience—not only for folklore but for conventional historical research as well, in order that we more fully understand the *written* record. Indeed, oral research methodologies, together with archival and bibliographic research, form a mutually sustaining and convincing partnership.

### Fieldwork Methodologies, Applications, and Archives

The oral history movement, which began in the post-World War II period, has grown exponentially in more recent decades and is now international in scope.<sup>5</sup> With the growing interest in collecting oral testimonies, many practical guides to fieldwork now exist for the general public. Some focus on folklore (e.g., Bartis, Georges and Jones, Jackson), others on oral history per se (e.g., Bermani and De Palma, Dunaway and Baum, Grele, "Envelopes," Ritchie, Truesdell, Yow), or both together (e.g., Hunt, Ives); and yet others on family history (e.g., Greene and Fulford, Spence). Oral history societies frequently provide public awareness and consulting as community

outreach, besides creating easily accessed Web sites to respond to this growing interest. For instance, the American Folklife Center, Library of Congress ([www.loc.gov/folklife](http://www.loc.gov/folklife)) produced *Folklife and Fieldwork: A Layman's Introduction to Field Technique*, by Peter Bartis. (Institutional resources for oral research are listed below.) These sources provide nuts-and-bolts information on interviewing and transcription techniques (e.g., preparing for fieldwork, image and sound recording equipment, elaboration and editing of data), ethical and legal issues (e.g., informed consent, ownership rights, release forms), as well as questions of archiving and preservation (storing, converting media, indexing, cataloguing).

In addition to “how to” guides, anthologies such as Dunaway and Baum (1996) or Perks and Thomson (1998; esp. part 2, “Interviewing,” 101–82) raise nuanced theoretical issues all across this spectrum of activity: the interplay between interviewer and interviewee, insider and outsider,<sup>6</sup> culturally determined parameters for the best results, gender perspectives, social hierarchies, as well as thornier questions such as how to interpret communication (muted channels of thought, metastatements, listening for silences), how to witness to trauma, who controls the interpretation of the narration, how the “facts” are verified, how sensitive information is handled, what biases operate, and so forth. Finally, one might add references that “invert” the microphone and gather testimonies of oral historians themselves reflecting on their disciplinary craft and personal experience (e.g., Casellato 2007).

From a global perspective, oral historical and ethnographic research has found many other applications. Beyond “therapeutic” (e.g., “reminiscence” groups)<sup>7</sup> and humanitarian goals (e.g., projects that promote community education and literacy projects, or strengthen collective identity and self-esteem across generations; cf. Foxfire, Wigginton 1998), oral history has been used in harsher political environments. It has become a valuable forensic tool in war crime tribunals, truth and reconciliation commissions, and indigenous rights movements. It has helped in the “witnessing” process for individual or collective trauma victims subjected by repressive regimes to violence or silenced memory,<sup>8</sup> by shattering silence and denial (e.g., Holocaust, Armenian genocide), and advancing social justice (e.g., for the families of *desparecidos* and refugees).<sup>9</sup> While spanning the political spectrum, oral history and folklore research has tended to thrive on the Left, although many sorts of oral history projects exist around the most diverse issues and groups.<sup>10</sup> This socially and politically engaged tradition is longstanding among folklorists and oral historians<sup>11</sup>—even though Passerini cautions against “facile democritisation” and “complacent populism” (Passerini 1998, 4).

But what can one do with the field-collected materials of oral research? The applications are many and diverse, as they are transformed into media (recordings, film, theater, exhibitions) for use in a wide variety of public settings including museums, festivals, and Web sites, as well as, increasingly, television and radio programming (e.g., “Save Our Sounds” oral history project). The immediacy of oral history and its engaging, direct style, draws in the reader, listener, or viewer as no other form of narrative does, bringing historical experiences to life. For many museums, oral history has been central to exhibition design and has proved to increase museum attendance.<sup>12</sup> Of course, not all fieldwork results in public record

or display. It may instead be limited to personal or family use via family genealogies, photo albums, memoirs, and videos. In fact, a niche market has grown around “personal history.” Personal historians can write histories for the exclusive use of individuals and their families, or they can help assemble and produce journals, scrapbooks, albums, and videotaped life histories.<sup>13</sup>

From an Italian American perspective, oral research has found a range of applications: Darrell Fusaro, for instance, explores an unresolved murder in his own family history in dramatic form in the play *The Basement*; documentary filmmaker of Italian American festivities Beth Harrington examines the process of ethnographic filmmaking and its moral dilemmas in *The Blinking Madonna*; while B. Amore transforms immigrant narratives and objects into artistic compositions in *Life line—filo della vita* (exhibited at Ellis Island and elsewhere). Another example is the author’s exhibition, *St. Joseph’s Tables and Feeding the Poor* in Los Angeles, a direct outcome of a city mapping project in the late 1980s, organized together with the local Sicilian community as a way of making an invisible community and its little-known customs visible to the general public.<sup>14</sup> And, of course, old-fashioned folkloric reenactments such as grape stomping in *vendemmia* or wine harvest festivals, still exist,<sup>15</sup> as do “folkloric” and costumed music and dance groups who continue to perform at heritage festivals. These are not the likeliest sources of inspiration for cultural reclamation, removed as they are from contemporary modes and style of cultural expression. Less choreographed and mediated forms of traditional culture, although rarer, show signs of engaging more contemporary sensibilities.

Perhaps some of the best known “products” of fieldwork are the sound recordings themselves, which capture the very voices *producing* oral genres such as lullabies, vendor’s cries, or folktales. Italian labels (many now defunct) that featured field recordings as well as revivals of those original sounds were names such as Albatros, Fonit Cetra, Dischi del Sole.<sup>16</sup> In Italy, original field recordings in the earliest documentation formats (e.g., wax cylinders, reel-to-reel recordings, etc.) are housed at the Discoteca di Stato in Rome. In the United States, pioneering recordings made in the 1950s by Alan Lomax (and Diego Carpitella) may be found in the Alan Lomax Archive (see Resources). Many of these were recently released as the Italian Treasury by Rounder Records. Field and commercial regional recordings may also be found in the American Folklife Office (Library of Congress), and recently in the Del Giudice-Tuttle Italian Music Collection (now in the UCLA Ethnomusicology Archive). Recordings of Italian American materials are rarer (Bianco 1965; Lomax Chairetakis 1979a, 1979b; Conte and Schlesinger 1986).

And finally, a word about archives: While memory functions metaphorically as an archive, actual archives frequently become public repositories of community memory and shared culture. They are critical to oral research. Ideally, primary documents are maintained in visual and sound archives that preserve the primacy of the original field documents, even though transcriptions of them may facilitate the ease by which they can be consulted. From early wax cylinders onward, the tendency has increasingly moved in the direction of a more complete or three-dimensional representation of the field experience. New technologies are being developed to make visual and sound materials more digitally accessible in their original formats—but this is always a matter of unevenly distributed human

and financial resources. Maintenance and accessibility are costly, both in terms of human and financial resources. Some archives are modest while others elaborately preserve, carefully catalogue, and index their materials (e.g., Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation Archive, Los Angeles, founded by Steven Spielberg, and recently renamed the University of Southern California [USC] Shoah Foundation Institute).

Multimedia and digital archives relating to the Italian American experience are growing as oral history projects multiply.<sup>17</sup> Such archives may document many aspects of the immigrant experience, from community history, individual life histories, social history, and family traditions. Only a fraction of their contents are ever digitized or published, so they remain a rich and frequently untapped source of primary materials for scholars. Collections of oral materials on general immigration may be consulted in centers such as the Immigration History Research Center (University of Minnesota) or as part of specific projects such as the Ellis Island Oral History Project, while the history of a specific community may end up as a publicly accessible Web site. *Italian Los Angeles: The Italian Resource Guide to Greater Los Angeles*, for instance, evolved from “mapping” the Italian presence in Los Angeles for the city’s Cultural Affairs Department into a community-based oral history project (including university students) and finally into the Web site, <http://www.ItalianLosAngeles.org>. Materials upon which such work is based frequently is deposited in a public archive (e.g., the Italian Oral History Institute Collection, UCLA Ethnomusicology Archive). The Columbus Quincentennial project of the Library of Congress’s American Folklife Center, the *Italian-Americans in the West* project, resulted in a traditional publication (Taylor and Williams) and traveling exhibition that opened in 1992; both were titled *Old Ties, New Attachments: Italian-American Folklife in the West*. Field recordings, notes, and other materials from this oral research campaign are in the Folklife Center’s archive. Sound archives scattered throughout Italy also provide vital contexts for fully understanding the Italian immigrant experience on topics ranging from the world wars, Fascism, and labor history, to folk culture (see Barrera, Martini, Mulè’s guide to sound archives in Italy, *Fonti orali*, as well as Bermani and De Palma).

It is through this dialog of spoken memories across continents and through time that the varied meanings of the Italian American experience can be more fully understood. For this experience too is rooted in a long tradition of orally shared life and history. We must only learn to listen.

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### Institutional Resources for Oral Research

- Alan Lomax Archive (Association for Cultural Equity): <http://www.culturalequity.org/index.html>
- American Folklife Center: <http://www.loc.gov/folklife>
- American Folklife Resources: <http://www.ipl.org/div/pf/entry/48474>
- American Folklore Society: <http://www.afsnet.org/>
- Association of Personal Historians: <http://www.personalhistorians.org/>
- Associazione Italiana Storia Orale: <http://www.aisoitalia.org/>
- Ausonia Club Oral History Project, 1965–1987, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA: <http://asteria.fivecolleges.edu/monarch/findaids/sophiasmith/mnsss123.html>
- Center for Oral History Research, UCLA: <http://www2.library.ucla.edu/libraries/6265.cfm>
- Circolo Gianni Bosio: <http://www.circologianni bosio.it/archivio>
- Ellis Island Oral History Project: <http://www.internationalchannel.com/education/ellis/oralhist.html>
- Historical Society of Pennsylvania: <http://www.hsp.org/default.aspx?id=677>
- Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota: <http://www.ihrc.umn.edu/>
- International Oral History Association (IOHA): <http://www.bcn.es/tjussana/ioha/>
- Italian Immigrant Oral History Project, University of Missouri, St. Louis: <http://www.ums.edu/~whmc/guides/whm0511.htm>
- Italians in Chicago—Oral History Project 1979–81: <http://www.rootsweb.com/~itappnc/pipcna.htm>
- Italians in Milwaukee Oral History Project, 1991–1992, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee Archives: <http://www.uwm.edu/Libraries/arch/findaids/uwmms53.htm>
- Italians in the Gold Rush and Beyond: <http://www.igrb.net>
- The Italians of Albuquerque Oral History Project (1995–1996), University of New Mexico Oral History Program. [http://elibrary.unm.edu/oanm/NmU/nmu1%23mss621bc/nmu1%23mss621bc\\_m4.html](http://elibrary.unm.edu/oanm/NmU/nmu1%23mss621bc/nmu1%23mss621bc_m4.html)
- Italian Los Angeles: <http://www.ItalianLosAngeles.com>
- Italian Oral History Institute (IOHI): <http://www.iohi.org>
- “Learning About Immigration Through Oral History,” Barbara Wysocki and Frances Jacobson: <http://www.memory.loc.gov/learn/features/immig/resources>
- Mediterranean Section, American Folklore Society: <http://www.afsnet.org/sections/italian>
- Museo Nazionale delle Arti e Tradizioni Popolari, EUR, Rome (Italian National Folklife Museum): <http://www.popolari.arti.beniculturali.it>
- Oral History Association (USA): <http://www.dickinson.edu/organizations/oha/>
- “Oral History Primer,” University of California, Santa Cruz: <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/ohprimer.html>
- Oral History Program, California State University, Long Beach: <http://www.csulb.edu/depts/history/relprm/oral03.html>
- “Oral History Techniques: How to Organize and Conduct Oral History Interviews,” Barbara Truesdell, Indiana University Center for the Study of History and Memory: <http://www.indiana.edu/~csh/techniques.html>
- Paesani in Pittsburgh: <http://www.postgazette.com/magazine/19980929italian1.asp>
- Save Our Sounds: America’s Recorded Sound Heritage Project: <http://www.loc.gov/folklife/sos>
- Society for European Anthropology (American Anthropological Association) UCLA Ethnomusicology Archive: <http://www.ethnomusic.ucla.edu/archive>
- Una storia segreta: <http://www.segreta.org/>

USC Shoah Foundation Institute: <http://college.usc.edu/vhi/>

Veterans History Project: <http://www.loc.gov/folklife/vets/>

### Notes

1. Various publications have treated the topic of the Italian internment: Scherini 1994; Fox 1990, 2000; Di Stasi 2001.
2. N. B. This is not a nuanced definition of current folklore studies, since contemporary folklorists study many other forms of culture that are not strictly orally transmitted but rely on other forms of communication and function in diverse contexts.
3. Bibliographies on Italian American folklore, although few, are useful: Del Giudice 1993; Cicala 2006.
4. The Web site <http://www.ItalianLosAngeles.org>, a project of the Italian Oral History Institute, was a direct outcome of such student research, enhanced through community partnerships, in order to create a more complete understanding of the breadth and scope of the Italian community (old and new) in Los Angeles.
5. Alex Haley's works, particularly, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (1976), set off a major social movement that popularized oral and family history and ushered in a period of exploration of personal histories and history making and proved to be a powerful motivator behind the early 1970s international oral history movement.
6. According to, for example, Schragger (1998), one must be aware of the relationship between the memory practices internal to a group and "oral history" as a disciplinary practice done by outsiders. That is, groups maintain their memory by telling stories about the past. A researcher, therefore, may not be getting a new story created in response to specific questions but rather a well-formed community narrative that has undergone a process of community interpretation and reworking. On the other hand, the researcher may have different questions and priorities from those the community, and thus may elicit "new" and less-well-formed material.
7. "Reminiscence theatre," particularly alive in Britain, may be the quintessence of oral history as a "synthesis of performance, memory and comment" (Mace 1998, 393).
8. For example, Holocaust survivors, Philippine, Korean, and Chinese "comfort women" during the Japanese wars, families of Argentine disappeared persons (*desparecidos*), and other victims of abuse.
9. At the June 2004 meeting of the International Oral History Association, in Rome, a disproportionately high number of participants came from South America (especially Brazil). Topics such as *desparecidos*, recovering memory and creating a historic record despite totalitarian efforts to silence this memory, were a leitmotif.
10. Oral history, of course, has also been an extremely important methodology for studying *elites* (e.g., the Cuban Missile Crisis and similar political crises). Such sensitive political information is frequently locked in secrecy and kept out of view until decades after the fact.
11. The earlier folk music revival as well as the more recent revival (initiated in the mid-1990s in Italy) offer further examples of the politically engaged tradition (Del Giudice 1994, 1995).
12. People's Story in Edinburgh, the Ellis Island Museum in New York, the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, Hobson Wharf in Auckland, to name a few (cf. Perks and Thomson 1998, 360).

13. There now exists a plethora of popular publications, CD-ROMs, and videos on assembling personal or family histories, for example, Greene/Fulford or Spence. An Association of Personal Historians has recently been formed: <http://www.personalhistorians.org/>.
14. This exhibition was curated with Virginia Buscemi Carlson at the UCLA Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center, March 1998. One positive effect of presenting this Sicilian food altar tradition in a mainstream institution was that it tangibly countered one of the cliché association of Sicilians with less-benign community activity (i.e., criminality), largely a media-generated and still-prevalent stereotype (cf. Dreamworks's children's film, *Shark's Tale*, 2004). On the St. Joseph's Table tradition, see the forthcoming publication by Del Giudice.
15. Multimedia CD-ROMs have the advantage of presenting "every aspect of an interview all at once." Producing such interactive multimedia forces historians to reflect on, and anticipate, audience desires, intentions and questions. Public history in fact, according to Read (1998, 14–20), is at the "cutting edge of popular culture and scholarly enquiry."
16. In an effort to return to public attention some of these out-of-circulation sounds, I provide a sampling of these sound recordings in *Italian Traditional Song*, along with an annotated and translated anthology of texts and an overview of traditional song genres.
17. Others, randomly sampled online include Italians in the Gold Rush and Beyond, <http://www.igrb.net/> (cf. Trojani 2004); Italian Immigrant Oral History Project, University of Missouri, St. Louis, <http://www.umsl.edu/~whmc/guides/whm0511.htm>; Italians in Chicago—Oral History Project 1979–81, <http://www.rootsweb.com/~itappcnc/pipc-nita.htm>; Ausonia Club Oral History Project, 1965–1987 Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA, <http://asteria.fivecolleges.edu/monarch/findaids/sophiasmith/mnsss123.html>; Oral histories in the wine and food industries (e.g., Robert Mondavi, Ernest Gallo), [http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO/projects/food\\_wine/](http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO/projects/food_wine/); Italians in Milwaukee Oral History Project, 1991–1992, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, Archives <http://www.uwm.edu/Libraries/arch/findaids/uwmms53.htm>; Historical Society of Pennsylvania: <http://www.hsp.org/default.aspx?id=677>; The Italians of Albuquerque Oral History Project (1995–1996), University of New Mexico Oral History Program, [http://elibrary.unm.edu/oanm/NmU/nmu1%23mss621bc/nmu1%23mss621bc\\_m4.html](http://elibrary.unm.edu/oanm/NmU/nmu1%23mss621bc/nmu1%23mss621bc_m4.html); Paesani in Pittsburgh, <http://www.post-gazette.com/magazine/19980929italian1.asp>.

Part II

# **Oral History**

## What Makes Oral History Different

*Alessandro Portelli*

*The keynote address of the thirty-eighth annual conference of the AIHA was delivered by Alessandro Portelli on November 4, 2005. Not only did Portelli knowledgeably address the topics of oral history and oral culture, given his scholarly experience in these fields, he was also able to beautifully practice what he preaches, that is, narrate orally in a story-telling mode that captivated the audience. What follows is Alessandro Portelli's keynote address, transcribed by the speaker himself.*

Back in 1960–61, I was an American Field Service foreign exchange student at Westchester High School here in Los Angeles—which still exists, although it has been almost swallowed up by the airport. And I had this wonderful experience of being an Italian in Los Angeles. Part of this was listening to the Italian radio station from “*la bellissima città di San Pedro*” on Sundays. Every Italian boy lives the day of Sunday in anxiety, waiting for the soccer results. The great privilege here was that, thanks to the time difference, by 10:00 a.m. I’d know the scores—and my Sunday anxiety was replaced by Sunday despair.

I came here prepared to give a paper basically on methodology; however, after hearing some of the workshops yesterday, I thought that something more narrative, with more “history” in it, might be a better idea. I also feel that somehow the historicity of contemporary Italy needs to be underlined at a conference like this. Basically, the ideas that I was going to present in the methodological paper were that oral history is a work of relationships; in the first place, a relationship between the past and the present, an effort to establish, through memory and narrative, what the past means to the present; then, a relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, and between the oral form of the narrative and the written or audiovisual form of the historian’s product. So what I would like to do is use these ideas as a template to talk about what is, by now, the center of my research, my thinking, and my feelings: the massacre at the Fosse Ardeatine in Rome.

On March 24, 1944, the Nazis, who had been occupying Rome since September 1943, killed 335 men in an abandoned quarry on the via Ardeatina. This act was ostensibly a reprisal for a partisan attack that had taken place the day before in a street in the center of Rome, via Rasella, when sixteen partisans attacked a unit of 150 Nazi policemen attached to the SS. The attack resulted in no partisan casualties and the death of thirty-three Nazi policemen. The retaliation was at the ratio of ten Italians for one German, and due to some confusion among the German police who were in charge of the action, the victims turned out to be 335.

This episode is still a very raw wound in the city's memory. If you mention the Fosse Ardeatine to anybody in Rome, especially if they or their family were there during the war, emotions will flare high. Why is this so? It has to do with meaning, with the construction of meaning. In terms of the number of victims, the Fosse Ardeatine wasn't the worst massacre that took place during the war. One, of course, thinks of the Shoah, of the thirty thousand Jews killed in the Babi Yar ravine in Kiev, of the horrors of Nanking, of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In Italy, about five hundred people were massacred by the Nazis in Marzabotto and in Sant'Anna di Stazzema. Fifteen thousand civilians were slaughtered in over six hundred mass killings by the German occupying forces in Italy from 1943 to 1944. In Rome, almost two thousand Jews were deported and very few returned; but the highest number of casualties was caused by the Allied air raids: more than eighteen hundred people were killed on the first day of bombing alone, July 19, 1943.

So, why is it that this memory is so poignant, so charged with meaning and emotion? One of the things that make oral history different is that while more conventional history is primarily interested in what happened—why was the massacre carried out, in what way, whose responsibility is it, what was its place in the overall military scenario of the war and of the Resistance—oral history also asks another question: what does it mean?

I will try to outline some of the factors that make this episode so charged with meaning. In the first place, it has to do with the place where it happened: this was the only major Nazi massacre that was perpetrated in the middle of a big western European metropolis. Most Nazi mass killings took place in villages or rural areas, where the population (and therefore the demography of the victims) was relatively homogeneous. At the Fosse Ardeatine, the victims were a cross-section of the complex demography of a major Western city. If you look at their religion, for instance, the slaughter included one Catholic priest, many Catholics, but also Freemasons and atheists. It was probably the only mass murder in which Jews and non-Jews were killed together. Or politics: the victims range from people who were not political and were picked up at random to guerrilla fighters who had been active in the Resistance, and from conservatives to Communists, with everything in between. They came from all neighborhoods, from all walks of life. Wherever you go in Rome, if you look at the walls, you're bound to find some plaque that commemorates someone from that part of the city who was killed at the Fosse Ardeatine. And they were lawyers and waiters, Jewish peddlers and Piedmontese aristocrats, students and railroad workers, and carpenters and teachers. Also, because Rome was the capital, the victims came from throughout the nation. I have discussed this event all over Italy, from the southern tip of Santa

Maria di Leuca to the northwestern border of Trieste, to the center of Sardinia, and in all these places they remembered some local person who had been killed at the Fosse Ardeatine in Rome. Thus, while most other massacres are primarily a local tragedy, the Fosse Ardeatine somehow gathers all of Italy into one shared act of violence. This demographic factor is reinforced, of course, by the fact that, as the capital, Rome represents the country as a whole also symbolically. Besides, Rome is also the capital of the Catholic Church, which enhances its symbolic meaning. (In fact, one of the huge questions—into which I will not go—is, what role did the Catholic Church play in that context?)

The Fosse Ardeatine is now one of the most beautiful, moving modern monuments in Rome. But if you go, you will see that the *fosse*—ditches—are in fact tunnels that were dug in order to extract the materials for the building boom of the 1880s, when the new capital was expanding to accommodate the influx of people that were attracted there from all over Italy. So, I think of those tunnels, those holes, as a funnel into which the whole history of the city was poured on that day in 1944 and out of which other stories radiated afterwards.

Some examples. The name of the man who lit the fuse and started the battle at via Rasella is Rosario Bentivegna. He was named after his grandfather, an architect from Palermo who came to Rome in 1870, when the city became the capital, and designed, among other things, via Veneto—the street celebrated in Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*. Rosario Bentivegna's grandfather, in turn, was the son of Giovanni Bentivegna, who was executed in Palermo in 1856 for leading an aborted democratic insurrection. Through him and other protagonists, then, the history of via Rasella and the Fosse Ardeatine links up with the whole of Italian history, beginning with the struggle for independence in the Risorgimento.

Another example: Righetto Ferola. He was a blacksmith in Trastevere, which, before it became so gentrified, was a popular neighborhood of artisans and workers. Righetto Ferola manufactured some of the most powerful weapons of the Resistance in Rome—the device that Harlan County coal miners call *bobjacks*, or, as they call them in Rome, “*chiodi a quattro punte*,” four-pronged nails: two nails welded together crossways and sharpened at both ends, so that no matter how you drop it, there is always one sharp prong sticking up. The partisans would strew them on the roads, and tear the tires of German convoys on their way to Anzio and Cassino, stopping supplies and reinforcements to the front (and making the immobilized trucks an easy target for Allied planes). Righetto Ferola was one of four children of Giovanni Ferola. Giovanni Ferola was a student in the Trastevere seminar in the 1860s: that was the only way a young man from a poor family could get an education. Giovanni Ferola ran away from the seminar, joined Garibaldi, who was then trying to liberate Rome from the Pope's domain, and later had four children. Two died in World War II, one was beaten to death by the Fascists in the 1920s, and the fourth, Righetto, died at the Fosse Ardeatine.

Let me tell you how I found Righetto Ferola's daughters. Trastevere, his old neighbourhood, had a Republican tradition going back to the battles fought by Garibaldi in 1849, in defense of the Roman Republic, on the Gianicolo hill. So when I wanted to find his family, I used the advanced anthropological technique of looking up “Ferola” in the phone book. There were four Ferolas, but one of

them was named Anita, and Anita was Garibaldi's wife. And indeed, Anita Ferola turned out to be Righetto's daughter. Again, contemporary identities are rooted in a century-old history of the city. There are hundreds of such stories around the Fosse Ardeatine, so that if you take the stories of these families and these people, you have a cross-section of the history of Rome itself. This is one of the reasons why this massacre is so significant. It wasn't only one group of people, one neighborhood. It's the whole city, which represents the whole country.

Another reason why it is so meaningful is the way in which it was carried out. If you read most of the commemorative plaques on the walls of Rome, they say that such-and-such a man was "barbarously" murdered by the Nazis, or some such formula. In fact, they were not *barbarously* murdered at all: it was a very civilized massacre. It could not have been carried out without the modern state, without the logistics, without the archives, without Western civilization. They had to have records to draw the lists of what they called "death candidates." They had to have trucks to take them to the place of the execution. They had to have places of detention, the central jail at Regina Coeli and the Nazi prison and torture chamber at via Tasso, from which they picked out the victims. They had to have an established procedure and chain of command in order to kill them all in an orderly manner. The reason they used the caves was that they were looking for a natural burial chamber, where they wouldn't have to dig a hole big enough to contain 335 bodies and where they could hide their victims under the ground as soon as the deed was accomplished. They took the victims in groups of five into the tunnels, forced them to kneel down, and shot them in the back of the head with a modern machine gun. The tunnels were dark and narrow, and after a while, the incoming victims had to kneel on the bodies of those who had been killed before them. At one point some of the executioners became disturbed, many of them had never killed before, so they had to be given a sip of brandy. One officer said he couldn't go on, so the chief commander, Colonel Herbert Kappler, took him kindly under his arm, comforted him, took him back into the cave and gave the paternal good example by shooting one man. As an act of respect, Kappler later claimed, the orders were not to touch the victims' heads with the barrel of the gun, so as not to disfigure them. Someone had suggested calling in a priest to comfort them (no one mentioned a rabbi), but they decided against it because, as Colonel Kappler said later in court, it would have been unkind to interrupt the victims as they were making their last confessions. All in all, a very humanitarian massacre. Very civilized.

This means that we, our culture, our Western tradition, are involved. It was not a savage act. The savages do it differently. This was us. And the question that the massacre generates is: Who are we? What kind of civilization is ours?

Third, and perhaps the most important reason why this episode is charged with meaning, is the way it has been remembered. In oral history, in fact, we do not simply reconstruct the history of an event but also the history of its memory, the ways in which it grows, changes, and operates in the time between then and now. At the center of this story lies a false memory. Let me illustrate it with a little anecdote.

After I wrote my book on the Fosse Ardeatine, I was short-listed for the Viareggio Book Prize. When the phone call came to announce that I had gotten it, my wife was at the hairdresser's, and I called her with the news. She must have looked

pleased, because the people in the shop asked her what was the good news, and she explained that her husband had gotten a prize for a book on the Fosse Ardeatine. The lady sitting next to her exploded: "I know all about it. The Germans posted bills all over the city asking the perpetrators of the attack in via Rasella to deliver themselves in order to avoid the retaliation; those cowardly Communist partisans didn't turn themselves in, and the Germans went on with the killing of the hostages. It was the partisans' fault." This is the dominant narrative, the common-sense story: the partisans are to be blamed because they refused to sacrifice themselves in order to save the hostages. The fact is it did not happen that way. The Germans proceeded immediately to plan the massacre: they posted no bills, made no appeals, hardly even looked for the "perpetrators." We have it from the best authority, General Kesselring, the commander of the Fourteenth German Army on the Rome front. While he was on trial for war crimes, the Allied prosecutor asked him whether they had posted bills asking the partisans to turn themselves in, and he said that on retrospect it might have been a good idea, but it didn't occur to them then.

So my wife told this lady that I had just written a four-hundred-page book that showed that this never happened, and the lady replied: "If he had talked to me, he wouldn't have written that book." One reason why this narrative has been able to root itself in popular memory is that historians only dealt with the mechanics of what happened and never with the memory. Now, the mechanics were just too easy, so easy that they would hardly justify the writing of an academic essay; and in fact there is no academic historiography of the Fosse Ardeatine. What is not easy is the memory—but until very recently, memory, and especially false memory, has been beneath the attention of historians. So that, in the absence of competent, credible historical writing, the popular press and reactionary gossip have gone on unchecked, spreading the false narrative of partisan responsibility.

This story has also gained credibility because of the widespread belief that there was an automatic relationship between the partisan attack and the Nazi retaliation (the so-called "ten-Italians-to-one-German law"). Once again, it was not so. There had been plenty of partisan attacks, and German casualties in Rome, before via Rasella. However, the Nazis had chosen not to publicize the fact by carrying out public retaliations. Had they done so, they would have had to admit that they could be attacked and killed, whereas the myth of their invincibility and invulnerability was essential to keeping the city under control. Via Rasella, however, could not be ignored: it was a pitched battle in the middle of the day, in the center of Rome, in which the Nazis were soundly defeated. They had to act quickly to restore their psychological domination over the city. Capturing the "perpetrators" was never the priority. What counted was terrorizing Rome with a swift and merciless retaliation to show that they could not be touched.

Thus, while popular memory images an automatic, undivided sequence of cause and effect, the attack and the retaliation were in fact *two* distinct events. There was no such thing as the ten-to-one law. In fact, Hitler's orders were to deport ten thousand people and blow up the center of Rome. When the local Nazi commanders objected (yes, one *could* discuss Hitler's orders!) that in order to do so they would have had to remove troops out of the Cassino and Anzio front, and that after all it was a pity to destroy such a historic city as Rome, Hitler first ordered

a fifty-to-one retaliation, then all but forgot about the matter. The Nazi officials on the scene concluded that a ten-to-one ratio was logistically feasible (and it was the first time that it was formally applied in Italy). Thus, in the interval between the partisan attack and the Nazi reprisal there was a debate, a negotiation, and a political and military decision. There was nothing automatic about the massacre. However, claiming that the sequence was automatic is functional to blaming the partisans, claiming not only that they should have known that this was the inevitable consequence of their action, and even that they did it on purpose to provoke the massacre, so that the city would rebel or, alternatively, so that the Germans would execute non-Communist prisoners and thus clear the way for Communist hegemony over the Resistance and postwar Italy. (Incidentally, there were over eighty Communists among those killed at the Fosse Ardeatine.)

This ideological construct is sustained by an imagined politics of time. The one part of Hitler's order that was executed to the letter was that the reprisal should be carried out within twenty-four hours. In fact, it was only twenty-two hours between the partisan attack (shortly before 4:00 p.m.) and the beginning of the slaughter at the Fosse Ardeatine (at 2:00 p.m. the next day). However, if one asks most people how long was it between via Rasella and the Fosse, answers range from three days (on the model of Christ's passion, I believe) to six months. This is necessary so that one can imagine that the Nazis had time either to ask the partisans to deliver themselves or to seek them out—and to imagine that the partisans had the time and the opportunity to save the hostages by delivering themselves.

The power of this narrative, furthermore, lies in the fact that it is very credible, that it makes a lot of sense: the cause-and-effect sequence, even the symmetrical "poetics" of the ten-to-one ratio (would it be as effective if it had been, say, thirteen to two or seventeen to four?), the powerful narrative effect of a story that begins with an explosion and ends with the silence of death, the myth of Rome as an "open city" that was at peace before the via Rasella episode (which, in fact, was only one of over forty partisan actions resulting in German casualties).

The fascinating thing about mythic imagination is that it cannot be influenced by information. As the lady at the hairdresser's demonstrates, no scholarly research can erode a firmly held ideological need to blame the freedom fighters for a massacre carried out by an occupying army. Let me reconstruct an imaginary but typical conversation. The person says that the partisans were warned that they should turn themselves in to avoid the massacre. I inform him that they were never warned, that there was no precedent, that there was no time, that the Nazis only released the news of the attack after the massacre had been carried out. And then he says, all right, but they should have turned themselves in *anyway*, even if they had not been asked. I object that this would be an odd, self-defeating way of waging a war; and besides, the orders were never to do so, even if requested, because under torture one might expose the whole Resistance underground. All right, says he—they should not have attacked the Germans in the first place. I object: how can you fight a war of liberation without attacking the occupying army? And the final, if often unspoken answer is: the whole Resistance was a mistake and a crime. This is the core of the unshakeable belief that the interchangeable mythic narratives are created to support: Italians should not have fought a war of resistance against the

Nazis. And since the standard democratic narrative is that Italian democracy was generated by the Resistance, the ultimate meaning of the myth is a rejection of the foundations of Italian democracy as we know it—a rejection that has become quite outspoken after Berlusconi's advent on the political scene in the mid-1990s.

The memory of the Fosse Ardeatine as part of the birth of democracy is staged every year on the anniversary of the massacre, when the President, the Mayor, and all the authorities, attend the celebrations. However, the families of the survivors always come out of the ceremony upset. A commemoration is the search for a unitary meaning, but there is no way you can generate a unitary meaning that will recognize all the different identities and histories of these men: are they all patriots, all martyrs, all partisans, all heroes, all innocents (or, as in some widespread false memories, all Communists, all Jews, all criminals out of jail)? Indeed, in the mid-1960s the families asked the authorities to stop making speeches, to stop trying to impose an interpretation or a meaning. Just say a prayer, read the names—which is a very moving ritual—but don't say anything, because whatever you say is bound to be wrong, at least for some of us.

What is at play here is the tension between private and public memory. For instance, Righetto Ferola's daughters told me, "We never say, 'We're going to the Fosse Ardeatine.' We always say, 'We're going to take some flowers to Daddy's grave.'" The Fosse Ardeatine is both a monument and a cemetery. The graves are there, in an enormous room, three hundred and thirty-five concrete graves beneath a dark concrete ceiling, a metaphor for the darkness in which they were killed, only relieved by a thin slice of daylight at the sides. And the tension is not only between public and private memory but also about *whose* private memory. In fact, the only thing one could say that is shared by all the victims is that they were all men. This is another sign of the fact that it was a civilized, orderly massacre: in the savage mass murders at Sant'Anna di Stazzema or Marzabotto, the Nazis killed and burned everything in sight: women, children, and old men. But here, or in other cases like Civitella in Tuscany, they took time to organize the slaughter and generally chose to kill only men. Which means that this is a women's memory, that it was women—wives, mothers—who lived to tell the tale, to mourn, and to struggle for survival. Of course, the victims also had fathers, but the fathers were powerless. They felt that they had failed to protect their children, that they had lost the continuity of their lineage. Some cherished dreams of revenge, others were sunk into despair. So it was women who were left to deal with reality.

One of Ferola's daughters told me that for a number of years, a special free bus line ran on Sundays from the Coliseum to the Fosse Ardeatine, for the families. And on the bus you could hear mothers and wives arguing over whose loss was more painful. "And we, the children," she said, "heard and thought, what about the pain of the children?" Women and children had to deal with the loss in their own way. Children grew up playing on the space in front of the caves, while their mothers were inside putting flowers on the graves or trying to identify the bodies. Young brides, Ferola's daughter recalled, would not go to the Pincio to be photographed in their wedding dress; rather, they'd go to the Fosse Ardeatine to lay their bouquet on their fathers' graves. And then, there were all these mothers and wives, wearing the customary heavy mourning black—remember, this is 1945, '46, '47; most

women didn't work outside the home, had no job training, didn't much venture into public space.

So those that didn't have families to rely on, and they were the majority, had to go to work, and the state assisted them by placing them in unskilled jobs in the public sector—hospitals, cleaning services, the state printing office, or the state tobacco plant. These were low-paying jobs, and often they had to take two or three jobs to make ends meet for their big families.

One woman, Gabriella Polli, recalled that her mother worked cleaning offices in the morning, as a phone operator at a hospital at night, and came home in the afternoon to take care of her four daughters. "And we never had holes in our socks, we were always clean and decent," she said. And she told me, "Later, must have been around '64, '65, one day I called my mother on the phone, and asked, mom, how are you? And she said, 'I'm crying.' 'Crying? For what?' 'For your father.' 'Now?' 'I never had time before, with work and with raising you girls. Now that I'm retired, finally I have the time to mourn for my husband.'"

Gabriella Polli also has another story. One day her grandmother went down to the grocery store to buy some bread—goods were still rationed, and there were long lines in the stores. But she came back in a few minutes, very pleased: the owner, she said, had kindly told her to step in front of the line and served her first. And her mother said, "Don't you realize why? It's because he didn't want you in there. He wanted to get rid of you as soon as he could."

There was much solidarity in Rome toward the families of the victims of the Fosse Ardeatine—as long as they stayed in their place, in the spaces reserved for mourning and grief. But these women in black, in the streets, in the stores, in the offices, were a reminder of death to a city that was anxiously trying to go back to life after years of death and oppression. So they were pitied but were not always welcome. And she explains it all with a wonderful metaphor: "Ours," she says, "was a strange grief. It was a grief that was washed, ironed, folded, and put away in a drawer. We were never able," she says ironically, "to *enjoy* our grief."

The massacre took place on March 24. The Allies entered Rome on June 6, and immediately, the very next day, thousands of people flocked to the Fosse Ardeatine. The commander of the Allied forces in occupied or liberated Rome had a bright idea: "These victims are already under the ground; let's build a monument on top of the place to commemorate them."

But the women reacted. A group of them went to the Allied general and said, "No, we want to be able to recognize them; we want to be able to grieve over their bodies, to be sure that they are there."

There is a difference between putting someone under the earth and *burying* him: A burial is not just a way of disposing of a body; it is a ceremony, a ritual, which, as the great Italian ethnologist Ernesto de Martino says in his book on *Morte e pianto rituale*, turns the loss into value, pain into meaning. So in order to bury these people they had to unbury them first.

This was one of the most excruciating moments in the whole story. These bodies had been piled on top of one another under the ground for months, and when pathologist Attilio Ascarelli and his team began to exhume them, in the middle of the hot Roman summer, the condition in which they were found was indescribable.

And women and children had to confront these remains to identify them—on the basis of a broken tooth, of a piece of cloth, of the content of their pockets.

Finally, some thoughts on what oral history does in these contexts. I try to avoid the word “testimony,” which many of us use, and it’s quite all right, but I tend to avoid it because basically testimony is an act of witnessing about something the person has seen, not something that the person has done or experienced in the first person. In oral history, however, the narrator is the protagonist, the center of the tale. The reason I got involved in this project was that in 1996 one of the perpetrators of the massacre was found in Argentina, extradited to Italy, and put on trial. And the press talked about the survivors in patronizing terms: these poor suffering people, after all these years, still fainting, still crying, still acting as if it had just happened. So the question I asked was, how did these people survive, how did they lead a normal life, how were they able to act as citizens, as working people, all these years, with this open wound inside them? While history was interested in the dramatic events of March 1944, I was interested in the stories that radiated out of them; I was interested in the dead, but also in the lives of the survivors, in the stories that radiated *out* of the funnel of the Ardeatine Caves.

Some of them had testified in court or had been interviewed before. But they were always asked to give testimony about the historic event, to talk about what happened to their fathers or their husbands or their sons on March 24, 1944. The courts and the media were not interested in *them*, but in those historic events. However, you cannot do oral history unless your interest is focused on the person with whom you are talking. What I wanted to know was not just what they had seen in 1944 but what their lives had been like since then—because oral history always leads us from the past to the present. And they had stories that they might have shared among themselves but that never made it into the history books or the media, stories of things that happened to them that no one asked them about and that often they didn’t even realize were of historical significance because they had grown to believe that their own lives were not, *per se*, historically significant.

So one of the things I often did was, when I had asked all the questions I could think of, and the interviewee had told all the stories she thought were worth telling, I would always let the tape run on and just chat. This is when the most unexpected stories are told, the stories that are not part of the historian’s agenda or the narrator’s public presentation. So, I was talking to Ada Pignotti, one of the great storytellers in the group, who had told the story of the Fosse Ardeatine countless times, in schools or in media interviews. She had been married six months when her husband was killed. “Since then,” she said, “the only men who have come into my house are the doctor and the priest.” We did the interview (in a public place): the questions were asked, the stories were told, and the tape kept running as we chatted. And what she talked about was what old people will talk about—her ailments, her pension, her complaint that less deserving or needy people had got better pensions than she did—“after all I went through to get that pension!” So I asked her, what did you go through? And she described the trail she traveled from office to office, the stairs she climbed, the waiting, the desks she had to face, the humiliations, and all the while I was thinking of Hamlet’s “arrogance of office.”

And then she added, “And every place I went, even later, in the offices where I worked, they always assumed you were at their disposal.” “What do you mean, madam?” “I mean what you think I mean.” To me, this was perhaps the most painful experience in the whole project, because it revealed the indignities at the roots of my own male culture, the assumption that widows were fair game, women without a man, unprotected, “experienced,” and “safe.” Now, the question always asked of oral history is, how do you generalize from one person’s story? You need confirmation from other sources, from other people. On the other hand, you can’t very well go around asking old ladies, “Were you sexually harassed in the 1940s?” But there are ways. An interview is not a question-and-answer session; rather, it is the opening of a narrative space, which the interviewer’s presence and questions or comments encourage the interviewee to explore and navigate. So I would make generic comments, such as “It must have been a difficult time, especially for a young woman,” and they would immediately pick up the hint and go right into the same kind of narratives.

Now, these ladies didn’t have a word for “sexual harassment.” With her third-grade education, Ada Pignotti thought that “history,” as defined in school, was only what happened to her husband and not to her. She was not aware that there were now such things as gender history, social history, the history of sexuality—indeed oral history—and that what she went through had historical significance in itself. This, after all, is another function of oral history: to bring into the vision of history aspects of experience that have been ignored and left out, and at the same time to challenge and stimulate the historical self-awareness of the people we interview.

# Oral Histories of Italian Americans in the Great Depression

## The Politics and Economics of the Crisis

*Stefano Luconi*

Italian Americans were a key component of the coalition of ethnic groups that elected Franklin D. Roosevelt to the White House in 1932 and contributed to creating the Democratic majority that dominated U.S. politics for two decades until the Republican Party regained the White House with Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1952. The timing in the shift of the political allegiance of Italian Americans from the GOP to the Democratic Party during the interwar years is well known and has been largely documented by analyses of election returns. Broadly speaking, voters of Italian ancestry began to desert the Republican Party between 1928 and 1932, consolidated their new Democratic allegiance in 1936, and went back, in part, to the GOP in 1940.<sup>1</sup>

However, besides the mere identification of electoral trends, the mechanics of and the reasons for such changes in partisan affiliation are worthy of further investigation. Drawing upon published and unpublished interviews and oral narratives, this chapter intends to go beyond a mere examination of voting statistics in order to give a few examples of how the Italian American experience affected the partisan choices of members of the Little Italies at the polls.

Most Italians who arrived in the United States between the late nineteenth century and the end of mass immigration in the 1920s were unskilled laborers who were barely literate and could hardly make ends meet in their adoptive land. Newcomers with little knowledge of both electoral democracy and the English language fell easy prey to urban political machines (Nelli 1970; Martellone 1992; Garroni 2002). As Frank Cammarata, a newspaper publisher from Patton, Pennsylvania, has pointed out, “most of the first immigrant families certainly couldn’t read a

ballot.” On election day, the precinct workers “pick up people at their homes, and bring them to the voting booths, and tell them where to put the ‘X.’”<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, following from their prevailing condition of destitution, Italian Americans relied heavily on party organizations to make a living. Like other immigrants from eastern and southern European nations, many Italians, too, were willing to barter their votes in exchange for patronage jobs and other services—spanning from leniency in party-controlled local courts to free clothing, coal, and food baskets—that political machines were ready to provide (Merton 1949, 71–81; Cornwell 1964; McCaffery 1993, 121–23, 131–32). As an anonymous Republican activist from Philadelphia has remarked about the hold of the GOP on local voters, “the cohesive power of the ‘machine’ is the offices. There are ten thousand of them at the disposal of the Organization. The Poles, Hungarians, Italians, and the other foreigners who come here vote with us because we control the offices. They want favors and know they cannot get them unless they vote with us” (as quoted in Bowden 1971, 92–93). Similarly, in the words of Arturo Cortese, on election days in the 1920s, Philadelphians of Italian descent could see Republican boss Charles C. A. Baldi “standing at the door of his South Eighth Street bank and handing out dollar bills to the needy” (as quoted in Varbero 1975, 292).<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, in the pre-Depression years, Italian American voters usually cast their ballots for the candidates of the party in power at the local level. Little Italies in such Republican strongholds as Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, or Chicago generally delivered large majorities for the GOP (Luconi 2002b, 55–56; Allswang 1971, 42). Conversely, cities like Boston, where the Democratic party controlled most positions under the spoils system in the municipal administrations, produced Democratic pluralities among Italian Americans in the 1920s as well (Gamm 1989, 83).

The one deviation from that pre-Depression voting pattern occurred in 1928 when New York State’s Irish-American Governor, Alfred E. Smith, made an unsuccessful bid for the White House on the Democratic ticket against Republican Herbert Hoover. On this occasion, many Italian Americans deserted the GOP because they easily identified themselves with the Democratic standard bearer, a Catholic politician who wanted to repeal Prohibition and was the first presidential candidate of either major party who did not belong to the WASP political establishment. Smith’s Italian heritage, on his mother’s side, was still unknown (DiLeo 1985). But, to a number of Italian American voters—as one of their grandchildren has observed—“it was as if an Italian was running for president.”<sup>4</sup> In 1928, following Smith’s ethnic appeal, activists for the GOP were no longer welcome to campaign even in such a Republican bailiwick as Philadelphia’s Little Italy. One of them has reported that “another worker and me went up to . . . Street with a truck and amplifiers. No sooner we got there than stones and tomatoes came at us from every direction.”<sup>5</sup>

Political coercion of workers on the part of their employers, who usually sided with the GOP, added to machine politics in causing Italian Americans’ pre-Depression Republican allegiance. The intimidation of voters was especially influential in company towns. In this latter milieu, the command of entrepreneurs over the lives of their employees was next to absolute and involved the domination of their voting behavior, too. For instance, Joe Perriello, an Italian American worker

of the Jones and Laughlin Steel Company in Aliquippa, Pennsylvania, has recalled that, in the 1920s, “if you wanted to work, if you wanted to eat, if you wanted to have something, you had to be Republican.”<sup>6</sup> Likewise, Pearl Leonardis, a woman from Windber, a company town of the Berwind-White Coal Mining Company in western Pennsylvania, remembered that as late as the 1930s, as she was about to enter the voting booth, “[my boss] wanted to come in and show me how to vote” (as quoted in Beik 1996, 327). Similarly, according to Joseph De Salvo, a former coal miner from Carrolltown, Pennsylvania, “[the] company wouldn’t give you a job unless you were Republican. . . . If you didn’t vote for the Republican Party you would have no job in the mines.”<sup>7</sup> It is, thus, hardly surprising that, in company towns, the necessity to protect one’s job by appeasing employers leaning toward the GOP as the party choice at the polls prevailed over class issues in shaping Italian Americans’ voting behavior longer than elsewhere.

The economic crisis of the 1930s caused a major watershed in voting trends among Italian Americans. On the one hand, widespread unemployment freed workers from the control of their Republican employers. Obviously, prospective voters with no job could not be threatened with dismissal if they did not cast their ballots for the GOP. On the other hand, hard times were blamed on the Republican administration of President Hoover. A common joke in Pittsburgh’s Italian American community was that “Hoover must have lost the 1928 elections. He promised prosperity if he was elected, but most of us were out of work in a year.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the economic depression struck Pittsburghers of Italian origin hard. Lucia Tosco Borgna, who settled in this city in 1931, noted, “It was not much better than the Old Country when I came here. Because I used to see some little kids walking without shoes, in the streets. Because they don’t have enough milk and bread to give it to the kids at that time.”<sup>9</sup> Actually, Italian Americans shared the experience of unemployment, hardships, and resentment toward the GOP because of the economic crisis in other cities, too.<sup>10</sup>

Yet the strength of local Republican machines affected the impact of the early Depression years on the Italian American vote to such an extent that the GOP itself even profited from such hard times. For instance, after losing to his Democratic challenger by 42.6 percent to 56.9 percent in 1928 because of Smith’s ethnic appeal, Hoover carried Philadelphia’s Little Italy by 52.5 percent to 46.3 percent in 1932 (Luconi 2002b, 55). Oral narratives suggest that the economic crisis made Italian Americans more dependent on the services of the Republican organization that operated relief kitchens to supply the needy with food and established welfare committees offering Republican stalwarts free health care, clothing, and coal, besides paying utility bills on their behalf (Bauman 1969, 54–55). As an Italian American Republican activist has recalled, “I very quickly decided to drop the argument as to the merits of the two candidates and put the proposition to the people as to the services I had rendered. . . . Going along these lines, I was able to convince pretty nearly the whole division, and . . . I carried my division almost four to one” (as quoted in Salter 1933, 771–72).<sup>11</sup>

It was the enactment of the social and labor legislation of the New Deal that managed to align a majority of the Italian American electorate with the Democratic party in Philadelphia. By 1936, however, the anti-Hoover vote of four years

earlier had turned into a pro-Roosevelt vote in Italian American communities throughout the United States. Indeed, Gennaro Di Biase, a second-generation Italian American from Providence, has recalled that his father became a “loyal Democrat” because “the New Deal was pretty good for workers.”<sup>12</sup>

Many Italian Americans benefited from the labor legislation that the Roosevelt administration had enacted.<sup>13</sup> Section 7a of the 1933 National Industrial Recovery Act, and the subsequent 1935 Wagner Act—which reintroduced workers’ right to organize and to collective bargaining after the Supreme Court had ruled unconstitutional the previous piece of legislation—enabled workers to establish or join unions. The latter helped mobilize voters of Italian ancestry to the benefit of the Democratic Party (Kennedy 1999, 187–88, 290–91, 328). As Joseph De Salvo has stressed, after the labor movement had been swept away from western Pennsylvania in the mid-1920s following an unsuccessful 1924 mining strike, “President Roosevelt opened the door for [United Mine Workers leader] John L. Lewis, and we got our union back.”<sup>14</sup> In Pittsburgh, too, according to Lucia Tosco Borgna, “when the union came . . . , Roosevelt was the one who started all that.”<sup>15</sup> The president’s name was associated with the fulfillment of unionization in the recollections of Italian Americans from other cities as well.<sup>16</sup>

The rebirth of the labor unions also had deeper political implications, seeing as they usually operated on behalf of the Democratic Party. In Frank Cammarata’s view, “the unions played a great part in getting out the Italian American vote because of the labor issues that were involved in the election campaigns.” In his opinion, Lewis was “more effective than any Democratic machine.”<sup>17</sup> Actually, to many Italian American workers such as Joe Perriello, the Democratic Party was the “political arm of the labor movement.”<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, the minimum wage provision of the National Industrial Recovery Act implied increases in salary for many Italian American workers, contrary to evidence collected by scholar Lizabeth Cohen (1990, 277) in her otherwise acclaimed study of Chicago’s workers during the Depression that such a piece of legislation “legitimized . . . wage reductions.” As Josephine DeCredico, a jewelry worker in Providence, recalled, “we were only getting about fifteen, twenty cents an hour until the NRA [National Recovery Administration] came in during the Roosevelt presidency. When this bill was passed for the NRA, we started with thirty-five cents an hour” (as quoted in DeCredico 1977, 33). Antonetta Filippone, a messenger girl for the Outlet Company, a retail store in the same city that strongly opposed unionization and collective bargaining, has similarly remembered that the NRA “had given us a raise in pay.”<sup>19</sup> By the same token, coal miners such as Joseph De Salvo, who had considered themselves “lucky if they made one dollar a day” in western Pennsylvania in the early 1930s, came to earn as much as forty-two cents per ton of coal during the New Deal.<sup>20</sup> Katherine Marcello, another jewelry worker from Providence, stated that “everybody loved it [the NRA]” (as quoted in Weisberg 1999, 114).

Italian Americans also profited from the relief measures of the Roosevelt administration. One can hardly come across an oral narrative from Depression times in which Italian Americans do not mention any relative on federal relief programs ranging from the Civilian Conservation Corps to the Works Progress

Administration.<sup>21</sup> Against this backdrop, David Pompa from Patton has emphasized that “the New Deal . . . gave our people a lot of opportunities to . . . get work.”<sup>22</sup> Likewise, James Toschi has stressed that Roosevelt “was a great president” because “he started the WPA.”<sup>23</sup>

The New Deal, therefore, consolidated the Democratic vote among Italian Americans. As a Democratic activist admitted about the successful outcome of the 1936 presidential race, “no amount of talking by me or anybody else swung the Italians. . . . bread in the stomach was the issue. Roosevelt gave them that.”<sup>24</sup>

But the New Deal also provided Democrats with the means to strengthen their network at the local level and enabled them to compete with Republican machines even in cities such as Philadelphia that had not experienced effective Democratic organizations until the New Deal. The late Democratic Congressman from Philadelphia and U.S. Ambassador to Italy, Thomas M. Foglietta, recalled that, when his father Michael entered politics in the 1920s, he joined the GOP because “in those days there wasn’t really a Democratic Party to speak of.”<sup>25</sup> Yet, by the mid-1930s, a Democratic machine had started to operate in Philadelphia. As one of its Italian American workers, Paul D’Ortona, who was to become chairman of the city council in the postwar years, has remembered, “we were active at Christmas time. We went around begging for food and canned stuff and prepared a basket for people on relief and welfare and saw that they had a good Christmas for their family.”<sup>26</sup> Likewise, Alfred Tronzo, an Italian American representative to the Pennsylvania General Assembly from Pittsburgh during the early New Deal, has remarked that the Democrats had “no political organization except some personal following” in the city until their party began to win local, state, and federal offices in the mid-1930s.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, as a *Post-Gazette* reporter, John Jones, has pointed out, “In a very short time they were able to put together that machine that sounds very much like a nineteenth century political machine.”<sup>28</sup>

The dire need for work in hard times, given widespread unemployment, made many Italian Americans, too, dependent on Democratic patronage and forced them to barter their votes for the party’s spoils. As a former ward chairman in Pittsburgh, Al Conway, has admitted, “anyone who . . . asked for a job was told to go see the [Democratic] chairman.”<sup>29</sup> Democratic control of the public payroll resulted in additional Italian Americans deserting from the Republican ranks. David Pompa has stressed that “a lot of people had large families—five, six, seven people in the family—and you simply had to stay in work. . . . So, if you wanted to stay in work, you changed your party.”<sup>30</sup>

Political spoils included political recognition as well. Appointments to high-ranking positions or nominations for elective offices contributed to luring Italian Americans into the Democratic camp out of ethnic solidarity. For example, John Jones has recalled that, in Pennsylvania, “the Italians came into the picture largely through a fellow, Charlie Margiotti,” whom Democratic Governor George Earle chose as the first state attorney general of Italian ancestry in 1935.<sup>31</sup> After an unsuccessful bid for the 1934 Republican nomination for governor, Margiotti went over to the Democratic Party in the Fall election and was later rewarded with the post of attorney general (Bronner 1960, 46–47; Harris 1956, 320–25). A lawyer and former Republican activist in depression-time Philadelphia has

confirmed that Margiotti's bolt was instrumental in the shift of allegiance of many Italian Americans from the Republican to the Democratic Party in Pennsylvania.<sup>32</sup> Inroads into the payroll of the state Justice Department further strengthened Italian Americans' Democratic allegiance in the following years until Margiotti made his way back to the GOP in 1938.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, political patronage helped the Democratic Party curb the defections of Italian American voters nationwide in 1940. Many of them began to turn their backs on Roosevelt after the president stigmatized Italy's eleventh-hour declaration of war on France by the infamous metaphor "the hand that held the dagger has stuck it in the back of its neighbor" (Roosevelt 1941, 263). Italian Americans feared that Roosevelt's words intended to pave the way for a military conflict between the United States and Italy. As Angela Silvioni Baccelli has remembered, "we were sad about the situation that brothers would be fighting against brothers."<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, according to Mary Merolla, "the pro-Mussolini attitude was maintained by many" within the Little Italies and "during the war years a divided loyalty existed among the Italian Americans."<sup>35</sup> Full employment, following the development of war industries, also weakened the Democratic hold on the Italian American electorate. Filomena A. Wilks has recalled that, after World War II broke out in Europe, "defense plants sprang up all over the country making ammunitions, planes, ships, and other war materials."<sup>36</sup> Consequently, as Evelyn Cavalloro De Nucci has remarked, "the war gave many people jobs" that freed them from welfare.<sup>37</sup> But, as the son of a Democratic worker from Pittsburgh pointed out, those who held positions under the spoils system with public administrations continued to "come to Roosevelt's party."<sup>38</sup>

It could be suggested that oral history per se offers rather impressionistic accounts for the interpretation of electoral behavior. For instance, scholarship has long challenged the reliability of recall data for the reconstruction of past partisan allegiances or has, at least, contended that such sources are "suggestive rather than conclusive" (Anderson 1979, 72). In particular, studies have pointed out that people tend to recall that they voted for the winners of elections, even if they actually cast their ballots for the losers, or may report a different party choice than the real one, for personal expediency. According to political scientists Richard G. Niemi, Richard S. Katz, and David Newman (1980), the error rate can be as high as 25 to 30 percent of the sample.

These arguments, however, do not necessarily mean that oral history is inconsistent with political and electoral analyses.<sup>39</sup> As historian Bernard Sternsher (1975, 147) has pointed out, "to get at the 'why' of voter behavior we must probe more deeply and in greater detail than the discernment of party systems and the typologizing of elections according to voter alignment in aggregate terms." Therefore, along with other sources such as newspapers and other written records, oral narratives can profitably supplement the examination of election returns in order to highlight the factors shaping the partisan choices of a given community at the polls. This chapter has provided an example of how oral history can help offer a better understanding of Italian Americans' voting behavior in the interwar years than the mere identification of electoral trends.

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### Notes

1. For an overview, see Luconi (2002a, 492–97).
2. Interview with Frank Cammarata (1992).
3. For Baldi, see Greene (1987, 133–35).
4. Interview with Angela G. by the author, November 18, 1997, Providence, RI.
5. Interview with “V,” an anonymous Republican committeeman, September 8, 1947, Philadelphia, as quoted in Maiale (1950, 152). The name of the street is omitted in the transcript.
6. Interview with Joe Perriello by James Green, June 6, 1993, n.p., as quoted in Green (1993, 8).
7. Interview with Joseph De Salvo Jr. (1992).
8. Interview with Michael T. by the author, October 18, 1991, Pittsburgh.

9. Transcript of an interview with Lucia Tosco Borgna (1977, 8).
10. For the case of Westerly, Rhode Island, see, for example, the interview of Alexander Pasetti (1985).
11. The name given for the activist, Tony Nicollo, is a pseudonym.
12. Interview with Gennaro Di Biase (1985).
13. For the key role of the New Deal labor legislation in the consolidation of the Roosevelt coalition, see Plotke (1996).
14. Interview with Joseph De Salvo (1992).
15. Transcript of an interview with Tosco Borgna (1977, 20).
16. Transcript of an interview with Al Sisti, February 1978, in Buhle (1987, 36).
17. Interview with Cammarata (1992).
18. Interview with Perriello, as quoted in Green (1993, 14).
19. Transcript of an interview with Antonetta Filippone (1994, 4). For the Outlet Company in the early 1930s, see the rather apologetic account by Smart (1984, 21–73).
20. Interview with Joseph De Salvo (1992).
21. Interview with Dante Mollo (1984); interview with Rose De Salvo (1992); transcript of an interview with Evelyn Cavalloro De Nucci (1990, 5).
22. Interview with David Pompa (1992).
23. Interview with James Toschi (1992).
24. Interview with “M,” an anonymous Democratic committeeman, September 10, 1947, Philadelphia, as quoted in Maiale (1950, 175).
25. Transcript of an interview with Thomas M. Foglietta (1980, 1).
26. Transcript of an interview with Paul D’Ortona (1977, 1). For Paul D’Ortona, see Biagi (1967, 184–85).
27. Transcript of an interview with Alfred Tronzo (1974, 2).
28. Transcript of an interview with John Jones (1981, 4).
29. Interview with Al Conway (1982, 8).
30. Interview with Pompa (1992).
31. Transcript of an interview with Jones (1981, 5).
32. Interview with Cammarata (1992).
33. Interview with Joseph De Salvo (1992); interview with Rita R. by the author, November 12, 1989, Philadelphia. See also Morgan (1978, 189–98).
34. Transcript of an interview with Angela Silvioni Baccelli (1975, 14).
35. Transcript of an interview with Mary Merolla (1989, 4).
36. Transcript of an interview with Filomena A. Wilks (1990, 1).
37. Transcript of an interview with Cavalloro De Nucci (1990, 9).
38. Interview with Albert F. by the author, October 27, 1991, Pittsburgh, PA.
39. For an early but outstanding example of the successful intertwining of oral history and electoral analysis, see Stave (1970). For a similarly insightful instance of the use of oral narratives for political history, see Weber (1988). For the Italian American experience in politics, see, among others, Mormino (1986, 172–94); Mormino and Pozzetta (1987, 143–74, 297–316).

## ***Il Corriere del Pomeriggio* of the Gruppo Lonatese of San Rafael, Marin County, California**

*Ernesto R. Milani*

There are places we have never been that nonetheless convey familiar images as though they were present in us, in our past, in our subconscious. Maybe we have actually heard of them or perhaps just dreamt them. It's mysterious why we have a longing to go there at a precise moment in our life and then leave.

San Rafael, California, USA, and Lonate Pozzolo, Lombardy, Italy, have been and continue to be such places for a number of people. According to the people of Lonate, America is actually California and specifically San Rafael, and the same applies also to the descendants of Lonatesi abroad. The tale originates in 1880, when records show that among the dozen Italians present in San Rafael were Peter Rosa, his family, and Giuseppe Soldavini—all from Lonate. Both worked as gardeners in a thriving community of almost twenty-five hundred people, where the foreign element was comprised of Portuguese from the Azores, Irish, and Chinese.<sup>1</sup>

The migration from Lonate, then a village of about six thousand, had just started. Between 1880 and 1924 nearly a thousand Lonatesi crossed the Atlantic in search of "America." Their voyages were eventually stopped by the American 1921 and 1924 Quota Acts and the Italian Fascist plan to colonize Africa.<sup>2</sup>

The mass migration had a strong economic basis. Italy was a country where agriculture was privileged over industry by the Cavour government. The sale of cheap American grains to Europe, made more easily available by virtue of the new faster steamships, precipitated a depression that landowners battled largely with taxes and by increasing the cost of the main dietary staple, bread. Consequently, migration became a form of protest and rebellion.<sup>3</sup>

The first point of entry of the Lonatesi was San Rafael, and thereafter they dispersed all over the Bay Area in search of jobs. They had no time to write their history. Furthermore, many were illiterate. What happened from 1880 to 1985? In

spite of the magnitude of the event, not many in Lonate had a precise and complete vision of the movement.

For many, it represented just a Christmas card or a few photographs sometimes tossed into the garbage bin. San Rafael was no more than a few relatives attempting to utter a few words in an incomprehensible dialect and asking a lot of strange questions about a long forgotten past. Not even the patrons of the bars where the game of Pedro is played to this day ask themselves the meaning of the American jargon they still use.<sup>4</sup>

Restoration of the Prestinari organ of St. Ambrose's church in Lonate Pozzolo generated a great enthusiasm for the history of this small town. The Pro Loco gathered a dozen local scholars who had studied the evolution of Lonate and engaged them in the task of narrating several aspects of its history to celebrate the event. This author wrote the chapter on migration. The result is the memorable and hefty volume *Lonate Pozzolo: Storia, Arte e Società*, published in 1986, which made its tortuous way to California and was read by Olivia and Teresa Dalessi, two inquisitive sisters from San Rafael. Their interest prompted the Pro Loco of Lonate Pozzolo to send the author to San Rafael to investigate the case of the last surviving Lonatesi and their descendants. It was November, 1987, when a small group gathered at the Dalessi home. This small party consisted of old-timers who were ready to reestablish ties and to learn more about their heritage and personal history. They were eager to learn why, after a century in America, which had changed many customs and behavior, they still preserved traits that made them diverse Americans.<sup>5</sup>

Let me here describe our methodology, and the role of oral history in our project. The first step consisted in the formation of a *Gruppo Lonatese*, organized on November 7, 1987, with the purpose of promoting closer ties with Lonate Pozzolo and sustaining the cultural links between the Lonatesi and their descendants in California. The enthusiasm generated among the Lonatesi in San Rafael and in Italy culminated on September 29, 1988, with a hundred-person delegation from Lonate Pozzolo warmly welcomed at the celebrations held at the Marin County Civic Center proclaiming Lonate and San Rafael sister cities.<sup>6</sup>

The following September 1989 a group from the Bay Area journeyed to Italy for a three-day series of sister city festivities in Lonate that renewed relationships, stirred emotions and cemented new bonds. On that occasion the abridged version of the book *Lonate Pozzolo: Storia, Arte e Società* was presented to the Lonatesi of San Rafael. It had been translated into English, while the chapter on migration was revised and expanded. Further, the annual calendar *Tacuin da Lunà* was renamed *Tacuin da Lunà* (Lonatese Calendar). The 1989 edition featured the history of St. Ambrose church in Lonate and that of St. Raphael in San Rafael.<sup>7</sup>

September 19, 1990, marked the birth of their newsletter, *Il Corriere del Pomeriggio*. The perusal of the entire set of issues tells the story of the accomplishments of an ethnic group that otherwise would have been lost. It took a while to organize, but the loose community had finally found a way to unite and celebrate while increasing knowledge of its heritage. Roy Bottarini, who had a personal interest in the matter, frequently lectured to a passionate audience about life in Lonate on topics such as Roman times, dialect, nicknames, silk-making, and specific historic events such as the battle of Tornavento.<sup>8</sup>

*Il Corriere* was also full of local news that helped to keep everybody informed of coming events. In January 1991, John Rostoni led a research trip to McNear Brickyard, the first large employer of Lonatesi in the area.<sup>9</sup>

In 1992 the Gruppo began the annual cleanup of Mount Olivet Cemetery, which had not been properly maintained for years. Volunteers obtained gravel and artificial poinsettias to adorn the monuments in such an attractive manner that even the Archdiocese of San Francisco sent a letter of praise.<sup>10</sup>

October 10, 1992, marked the ground-breaking ceremonies at Albert Park, where Mayor Al Boro and Pro Loco president, Gianpiero Bertoni, mixed local and Lonatese soil to renew the existing friendship. Albert Park had fallen into decline, and the city had planned to rejuvenate and make it a more integrated part of the residents' lives by involving them directly in the work. Several groups partnered with the city to make plans for improving the area according to their vision. The Lonatesi were directly involved in the construction of the bocce courts, the Lonatese Gardens and the Italianate water fountain at its center. The Gardens were formally completed in 1997, a two-hundred-thousand-dollar project that was the result of years of volunteer work by the Lonatesi, who had prepared countless polenta and stew dinners in the old Lombard tradition and organized picnics, yard and garage sales, and other fundraisers to fulfill their dream. Supervision, materials, and financial donations were also provided by Ghilotti Construction Inc., as well as by McNear who gave a thousand new and also old bricks. The tiles of the fountain were hand painted by Gruppo member Brenda Rose de Clario, who volunteered to meet the individual request of her supporters by painting, for instance, the old houses of some Lonatese migrants.<sup>11</sup> The bocce courts proved very successful, with players coming from all parts of California. Even the Gruppo itself formed two distinct teams.<sup>12</sup>

Coinciding with this event, Olivia and Teresa Dalessi and Judy Milani published a self-guided tour of the area around C Street in Gerstle Park. This document is the first detailed analysis of the Lonatese residences, and while the number of households is only one hundred, it is amazing that after such a long time, it is still feasible to find names, photographs, and short stories about the people who lived there.

San Rafael Avenue, Gerstle Park. The Gerstles had three houses, one by the tennis court, one in the middle and one by the playground area. Their daughters used these homes . . . The property was deeded to the city for a children's playground along with \$900 to buy equipment. When Caesar Bettini retired as a caretaker, Mario Soldavini was hired by the city of San Rafael as gardener and caretaker of Gerstle Park.<sup>13</sup>

Angelo Zaro. Born in Lonate on June 6, 1895, and died on February 2, 1956. He came to San Rafael in 1906. He worked for the railroad, McNear's Brickyard and the Marin Municipal Water Co. He went back to Italy and married Carolina Fontana in Somma Lombardo on May 11, 1912. They left the same month for San Rafael. In 1915 they purchased the Clorinda Avenue house.<sup>14</sup>

Being illiterate didn't hamper the imagination of many migrants such as Angelina Arbini Bottini who bought a house on Marin Street as a rental income: "Angelina was

from Lonate Pozzolo. She could neither read nor write. She had an envelope for each tenant. Each month when the rent was paid, she put a straw from a broom until they were twelve. Then she started again, adding a new straw for each payment.”<sup>15</sup>

*Il Corriere* often reports on the connection with the Lonatesi of Walla Walla, Washington engaged in agriculture, especially in the cultivation of onions. The famous Walla Walla Sweets originated with John Arbini. Curiously, in San Rafael, another Arbini, Antone (Antonio), kept up the family tradition by developing a new chrysanthemum variety called Golden Arbini.<sup>16</sup>

The 1994 edition of the *Tacuin da Lunà* was dedicated to paintings in Lonate, with a special section devoted to the American works of Luigi Brusatori. Born in Sant’Antonino of Lonate on July 20, 1885, he graduated from the Brera Academy of Art in Milan in 1903. He then started to work as a fresco painter, but family economic pressures forced him to follow his brother Ambrogio to San Francisco, where he arrived alone in April 1912, having left his wife and children in Italy. Life as an artist was not easy in California, but he succeeded in obtaining several important commissions to paint frescoes in churches in Red Bluff, Fresno, and Milpitas. He made a portrait of Archbishop Cantwell of Los Angeles, who was so pleased with it that he commissioned Brusatori to paint frescoes for the church of Santa Clara in Oxnard. He netted the incredible sum of five thousand dollars, and soon after, in 1921, returned to Lonate for good. His outstanding works in San Francisco are to be found in the church of St. Francis of Assisi with two altarpieces depicting *The Stigmata* and *the Death of St. Francis*. In the church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Brusatori painted the frescoes, *The Last Supper*, *The Multiplication of Loaves and Fishes*, *The Coronation of the Virgin Mary*, and *The Worship of the Holy Sacrament*, and he decorated the entire church. Gene and Gina Brusatori, San Rafael descendants of Luigi Brusatori, teamed up with Gruppo Lonatese to petition to save these churches from demolition and make them San Francisco landmarks. While they met with success in the case of St. Francis, the fate of Our Lady of Guadalupe is still awaiting positive outcome.<sup>17</sup>

In 1990, Dorothy Baciocco began collecting recipes among the Lonatesi. Her detailed research into the memories of many family cooks has evolved into a volume with photographs of old Lonate illustrating the tradition. Some recipes no longer used in Lonate were still used in a variety of ways in San Rafael. Anecdotes relating to a sporadic rather than continuous interaction between the two places make the book a historical account. Given the importance Italians attribute to food and wine, highlighting their joyous approach to life, it’s no surprise that Italian recipe books abound and distinguish themselves all over the world. *Gruppo Lonatese Family Cookbook* was published in 1997. This comment about the *minestrone con riso* recipe was recorded by Scott Gordon: “Whenever I go to Lonate I have the wonderful fortune of staying at my grandmother’s cousin’s house. His name is Gino Taglioretti. There is a picture of his father in the 1989 Lonatese calendar. Fortunato Taglioretti went to live in San Rafael for work and then returned to Lonate. Gino’s wife Rosetta never uses garlic, she is a fantastic cook, but of course rarely measures how much of each ingredient to use. So her recipes are full of words like ‘a bit of this’ and a ‘lot of that.’”

Lonatese cuisine was very simple and based on polenta, rice, pasta, and vegetables. Meat was seldom eaten. Some remembered dishes that are not as popular in Italy as they used to be, such as *trippa* (tripe), *casseoula* (a winter specialty made of pig knuckles, salami, pork ribs, vegetables, and cabbage), dandelion green salad, fried zucchini flowers, and lentils with pork (*lenticc*). Many recipes have been adapted to the new land, and new ones have been added outright, such as those based on hot dogs or prawns. Some recipes, such as the *ping*, brought to California by Dorothy Baciocco's grandmother from Ottone (then province of Genoa and now Piacenza), are definitely old and from precholesterol times: besides six packages of Swiss chard or spinach, it called for three or four loaves of stale bread and eighteen beaten eggs and sometimes, at the end of the process, the delicious *pings* are served with spaghetti-like sauce. The cake section at the end is very small. The Lonatesi had little time for sweets, save for homemade biscuits.<sup>18</sup>

The Gruppo Lonatese has also been active in granting scholarships to students willing to do research on migration. The same was also done on a couple of occasions by the Pro Loco of Lonate, but the program was eventually discontinued. Unfortunately, the interest in Lonate was confined to a few people and lost momentum after the emotions of the various official gatherings created by the visiting groups faded. It's always very difficult to maintain enthusiasm and focus, especially when there are no major projects and goals to be met.<sup>19</sup> And this is what happened to the Gruppo Lonatese.

In May 1999, a Gruppo trip to Lonate had the pleasure of taking part in the dedication ceremony of a new town park, Parco San Rafael, to honor the sister city. This event was mentioned by *Il Corriere*. In the same issue, though, the new president had inaugurated his term with a plea for volunteers: "The crowd of working bees is getting smaller and smaller and we need new blood and fresh ideas." The maintenance of the Lonatese Gardens was at stake and risked being shamelessly farmed out due to nonavailability of volunteer labor. The malaise that seemed to pervade the Gruppo was disclosed again in the president's address of July 2002: "We had a small turnout at our Spring dinner . . . we are having a difficult time getting people to help in committees or events . . . Let me know what you feel about the future of the group."<sup>20</sup>

However, in spite of this alarm bell, the polenta and stew dinners, the cemetery clean-up, the August picnic, the Italian film festival and Italian street art festival sponsorship, the scholarship grants, and the Gardens's maintenance, were still ongoing.

At this crucial time something happened, and it drew attention to a subject that had been long discussed: oral history. As of October 2002, *Il Corriere* added brief family histories with the aim of convincing more people to add narratives of their own experience. The response was good, and over ninety stories are now published in *The History and Genealogy of Gruppo Lonatese*, compiled by Olivia Dalessi in 2004. The book fills a void that risked becoming permanent; it records the events of some of the Lonatese families who migrated to San Rafael, plus other Italians, Irish, and Swiss with whom they interacted. It represents an adequate mirror of the migrant's way of life. The contributors wrote what they remembered, and the flow of information was not professionally manipulated. There exist only

a few interviews and biographies of Lonatesi, and thus this book rewrites some of the history of San Rafael where Italians are rarely mentioned.<sup>21</sup>

Joseph Ferrario provided a biography of Caesar G. Canziani Ferrario and Maria Zocchi Zaro. His recollection explains the destinations of the Lonatesi, their migration patterns, and their customs in California. Cesare had two brothers and two sisters: Steve (Stefano) settled in Livermore; Ernesto worked at the C & H Sugar Plant in Crockett with other *paesani* of Sant'Antonino, Samarate, and Ferno, eventually returning to Italy for good; Rosa and Maria migrated to the farm area of Tres Arroyos in Argentina. Cesare arrived in California in 1907 and started to work digging tunnels for Western Pacific Railroad, then transferred to W. S. Dickey Brickyards in Union City. Maria migrated to Livermore in 1919 and worked at Cresta Blanca Winery and later in a laundry in South San Francisco. She married Cesare at St. Peter and Paul's in San Francisco on July 4, 1920, in a double ceremony in which her sister Maddalena married Antonio Zaro. Lonatesi preferred to marry in this church in Washington Square because Masses were said in Italian, and the tradition also required the reception to be held at the famous Fior d'Italia in Union Street. Joseph was born in San Rafael after his family moved there. His father practiced gardening, raised small animals, canned and preserved homegrown vegetables, and made homemade wine. The collation of many family histories echo the shared experiences, but their entire collection, accompanied by simple documents and photographs accurately kept, chronicle the life surrounding migrants that has either almost faded into oblivion or been misrepresented on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>22</sup>

Mary Ferrario O'Brien, Gruppo Presidentessa for five years, elaborates on her grandfather Carlo who had been to San Rafael in the 1890s, worked at McNear's Brickyards for a few years and then went back to Lonate. Her father, Mario, was born then in 1899. At age fifteen he went to work in Switzerland and was soon drafted to fight in World War I. After the end of the war he worked at the vegetable farm in Malpensa, close to Lonate, owned by the Umanitaria, a benefit society that helped migrants and fed them while they were in transit from Milan Central railway station to their ports of departure of Genoa or Le Havre. In 1921 he left for San Rafael, where he found work with Carlo Caletti developing Yosemite National Park. They paved roads, cleared land, and built bridges. He married Giuseppina Colombo, who was one the last migrants to arrive from Italy in 1934. Mary was born on December 2, 1935. She spoke Italian and Lonatese dialect until she went to grade school, and in fact still does. An analysis of the histories of these families shows the trends in migration and reveals a new approach to the definition of ethnicity because the country of origin was not erased and therefore a heritage that should have been assimilated and almost forgotten in the mainstream of the American way of life is still largely familiar to their descendants and survives with a strong accent, for instance, on family values and the work ethic.<sup>23</sup> "If you don't work, you don't eat. The State is not an employer. I need to buy my house."<sup>24</sup>

The Lonatesi settled in San Rafael first and stayed close by. They found ample job opportunities both in dependent and independent activities in a state with a mild and salubrious climate that rarely required overcoats and where Mission San Raphael for convalescent Native Americans was established in 1817. The arrival

in California was dictated by personal choice and family ties rather than the dreadful inducement by steamship agents or mining agents, the *padroni* and their accomplice agents who scouted the impoverished Italian plains in search of cheap unskilled labor. California seemed to be a magnet of its own. Who went to America? Able-bodied young males either single or married. The norm was to stay away a few years, make money, return to Italy, buy a piece of land, and build a house. This dream was partly fulfilled and broke the large landowners' grip on the land, especially around the 1920s. Lonate also has its row of American-funded houses.<sup>25</sup>

The majority went home and got married, though often one sent for a wife from the same village or married by proxy. A study of the narratives, the ship manifests, and the naturalization petitions list all possible situations: fathers away with sons or daughters, wives in Lonate; men voyaging continuously back and forth pending the final decision to either stay in Lonate or leave with the entire family; children of returnees who migrate alone; brothers going to San Rafael and sisters to Argentina and vice versa. The uprooted Lonatesi never gave up their roots. The family ties were kept along with their traditions. Weddings represented a milestone that had to be remembered in the family. Besides the church decorations and the lavish receptions, the engraved and enlarged sepia portraits were sent back to the relatives to demonstrate their new affluence: magnificent and striking lace dresses and bouquets for the brides, often rented well-tailored suits for the smiling grooms. This was a visible change from the gloomy family pictures taken in Italy, where poverty was still visible on their tight lips and their knotty hands proclaimed sadness. San Rafael was the beacon everyone referred to as an extension, almost a distant suburb, of Lonate.<sup>26</sup>

Inspection officers usually classified Lonatesi as laborers and peasants, but most of them had skills that surfaced when personal capabilities could be freely and easily turned into well-rewarded professions.<sup>27</sup>

McNear Brickyard was the initial employer, where various skilled and unskilled jobs could be obtained. Some also worked at W. S. Dickey Brickyard in Union City and at Remillard Brickyard in Larkspur. The Bay Area was developing and needed construction and reconstruction material. Gardening for large estates of wealthy San Franciscans or just in the backyard was a serious business for the Lonatesi who had always been close to the land and appreciated its inner value. The Lonatesi had actually entered the horticultural business in Walla Walla, Washington, around 1890. The main onion crop was later supplemented by other vegetables such as asparagus, beans, squash, corn, and lettuce—quite a different alternative to factory work.

This agricultural settlement is also one of the few successful experiments that involved Italians. Ranching was very familiar to Swiss-Italians like the Dalessi, who had been in California well before the Civil War. Wine attracted Joseph Ferrario, who operated the Ruby Hill Winery in Pleasanton for a few decades. Bruno Canziani became a legend at Wente Wineries in Livermore.

Employment was readily available with the various railway companies that intersected California: San Quentin Narrow Gage, Fairfax-Point Reyes Railroad Company, or Northwestern Pacific Railroad. The entrepreneurship of many took them quickly into their own businesses, especially those catering to the growing Italian population: shoemakers, barbers, and mechanics, as well as merchants who

ran grocery stores, meat shops, bakeries, bars, taverns, small restaurants and hotels. Women, who had been confined to housework, silk mills, and field work in Italy, found jobs as housemaids, ran boarding houses for singles, worked in laundries or factories like the Carson Glove of San Rafael and the American Biscuit Company in South San Francisco that required a long ferry ride before the opening of the Golden Gate Bridge in 1937.<sup>28</sup>

Toil meant a better material lifestyle, and they started to notice a positive change and envision a future for their children who could easily access education to enter either blue-collar or white-collar jobs without the restrictions they had experienced in Italy. World War I and the last groups of migrants marked a clear change in the attitudes of the Lonatesi who found themselves permanently in America. The transition was as fast as the pace of American life. The forced separation during Fascism, World War II, and the new suburbanism transformed the Lonatese community, and apparently disintegrated it as it did other communities elsewhere in America. However, family and ancestral ties have not disappeared but have rather taken a new road where certain visible and invisible paths are still part of their life. Acculturation and integration have inevitably taken place, but strangely and surprisingly *the call of one's roots* is still strong in spite of the territorial mobility that has broken homogeneous ethnic areas and consequently traditional family oriented life. San Rafael and Lonate Pozzolo still share that magical appeal.

In Italy today Americans of Italian descent are often regarded as tourists with an Italian surname, people with some vague interest in a forlorn village and in a few ethnic dishes. This research makes this remark questionable. Better communications, a new and better-qualified migration from Italy, and reduced pressure by the American establishment to enforce an unattainable monoculture, make the maintaining or fostering of Italian heritage, whenever feasible or desired, very viable. This is not to begrudge "multiculturalism" but to celebrate *de facto* acceptance of Italians as part of American life. The same applies to Italians who migrate from their regions to large cities.

Lonatesi formed no mutual aid societies for sickness and death benefits, and the Società Lombarda of South San Francisco enrolled only a few Lonatesi from San Rafael. This explains that their migration plans were temporary and that they felt independent and even secure in their new environment. Only in 1931 did they form their own association, Club Italia, as a fraternal association. They also belonged to the Italian Catholic Federation and the Order Sons of Italy in America (OSIA), but the integration process was further advanced by their affiliation with the Order of the Druids, the Native Sons of the Golden West, and the Improved Order of Redmen. *The birds of passage had finally found their nest.*<sup>29</sup>

Memories overtake the power of annihilation, and another President, Ann Canziani recalls: "My father-in-law took Carlo and me there [Lonate] to meet everyone and to create a bond that would keep our ties close." Some were lucky, but the majority never met their grandparents. This was the missing link that needed to be found. It was the inexplicable connection where San Rafael and Lonate Pozzolo represent the Alpha and the Omega without any intermediate stop. People made and continue to make the pilgrimage.<sup>30</sup> "It was a very difficult life, but they didn't think so."<sup>31</sup>

As for another Lombard settlement, the Hill in St. Louis, integration was slowed by the settlers' concept of America, which didn't necessarily include the relinquishing of their heritage and old customs. It was a sort of gamble where some stayed and played and others returned.<sup>32</sup> The mosaic of Lonatesi in America is slowly being completed, and the Gruppo Lonatese has certainly contributed to answering many questions related to the past and present patterns of daily life.

The polenta dinner was cancelled in 2004 but reinstated in 2005. It's also reported that it was a financially sound event that netted thirty-four hundred dollars but most of all recreated a festive and friendly atmosphere that had apparently waned. In the same year, the *Tacuìn da Lunà* reached the Pacific shores with a piece about the moorland (*brughiera*) around Malpensa and another about the history of San Rafael.<sup>33</sup> A clipping of a Livermore newspaper reported that Bruno Canziani Park had been named after the man who for sixty-eight years had performed all possible duties at Wente Winery.<sup>34</sup>

*Il Corriere* and Gruppo Lonatese have been active for almost twenty years. Not many would have bet a dime on this team. Their accomplishments are really notable and prove that the same may be done elsewhere in America and Italy. The Lonatesi were not afraid to unearth their roots, to reconnect, tell of their simple everyday lives—the stories history often neglects—and come to terms with their past according to their capabilities. Their determination has also hidden many of the feelings that only surface in their various experiences. Only once, through the recountings of Fiorina, are we allowed to penetrate the mind of a migrant during her last days at home in Italy, the voyage, the first encounter with San Rafael, the emotions of the first awakening, looking out the window and seeing a landscape of gray clouds and fog. But the symbol of the brighter future she had envisioned is right on their kitchen table: a vase of roses sparking joy despite its thorns.

Joy, a term rarely used in migration history, is a term that needs to be revisited.

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### Notes

1. U.S. Bureau of the Census 1880, 39. Peter B. Rosa was born in 1851 and was married to Ursula. He was a gardener and partially blind, and he had been unemployed for eight months. His children Frank, Rosa, and Santina were born in Italy in 1869, 1871, and 1873 respectively, while two other children, Angelo and Frank, were born in California in 1876 and 1878. Giuseppe Soldavini (Giuseppe Solderini), twenty-four years old, was also a gardener but listed as a servant.
2. Comune di Lonate Pozzolo n.d.; Serpieri 1910, 1–49; Commissariato Generale dell'Emigrazione 1925.
3. Galliani-Cavenago 1999; Milani 1997.
4. "Pedro" is an American card-game brought back to Lonate by migrants. The Pedro is the trump of five, valued at five points. Some of the terms are still referred to in the American jargon such as "trump ten" called *ghem*, a corruption of *game* or "trump two," called *lò*, from *low*.
5. *Lonate Pozzolo: Storia Arte Società* 1986, 20; *La Prealpina* 1985c, 1986a, 1987a, 1987b; Lucca 1986; *Il Giornale* 1986.
6. *Bylaws of Gruppo Lonatese* 1989; Comune di Lonate Pozzolo 1988; *La Prealpina* 1988a, 1988b, 1988c, 1988d 1988e; Lucca 1988; Baldoni 1988.
7. *Lonate Pozzolo: History Art Society* 1989; Magnoli 1989a, 1989b; *Tacuìn da Lunà-Lonatese* Calendar 1989.
8. *Il Corriere del Pomeriggio*, September 19, 1990. The first issue was prepared by Claire Villa, Jeanne Villa, Margaret Farley, Olivia Dalessi, and Ann Canziani. In April 1995 it was subtitled "The Cultural Newsletter of the Lonatese and Their Descendants," but in

- December 1997, a broader base called for a change to “The Cultural Newsletter of the Gruppo Lonatese.”
9. *Corriere*, March 1991.
  10. *Corriere*, January 28, 1992.
  11. *Corriere*, March 1992; October 1992; June 1997; Lonatese Gardens Edition, August 1997; 10th Anniversary Issue, August 1997.
  12. *Corriere*, September 1994, May 1999, October 2002.
  13. Dalessi and Milani 1992, 18.
  14. *Ibid.*, 6.
  15. *Ibid.*, 2.
  16. “San Rafael Mums Grower Produces New *Golden Arbutus* to Withstand Most Tests by U.S. Experts,” *Daily Independent Journal*, February 2, 1938; Caroline Arbutus to Teresa and Olivia Dalessi, December 15, 1987; Hagar 2005.
  17. Brusatori 1977; Il Fontanile 1988; Milani 1993; O’Mara 1986; Mervyn 1986a, 1986b.
  18. *Tacuin da Lunà*-Lonatese Calendar: *Cucina contadina lonatese* 1990; Baciocco 1997.
  19. *Corriere*, *passim.*; Lonate Pozzolo assigned two scholarships: one to Mitzi Cordera in 1992 and one to Gabriella Ponti in 1994. Both students spent a few weeks in San Rafael as guests of Gruppo Lonatese. Their research may be found at Lonate Public Library; *La Prealpina* 1994a, 1994b; Olivia Dalessi to Gruppo Lonatese, letter dated November 5, 1990, which explains the purpose of the exchange program is to learn about the Italians of Northern Italy, to provide the public with a knowledge of the culture of Northern Italy, and to preserve it for future generations; *Corriere*, November 1999.
  20. *Corriere*, November 1999, July 2002; Milani 1978. The dissolution of the Subalpina Mutual Aid Society reads, “The reason why it has become impossible to continue the affairs of the Subalpina is that no one wishes to assume office or responsibility” (Boston, April 24, 1961, Appendix A, 144). A letter dated January 25, 1955, had previously stated, “For lack of cooperation and support among members, we were forced to give up our annual Christmas party that we successfully held for many years” (Annex B, 181).
  21. *Corriere*, October 2003; Dalessi 2004. The reference to the Lonatesi and even the Italian presence in San Rafael is scarce and usually confined to the famous Olympic swimmer Eleanor Garatti or Judge Charles Brusatori. See also Carla Ehat and Anne Kent, interview with Charles Tacchi, Oral History Project of the Marin County Free Library, San Rafael, May 9, 1980; Claire Villa and Ann Pogojeff, interview with Edmond Rossi, San Anselmo Historical Society Oral History Project, San Anselmo, June 6, 1978. Claire Villa’s interview with Edmond Rossi anticipates her future editorial skills at Gruppo Lonatese. Carla Ehat’s interview with Charles Tacchi concentrates on California. Charles vaguely remembers his father’s hometown, Lenat or Lainate Pesoli, where people lived in two-story houses, migrated to Europe before going to America, and raised silkworms. The parents spoke little about their past, but today a professional interviewer would elaborate differently on the first part of the conversation. Too late now. Cf. Brevetti 2004.
  22. Dalessi 2004, 18.
  23. *Ibid.*, 163.
  24. These are typical phrases repeated by Lonatese migrants.
  25. Keegan 1987. The average temperatures in San Rafael range between 41° F and 49° F in December and peak between 67° F and 68° F in July. The mild temperatures favored their acclimation much better than that of migrants in other areas of the United States, where winters and summers were unbearable.
  26. Dalessi 2004. The Lonatesi spread all over the Northern Bay Area. San Rafael, Tiburon, San Anselmo, Larkspur, Mill Valley, Livermore, Cotati, Richmond, Novato, Pleasanton,

Greenbrae, Point Reyes, South San Francisco, Sebastopol, and Fairfax are the names of towns and places familiar also to Lonatesi in Italy. Suburbanism has broken the life pattern, and there is a diminished attachment to traditions and a significant resettlement all over America due to out-of-state college attendance, jobs, and career opportunities. However, according to the 2000 U.S. Census, Italian Americans in San Rafael still number 7.9 percent of the population, the same as in Mill Valley, while San Anselmo and Larkspur stand at 11.4 percent and 9.5 percent, respectively.

27. Luigi Brusatori departed from Le Havre and arrived in New York on April 20, 1912, aboard the ship *France*. He was registered as a laborer. See also all different ship manifests at <http://www.ellisland.org>.
28. Dalessi 2004, 266; *Independent Journal* 1961. This reprinted edition reproduces articles about McNear and Nave; Jan Lund 1989; Taylor and Williams 1992; Locati 1978.
29. The Club Italia was founded on April 20, 1935. The purpose of the organization was to promote literature and social, educational, and recreational functions. In the 1990s, the Club had over three hundred members who met once a month at the San Rafael Recreational Center with a dinner meeting and card playing. On September 20, 1947, another group of Italians gave origin to Marvelous Marin Lodge No. 964, Order Sons of Italy in America (OSIA). In the 1990s, it counted over two hundred affiliates. The incumbent president was Robert Pedroli. The OSIA is the largest Italian American fraternal group, with over six hundred thousand members scattered all over America. The association promotes charities and awards grants and scholarships, besides the usual social activities. Both groups promote the knowledge of Italian heritage. Other Lonatesi preferred to join American institutions such as the Ancient Order of the Druids, based on justice, morality, and brotherly love and following the rituals of ancient Druids. Marin Grove No. 208 was instituted in San Rafael on February 12, 1910. The Native Sons of the Golden West also attracted some Lonatesi. Another group that promoted Americanization through greater love for the United States and the observance of the principles of American liberty was the Improved Order of the Redmen. The Redmen hall was located in the Cochrane-McNear block of San Rafael (4th Street between C and D Street).
30. Dalessi 2004, 22.
31. *Ibid.*, 93.
32. Mormino 2002.
33. *Corriere*, February 2005.
34. *Ibid.*

## Breaking the Code of Silence Woman to Woman

*Marie Saccomando Coppola*

We sat across the kitchen table from each other, two women related by blood, alone for the first time: an eighty-three-year-old Sicilian aunt and me, her fifty-one-year-old Sicilian American niece. On her morning errands, my cousin Cettina had driven me in her small Fiat to our aunt's house. Aunt Rosina had just bought a half-bushel of artichokes from a street vendor. Her doctor had warned her against the effort of preserving food due to a heart condition, but she just smiled, told me how little she paid for the artichokes, and assured me that it would not be much work at all. She made me a cup of tea—since, avoiding caffeine, I had asked for a decaffeinated tea instead of the ubiquitous, strong Italian *espresso* coffee. I set up the tape recorder, prefacing our session with: “You remember the dissertation we talked about over the telephone?” My fluency in the Italian language was more limited then, but everyone understood me, *or so I thought*. “Yes, yes,” she responded. I began to ask about her life, including her early family life, schooling, life as a single woman, work, engagement, marriage, children, and health. She spilled forth the story of her life from her heart. Little did I realize the problems this conversation would create.

Nine years later, and proud of having given testimony to her life, I sent a hard copy of my dissertation, titled “Toward a Missing Link in the Identity of Italian American Women: Oral Histories of Sicilian and Sicilian American Women” (Coppola 1998), back to Racalmuto with an American cousin who was going to our ancestral home to attend a wedding. My aunt accepted the manuscript graciously, recalling fondly the time I had spent with the family in Sicily. However, between the time my cousin left Sicily and when she arrived home to the United States—a twenty-four-hour lapse—my aunt had telephoned my mother in the United States and exploded in a rant against me and my work. As a student of oral history, I innocently believed I was ennobling her life story. She on the other hand, believed I had betrayed her and the entire family.

Recently urged by a friend to find and use my aunt's words in Sicilian as she related her story, I searched and found the field journal I had kept at the time. Finally aware of the more precise language she used when berating my mother over the telephone, it does now seem clear that *others* were involved in her reaction.

La famiglia di Taverna erano poveri ma avevano da mangiare. Sto libro non leggere!  
Lu sciriru. Mai ave benire nella casa mia! Chi bo yia? Che ci ha battare le mani?

The family Taverna [She uses the third person to speak about her immediate family.] was poor but they always had something to eat. This book is not to be read! I tore it up. She [that is: me] is never to come to my house again! What did she expect? That we would applaud her?

My mother tried to think of the most tactful way to respond. Mostly she agreed and tried not to add anything offensive, thereby placating my aunt in order to keep peace within the family. However, on the question of applause, she could not contain herself saying: "*No, Rosa, ci la battare io!*" (No, Rosa, I applaud her!) More was said, but I did not record the Sicilian passages, since I do not speak or write Sicilian well. Instead, I simply translated most of the conversation directly into English as I recorded it. Here is part of Rosina's narrative from my journal:

We are proud. People in the town do not know the entire story. Do not let anyone from the town read the story. [There are many immigrants from Racalmuto living in my town in the United States.] She has disgraced me and my children. [She used the term *disgraziata*, a strong pejorative, but I did not write the exact wording of the sentence in which she used it.] My sons [She had five sons, no daughters.] all have university degrees. She has made everyone angry. Nothing I told her was for publication. I forbid her from publishing it. I have burned every page.

I was in shock. By this time, my father was already suffering from dementia and thankfully did not fully grasp what was happening. My mother had only a long-distance relationship with her sister-in-law, never having traveled to Italy. They never spoke to each other again, partly because of the fallout (but also because my mother fell ill shortly after) and partly because my father was unable to dial an international telephone number without my help. The simplest explanation I could offer myself, as consolation, was that she had spoken with me intimately, aunt to niece, neither of us knowing the other very well before I recorded her story, and that she had not expected her words to become public. This explanation, however, did not fully satisfy me.

Oral history plays a critical role in women's history, creating a space for voices that have long been silent in a history largely written by men. However, an internal culture of silence has even further delayed this opportunity for Italian American (and specifically Sicilian) women. Although they have been writing since midcentury, only during the past fifteen to twenty years has the field flourished. Helen Barolini and Edvige Giunta, among others, attest to Italian American women writers as late bloomers (Barolini 1985, 3; Giunta 2002, 24). Oral history provides a

way to record resistance to the patriarchal worldview and thus negate the stereotypical posture of feminine passivity. Allowing women to speak for themselves provides an opportunity to tell their life stories, define their personal identity, and interpret the meaning of their own lives in their own words.

Faculty in the American Studies Department where I was a Ph.D. candidate encouraged me to apply theory to my personal life. Recognizing the contribution of the women in my family appealed to me. It was just such a noble cause that led me to a dissertation on the women's voices retrieved from my own family history in southern Italy. In interviewing my aging aunt, I believed I was giving her an opportunity to tell what she had accomplished. I included her story in my dissertation. Instead, I had so offended her that she disowned me. I have been writing and attempting to make sense of this incident ever since. As a child, I knew that telling family stories around the dining room table was something meant to be private among Sicilian Americans, a carryover of the code of *omertà*, that is, loyalty to the family through silence (cf. Barolini 1985, 24). Italian American women writers take a great risk of alienating their families when they break this code of silence through writing.

I had met my father's sister for the first time when I traveled to Sicily in 1984, my first trip to Italy. All I knew of my family in Sicily came from my father's stories about his life in Racalmuto, from the blue airmail envelopes that arrived periodically, and from the black-and-white sixteen-millimeter movies that he had taken on his postwar visit in 1948. Aunt Rosina was much smaller than I had expected, a diminutive four feet eleven inches. I had to bend over to kiss her. She was dressed in black, hair drawn back in a bun. Her eyes took me in without reservation. She loved me instantly as though I were hers, holding my hand, patting and squeezing it, all very gently. I could not help but immediately love her too.

Our second meeting was in 1987 when my father and I spent a month in his hometown. When I asked why he had not returned after 1948, he answered that it would have been too difficult to leave again. That was the first inkling I had that he had any regrets about emigrating from Racalmuto. In 1987, when I returned to Sicily with him, I realized that the Sicily he remembered had changed dramatically. The economic miracle of the 1950s and 1960s had brought all the goods and services we Americans enjoyed to the doorstep of Racalmuto. Our Sicilian family was anxious to prove this to him. When we first arrived in our *paese* or hometown, they asked my father what he usually ate for breakfast. He innocently answered, "Corn flakes and milk with honey." The next morning they had it on the table for him! They wanted to show him that anything he had in Buffalo was available in Racalmuto.

Two years after the trip with my father, I returned alone to collect the oral histories of Sicilian women. By the time I arrived in Racalmuto, everyone in my family knew the formal purpose of my trip was to tape record women's stories. However, the issue of writing the dissertation faded in light of the excitement of interviewing women. Although I had previously spoken with both Rosina and Cettina, my aunt and my first cousin, about the project, I depended on other family members to volunteer or to suggest women friends who would be interested in taking part in the project. Many were willing. I recorded eight interviews during the month I spent there.

When I first arrived, I needed help in getting my tape recorder back into working order because I had neglected to buy a converter to accommodate the European voltage system. I discovered my blunder in a hotel in Rome when I was practicing with my equipment and blew out the lights! Eager to help, my cousins assured me they could buy whatever I needed. In the interim, the female cousin with whom I was staying, Cettina, began to tell me her story. When I tried to explain that I wanted to record it on tape and that my recorder was not working, she dismissed my concern, telling me not to worry. She obviously had no concept of the ways of oral historical methodology. That night, realizing that I had to record the part of her life story that she had already told me, I excused myself from the evening routine of watching television to write in my journal. The next day, she continued telling me the path her life had taken. Three days later, my recording equipment was in order. I had no opportunity to go to an electronics store, not only because I didn't know my way around the small town but, moreover, because my cousins insisted they would take care of it. I continued to record Cettina's daily account of her life because she continued to relate it to me as I accompanied her through her busy day. I did not ask to visit my aunt until my equipment was in order. I realized only in hindsight that here was a serious clash of cultures and knowledge systems! She did not understand about tape recorders, dissertations, and the power of information.

My aunt greeted me with open arms. I set up my recorder on the kitchen table, told her again that I was going to use her words in my dissertation although I did not specifically say I would quote her. I assumed that because I was using a tape recorder, she would know that her precise words were important.

She spoke for almost two hours, needing little prompting, since she had told the story many times before. Rosina wanted me to see her life the way she saw it. As one of thirteen children, she recounted the deaths of several family members from accidents, the Spanish flu of the early twentieth century (which took three siblings in a week), and other illnesses. The most shocking of all was the death of a newborn sister shortly after her father died. A doctor, whom they summoned because the baby had a persistent cough, told them it was nothing serious. When she did not improve, they called another doctor, who asked why they had not consulted medical help before, saying he could have helped if called in sooner. They confronted the first doctor, but he replied, "What was she going to do without a father?" I listened in awe.

In describing her early married life, she used the phrase that I later co-opted as the title of the chapter on her life, "*una vita sacrificata*" (a life sacrificed). She had related the daily care she had given her mother-in-law, who had a stroke and was bed-ridden in her own home for seven years. This was in addition to raising five sons and working in her husband's dry goods store. I had asked how she managed to care for her children with this workload.

*Chi a scuola, chi a asilo, e quello piccolino a mia mamma. . . . C'era mia mamma. Ti dico che Angelo piccolino ci faceva il bagno da mattina, . . . da mangiare. Facevo tutto e lo portò a mia mamma. Si dormentava lì. Poi io ritornavo all'una. Lo trovai ancora che dormiva. Lo prendevo, sia lui come Luigi [l'altro figlio che faceva lo stesso ritmo*

*quando era bambino*—*Questi due sono stati di più che lo portava a mia mamma perché Giovanni—umm—fu un periodo che c'era la guerra [la seconda guerra mondiale]. Zio Giuseppe non andava per comprare [le robe da Palermo o Catania per vendere nel negozio]. Non ci aveva questo coraggio [essere sulle strade aperte durante la guerra]. Allora, abbiamo chiuso il negozio e si n'è andata a lavorare al pastificio del mio fratello Angelo [. . . ] Allora, sta lavorando . . . ed io stavo a casa con Giovanni. Insomma, non avevo bisogno di portalo da mia mamma—na vita sacrificata [la] mia.*

One went to school, one went to nursery school, one went to my mother's. . . There was my mother. I tell you, in the morning I bathed baby Angelo, . . . fed him. I did everything and brought him to my mother's house. He slept there. Then I returned at one o'clock. I found him still sleeping. I took either him or Luigi [the other son followed the same routine when he was a baby]. These two stayed with my mother more because Giovanni—umm—there was a time that there was the war [World War II]. Uncle Giuseppe did not go to buy [the goods in Palermo or Catania to sell in the store]. He didn't have the courage [to be on the open road during the war]. So, we closed the store and he went to work at my brother Angelo's pasta factory [. . . ] So then, he was working there and I stayed at home with Giovanni. In other words, I had no need to bring him to my mother's—mine was a life of sacrifice.

My aunt's story was not for publication according to her understanding, I later realized. The uneven power between researcher and narrator made her vulnerable, despite the clear intent of my research, a tape recorder in full view, and my adherence to the ethical code of my discipline. But I had failed to grasp her perspective, for I was too absorbed in my own immediate needs.

The language barrier loomed large over us. I wrote in English; no one in my family in Racalmuto spoke English, and I assumed that they could not read it either. I had no problem understanding the Sicilian language, since I had heard my parents use it whenever they did not want us children to understand their conversation. I had learned to understand it simply by listening. I spoke the standard Italian I learned from the language classes I attended in the early 1980s when my children were away at college and I could realize my life-long dream of traveling to Italy. In September 1988 I applied to a PhD program in the American Studies Department at the State University of New York at Buffalo and designed a research project involving fieldwork in Sicily. I would speak to my aunt from my parents' home, since by then my father was beginning to suffer from dementia and needed my help to dial the telephone. Every time my father and I telephoned, I would talk to my aunt about my project. She quickly agreed with my proposal to record women's stories. Over the next five months, we had several telephone calls, and I reiterated the idea that I was going to record stories of women's lives in Sicily in preparation for writing a dissertation. Although the Italian university system differs somewhat from the American, the term *tesi* connotes a written thesis. I used the word specifically to make my meaning clear. My aunt, of course, had only an elementary education, but four of her five sons had university degrees. I assumed they would have talked about it.

In the interest of avoiding a “clinical” approach, I did not have anyone in my family or friends sign release forms in order to use their testimony for the dissertation, feeling too much like a pretentious academic. I wanted to avoid formalities. If I had asked family members to sign a piece of paper, I would have alienated them in a different way. Asking for signatures on documents is not part of family culture; it would have been offensive and frightening in a legalistic way. Telling them personally about my research project was more in keeping with the family culture. I am not the first woman to have experienced such confusion. Gilbert similarly describes this gap between Italian and American within her own household, and how the linguistic break leaves us “in a world of perpetual mystery” (Gilbert 1991, 116).

Oral historians place great importance on listening and allowing the narrator to be in control of the story. Rosina was a natural master storyteller living in an oral culture. Our recorded interview was the first and only time the two of us were alone with a tape recorder. For the subsequent interviews with family members and friends, I was never alone with a narrator, even though I had asked for *personal* interviews. Present in the room was always a mother, sister, daughter, cousin, or woman friend. I would ask to be alone with the interviewee, and she would agree, but her idea of being alone and mine were not the same. I resisted making an issue about it because I felt it was part of the local women’s culture, that is, that women would always be accompanied by other women.

Addressing current issues in oral history, Sherna Berger Gluck insists on collaboration as crucial in the interpretation of the words of narrators (Armitage 2002, 81). Although the context of her remarks did not include interviews with blood relations, I cringed as I read her assessment, knowing that distance, time, and language made collaboration almost impossible between my aunt and me. I collected her story in 1989; I completed writing the dissertation in 1998, all the while focusing on my need to complete it. Moreover, Rosina did not read English, and I do not write in Italian. The cross-cultural nature of my inquiry rendered collaboration extremely difficult. I only became familiar with the concept of collaborative interpretation later on. Besides, my mindset was that I was giving Rosina a precious gift: recognition of her life’s work. There was no doubt in my mind that she would be pleased with my effort.

When I went to Sicily in 1989 to collect women’s stories, I had a plan to reach women on a personal level through family. I was aware of the warnings about asking personal questions, not only of people in general but of Italian and Italian American women in particular. Barolini, for instance, had already recognized the burden that family loyalty places on Italian American women writers, stifling them from exposing family secrets (Barolini 1985, 24). Working with Puerto Rican women, Rita Benmayor reports that people are typically suspicious, for good reason, that others may use conversations against them: “Women continue to ask ‘What is this for?’ Their most immediate frame of reference for an interview is the ‘face to face’ interrogation at the Welfare office” (Benmayor 1991, 172).

Furthermore, a priest in Palermo counseled me on my method of recruiting women to participate in the study. My family in Racalmuto found an apartment in Palermo, escorted me there, and introduced me to students from Racalmuto

who were going to the University in Palermo so that I could continue my field-work there. I was living in an apartment with seven other women: the proprietor and women from outlying towns who had nursing jobs or were going to school in the city. They returned home on weekends. I began interviewing the women with whom I was living, asking if they had any friends who would agree to an interview. I had asked Father Roberto Battaglia if he could introduce me to some of his parishioners as a researcher. He described Sicilians as fearing anyone foreign. They have their own sure ways of identifying strangers, the language litmus test being among the most infallible. Unless you grow up speaking your town's dialect, it is almost impossible to learn to make those sounds correctly. People, he said, might not even give a stranger the correct street directions! First, they consider any unknown person to be a representative of the government. Sicilian cynicism of government institutions extends to the Church. Even benign questions such as, how many brothers and sisters do you have? are suspect because the state could use such information for tax purposes. His advice to me was, "If you meet because you've brought bread and then talk about something else, you're far more likely to get the truth" (Battaglia 1989). Ironically, I had approached Father Battaglia through a woman friend in Buffalo who was his cousin. She had given me a letter with a money gift for him. When I went looking for his church using the address she had given me, I could not find it. I walked up and down the street several times searching for the place. There was an open-air market along the street blocking the view of the buildings behind the vendors. Frustrated and tired, I approached two people at one end of the market, telling them I was searching for a cousin of an American friend. They howled with laughter. I did not understand at the time that Americans looking for cousins was a topic of great satire in Italian films.

During my 2004 visit to Racalmuto, my cousin Cettina told me how much trouble there had been over my "book," as my aunt referred to it. All five of Rosina's sons had been in town for a family wedding; all of them had seen the copy, all had blamed their mother for telling me her story; all were incensed over what I had written. The incident occurred in 1998. I have since kept track of all correspondence and conversations alluding to the problem, trying to find that missing link in our understanding. Angered sons against their mother had prompted the backlash. Gender issues within her own family were *displaced* onto me. She and I had engaged in "women's talk," the way women talk to each other as family members or close friends, establishing an intimacy not typically part of men's talk.

Were they angry over their mother "spilling the beans," or over my recording it? Women speaking to each other never interested the men. At family gatherings, there was typically a physical division between the men and the women: women in the kitchen, men in the living room. The problem, I concluded, was recording women's words *on paper*. Women commiserate with each other. They tell their troubles, their heartaches. An ideal Italian or Sicilian woman would bear her burden stoically and not complain about sacrifice to her own men. Rosina construed me as a "safe" person (because a woman and a family member) to whom she could express herself. Most likely, the men were scandalized and she recanted. After my aunt disowned me, I asked my cousin Cettina to talk with other members of the family about the incident so that I could understand what had happened. She

could not get anyone to talk about the “book.” Rosina, being the matriarch of the family, had forbidden any further discussion.

When I visited my family in Racalmuto after Aunt Rosina died, her sons and daughters-in-law gave no indication of the trouble my writing had caused, possibly because it would have upset their own family gender dynamics, and stirred up women talking out of turn—dangerous stuff for those who want to maintain the cultural gender status quo! Instead, my cousins welcomed me into their homes, prepared lavish dinners, and were concerned about making my visit enjoyable. This was another instance in the family conspiracy of silence: surface behavior in certain family settings belies the problems that persist beneath.

The well-established Italian notion of *la bella figura* requires keeping up appearances, part of which is keeping the family business to itself. Gloria Nardini scrutinizes the layers of meaning behind this quintessential Italian ideal—an integral part of the Italian psyche. Italian Americans have internalized the inner self with its incumbent feelings of guilt as the nucleus of one’s identity in keeping with the tradition of Anglo society, whereas, Nardini argues, Italians do not dwell introspectively for their identity. “This notion of self as a social presentation for the consumption of others is widespread in the Mediterranean world. It is linked to the reputation which the community awards to its members” (Nardini 1999, 15). In painting my aunt’s picture of poverty, I gave away family secrets in detail, that is, what went on behind closed doors.

Werner Sollors uses the term *culture of consent* to indicate the American eradication of legitimacy based on descent. Here, instead, the individual consents to make himself anew, using outward achievements as the definition of identity (Sollors 1986, 4). This appears to be in contrast to Sicilian culture. In the United States, raising one’s social and economic status through material wealth represents the realization of the American dream. Yet, class distinctions persist in European society to an extent not readily apparent to Americans, and I may not have taken this sufficiently into account, exposing longstanding, rancorous class distinctions in my aunt’s milieu. She may have wanted to present the family’s *middle class* status, achieved after the war, as though it had always been the case (in keeping with the concept of *la bella figura*), thereby presenting a more favorable image of the family. My father always spoke of his family’s economic and social standing as being above that of the peasants because his father was an artisan, a blacksmith. My written account had not made that distinction. According to Barolini, the Italian family structure from the old country “could not make peace with the Anglo-American ideal [of] Rugged Individualism and [the] Self-made Man” (Barolini 1999, 61). My father’s “poor boy makes good” heroic immigration narrative did not have the same resonance in Sicily. Italian Americans may not be Italians, especially to Italians; they have experienced too much of the American ethos to be identified as Italian.

After my aunt’s scathing telephone call to my mother, I wracked my brain in search of an explanation. Where did I go wrong? Unable to believe I had told any secrets, I looked closely at the Italian words I had used, searching for clues to Rosina’s reaction. Between the short period of time she and her sons had to read the manuscript and the fact that none of my family spoke or read English, I focused on the Italian phrases I had used. The title I gave to the chapter on her life was a

phrase she used, “*una vita sacrificata*” (a life sacrificed). I pondered that expression, wondering if she had objected to the label “sacrificed.” I began to doubt my use of “sacrifice” as a way to describe her life. Had she somehow resented my implying that she had given up so much? This train of thought led me to question the sacrifices made by the immigrants as well as those who stayed in Sicily.

The first time I saw her eldest son, Calogero Taverna, after the incident, in Rome in 2002, he gave me his version of the reaction. (By then, sadly, my aunt had died and I had not yet returned to Sicily since my fieldwork in 1989. After the estrangement, I dared not return. This was also before my cousin Cettina told me how outraged all the sons were over my writing.) When I asked him to explain why his mother had taken such offense, he raised one arm, twisting his hand, saying, “*Voi Americani—tutti contenti—tutti ricchi*” (You Americans—everyone happy—everyone rich). I cringed at his sarcasm. His wife’s entrance into the restaurant punctuated his outburst, necessitating small talk, since I was seeing her again for the first time in four years. Later, when he and I were again alone, he said, as an aside, that his mother probably would have labeled those who emigrated to the United States as having sacrificed *their* lives more than those who stayed. I could only guess at the reasons for his conjecture, since he would say no more, throwing up his hands with a condescending grin that stifled me. I presumed Aunt Rosina would have thought that those who went to the United States sacrificed more than those who stayed. That led me further down the road to looking at the Sicilian view of Sicilian Americans.

I was not aware of the continuing rancorous debate between those who emigrated and those who stayed behind. My father never intimated there was any question about the wisdom of his decision to leave Italy. In that sense, he was part of the debate, but I had never heard the other side. I was aware that he would send money and care packages to his family in Sicily, assuming he was much better off than those still in Italy. These early memories were of postwar Italy and my father’s 1948 trip.

Still puzzled about Rosina’s reaction, I began to recall the many times she had criticized my father for not teaching his children to speak Italian, thus severing their cultural roots. The first time she said this privately to me, I went into a lengthy explanation of the historical and societal forces in the United States at the time that influenced Italian immigrants to abandon their native tongue. She considered my father’s behavior as neglectful, while I tried to show her that he intentionally avoided using the language to protect us from prevailing racism. My explanation meant nothing to her because she continued to mention this neglect. When I had broached the subject with her son in Rome in 2002, he would not give any more clues as to his mother’s objections. It was another year before I returned to Rome. He and I e-mailed each other, but he was more interested in me writing articles for <http://www.Racalmuto.com>, a Web site that he had developed to encourage local tourism. Evidently, he wanted to leave my “transgression” behind. Later, he revealed anti-American sentiments through our correspondence, which added further layers to the story and into which I will not delve here.

While Italian Americans look for their affinities to Italians, they, in fact, find many differences, turning our identities upside down. Unable to deny the American part of themselves, neither can Italian Americans ignore their Italian

component. Louise DeSalvo labels this experience “vertigo,” the title of her recent memoir. Other Italian relatives have felt resentment toward family members who have emigrated. A cousin of Barbara Harrison, author of *Italian Days*, calls Barbara’s family “abandoners”; yet another calls her “a bastard . . . not Italian and not American” (Harrison 1989, 405) and complains about Americans who come looking for their roots. My aunt embraced me unconditionally the first time I met her in 1984; the second meeting was with my father in 1987. On those occasions, my aunt expressed gratitude to my father for sending money for her dowry decades before, which enabled her to marry, as an act of allegiance she never forgot. On this basis, I concluded that my Sicilian family did not look upon its Italian American branch as “abandoners” but rather as helpers. However, I now question what attitudes toward Americans may have lurked just below the surface.

Susan Caperna Lloyd relates her journey to her ancestral home in Sicily. She finds meaning in the contemporary Easter rituals that she stumbled upon in Trapani. Sicilian tradition involves processions by men carrying the statues of the Madonna through the streets on Holy Thursday. Women have created public space within these ceremonies. Lloyd witnessed the solidarity shaped by the women of San Biagio, Sicily, who have taken charge of their town’s Easter celebration. They make hundreds of decorated breads in the shape of icons connected with the narrative of the holy day, such things as crosses, Madonnas, angels, and fruit (Lloyd 1992, 167). Lloyd saw the freedom and self-confidence that comes from participating in the female rite of making bread, noting the relationship to the grain goddess, Demeter. The mix of pagan mythology and Christianity comes from the nature cycle, where legend originates. Those tales have nourished women in Sicily for millennia. Italian American women either lost that nourishment or never experienced it. Lloyd is recovering its essence for a new generation by making sense of it through mythology.

Both my mother and aunt suffered economically and socially. My mother, although raised in America, did not receive the level of formal education that my aunt did, however meager it was. She completed fourth grade, while my aunt achieved the equivalent of sixth grade. My mother and her sisters left school before June exams to work in the fields with my grandmother in order to supplement the family’s income; they were late beginning school in the fall because it was harvest time. This harvest cycle kept them behind in school. The younger children were able to attend high school because by that time the family had older wage earners. My aunt never suffered that kind of deprivation in Sicily. Further, Sicilian culture placed women who worked outside the home on the lowest social rung, so Rosina did not work outside the home until she was married, and even then only in her husband’s dry goods shop in the main piazza of the town—an accepted custom. As young as seven, my mother worked on farms south of the city of Buffalo harvesting along with the rest of her family. Her immigrant father was unable to get enough work all year round to support them. Rosina may have looked at Italian Americans as a degraded ethnic group, although she would never have explicitly directed comments to her family to that effect, out of a sense of courtesy.

After reading the exact words of her violent reaction to my mother in my journal written years ago, I am now certain that her sons condemned her for telling me the family's stories. Seeing her words in print must have shocked her as well as her sons. It made no difference that I had used my rather recently acquired knowledge of Italian to explain how I intended to use her words. Perhaps, the novelty of being able to talk to each other intimately after many years of only knowing about each other through the letters written between her and my father overpowered any concerns about what would become of her words. Women's talk did not interest her sons until they saw it *in writing*. They did not have to read English to understand the theme. Although there were other Italian phrases in the chapter, the title of the chapter on Rosina's life alone, "*Una Vita Sacrificata*," would have been enough to enrage men who did not want their history known or their mother telling the intimate details of their lives. They probably resented the fact that she saw her life as a sacrifice.

Power issues do enter the oral history project. The only valid story is the teller's first-person narrative, not writings *about* that person. As soon as a writer interprets another's words, the narrative becomes a secondary source and the teller is relegated to a peripheral place. Writers write to understand themselves: "Telling stories that are part of family history is a difficult task—by choosing what to include and in reshaping the story, the teller for the most part reveals his or her viewpoint" (Laurino 2000, 217). Rosina's autobiography would have told a different story had she written one.

During the years between doing the fieldwork and developing a workable thesis, I abandoned the project more than once. By the time I began anew, I had given little thought to any objections my aunt might have had. I was not sensitive to the transformational effects of committing an oral story to paper. I should have listened more closely to my mother's objections when I recorded her life story. She expressed shame about the kind of work she and her sisters had to do in order to establish her immigrant family by buying a house in the new world. They had to harvest crops, live in shanties, compromise school attendance, and thus sacrifice a basic formal education. I insisted that making this knowledge public would enhance her accomplishments; she deferred to me because of my formal education. I can now attribute her objections to a version of *la bella figura*. My aunt would probably have made her feelings known if I had been in as close proximity. The only way I could have averted the estrangement would have been to collaborate with her by mailing her a copy before submitting it to the university. However, first, I would have had to translate, or more realistically, have had someone else translate it into Italian. Considering the time constraints, language differences, and expense, this would not have been likely.

Clues that I did not take sufficiently into account may have averted the misunderstanding. Besides my mother's objections, my cousin Cettina's continuing daily account of her life story to me without understanding my need to tape record it was also an indication that she did not understand my intent to retell her story in a written format. I made assumptions I should not have made. As a person with modest formal education, Rosina did not understand the power of the written word. Her sons, however, were college educated and could have explained it to

her. In retrospect, I realize she had little knowledge of what I could have meant by describing my proposed dissertation and she had never discussed it with her sons. Regarding release forms, I remain convinced that asking my family to sign them would have alienated them in yet another way.

I can identify with the recent interpretation Alison Goeller gives to Italian American women who return to their ancestral homes. She opens a perspective on gender issues by comparing them to Demeter searching for Persephone, alluding to the Greek myth, which still inspires, according to Goeller, part of the folklore of southern Italians. Persephone becomes the symbol of an Italian American woman who travels to Italy to reconnect with her ancestors and to design a new identity (Goeller 2003, 76). Goeller presents a line of Italian American women writers who reveal their own conflicts as well as their desire to recover power lost in the transformational process of becoming American. My aunt and I represent women who supported each other by listening and telling stories. I have a better understanding not only of her life but also of my own. I regret, however, that she suffered because of my creative act and that our relationship ended in a recriminating manner. In the years that followed, I continued dialing Rosina's telephone number to enable my father to speak with her. When she answered, I would identify myself immediately, assure her that my father was with me, and pass the telephone along to him. We never exchanged another word. Committing our stories to the written page has proven one way of breaking this silence.

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## Twice-Told Tales

### Art and Oral Histories from the Tenement Museum and Ellis Island

*B. Amore*

We have all grown up with stories. They are a fundamental way that history is transmitted. Many writers draw on their own experience or the collective experiences of others as sources for their writings. This is also true of artists. I here share some of my visual work, which draws on stories I was told as a child, as well as several large exhibitions that I created, incorporating oral histories found in the archives of the Tenement Museum and the Ellis Island Immigration Museum. In using these oral histories from the past as inspiration for the present, the lived experiences are actually being reinvigorated and given new life.

This quote, which I found in the Oral History Project at Ellis Island, is by Domenica Calabrese, born in 1920, who came to America from Campari, Calabria, at the age of eleven. These interviews with her were conducted in 1992 and 1994, over sixty years after she left Italy.

I had a great-grandmother who lived two doors away from us. She and I were constantly together. But one thing I do remember is when we left Italy. A few days before she and I took a walk to her land and she was very, very sad. She said, "Ah." She said, "You're going to America now. Some day you will remember me." But, she said, "remember when you get there, when you reach the Battery there is a row of fountains there. You have to see that there is one. Find out which one it is; that you cannot drink out of. Because when you drink from that certain fountain you're going to forget all of us that you're leaving here." So when I arrived at the Battery I was looking for the row of fountains, but I didn't see the row of fountains. So, I said, I guess since I didn't see them it must be okay.<sup>1</sup>

My own grandmother, Concettina De Iorio Piscopo, never uttered the words, “Someday you will remember me.” but living with her indelibly imprinted my life. It was she who taught me to drink from the fountain of memory. It is because of her collections of objects, from the everyday to the sacred, that my work exists.

My grandmother’s stories were the first I heard. Her childhood was my place of beginning. These early lessons were imbibed by me and became part of the fiber of my being, so much so that I never really thought about them as a conscious source of my own art until I embarked upon a particular voyage of discovery in my fifties. I began a series of works with titles like *From Whence I Came* and *Following the Thread*. The thread, of course, was the thread of memory.

The third exhibition in the series took place at 97 Orchard Street, a historic brick tenement that has become the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York City. On each floor of this building, four families lived in tiny apartments consisting of three rooms each, with a shared toilet in the hallway; immigrants from Lithuania, Greece, Prussia, and Italy lived in close quarters.

The inspiration for *Opening Windows in Time* came about when I visited the Tenement Museum and workers were removing the arched tin that had shuttered the windows for over sixty years. They seemed like the “eyelids” of the tenement, guarding the secrets within, and I asked if I could recycle them into art. Several years later the tin became the backdrop for these panels and triptychs, which made use of both the photographic and oral histories preserved in the Tenement Museum archives. Finally, the stories of the people who had lived their lives within the brick building were free to be revealed.

The curved shapes of the tin inspired the form of the triptychs I created for the four families I researched. The Triptych form is reminiscent of Renaissance folding altarpieces. The central portion contains as many as six generations of a family in shaped photographs and objects. The side panels display the oral history of the family written in illuminated script. The entire piece is like a small shrine to ordinary lives that were lived with extraordinary courage (see Figure 6.1).

Josephine Baldizzi lived at 97 Orchard Street until 1935, when it was closed because of changes in the fire code. She donated many family artifacts to the Museum for use in the reconstructed Baldizzi apartment, which has been open for guided tours since 1994. The Baldizzi triptych is painted a morning glory blue because the family grew morning glories on their fire escape in the recycled wooden boxes that contained their Depression-era welfare cheese.

My parents loved the Italian music and the Italian stories. We used to laugh, my brother and I, because they were always so dramatic. And we used to laugh because we didn’t know what they were talking about. My mother played the radio day and night, and she loved all her records. My father played a guitar and one time he said he was in an opera as an extra. . . . We were more involved with the Jewish people, because of the two neighbors in the back. On Friday nights, we would turn on the lights for them because that was what a good neighbor should do, my mother said. My parents never told me “Don’t go near this one or that one.” I remember there was one lady who said she was a Spanish Jew, a neighbor. And anytime anybody was sick, they were all in there helping. The kitchen was where everybody congregated. Most



**Figure 6.1** *Baldizzi Triptych: Family Stories* (open) (Wood, tin, photo, mixed media, family artifacts; 41" × 72" × 10"). Artist: B. Amore. Photograph by Tad Merrick.

of the time they all came to my mother's apartment. Everybody sort of stopped there before they went up the stairs. All the doors were always open, people talking with each other.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the Baldizzis, I researched the Gumpertz, Confino, and Rogarshevsky families. Their oral histories give a lively picture of Lower East Side New York life from the turn of the century until 1935. A visit to the New York museum and its original apartments conveys an almost eerily accurate impression of the tenement life that many of our ancestors experienced.

The exhibition that led to my invitation to show at the Tenement Museum was titled *Following the Thread* at SOHO 20 Gallery in New York. It was a pivotal point in the development of my work. The installation, titled *Odyssey*, is composed of person-sized black Trentino marble figures swathed in fabric. They are akin to the Italian village women carrying jugs of water and baskets of produce on their heads. The tall, strong, stone women balance their bundles of history. They are wrapped in fabric. The women used fabric to make beautiful clothes but were often trapped in their traditional roles. Here we experience the torn fabric of the immigrant's life in a revisioning of history. I use fabric to bind things together and make a work of art from disparate pieces of experience (see Figure 6.2).

These personages stand in for the original immigrants, whose dreams of what they would find in America sustained them during their painful departures. Here Domenica Calabrese spoke of what she thought they would find in America as they embarked on their journey of emigration from Calabria.



**Figure 6.2** *Odyssey* installation (Trentino marble, fabric, mixed media, family artifacts; each 72" × 16" × 18"). Artist: B. Amore. Photograph by Chris Burke.

Yes. I thought America was like a heaven where everybody, it must, I thought it was full of kings and queens and princes and everybody was rich. That was generally told in general by all of the people that the streets were made of gold, that everybody did so well here. . . . We had two, just two suitcases, and it was what we called an American Trunk. It's the basic storage trunk that you have today in the stores that's made out of some kind of tin or something. . . . The night before [we left] we had people through the three rooms sitting all over the furniture, on the floor, on top of the trunks, on top of the bed, on top of the tables. The next day the whole town accompanied us, which was about, say, a half a mile to three-quarters of a mile. Then some started bidding us goodbyes, and there was crying. Then we reached my uncle's house, which was in the country, and we had to pass it, and there was a big crowd there. My grandmother, my father's mother, she cried, and so did my great-grandmother. It was a sad farewell.<sup>3</sup>

Ettore Lorenzino, born 1913 in the Udine region, speaks of another aspect of leaving, the sense that one was saying goodbye forever: "The thing that was left with me the most is that when the train was leaving, my mother was hanging on, she won't let the train go. And that stays with me, because she had a feeling that maybe she'd never see me again, which she never did. I felt foolish. The minute they blow the whistle, it choked me up, I couldn't say another word."<sup>4</sup>

Included in this exhibit were *Ancestor Scrolls*, which hovered like spirits, around the room. The "body" of each person was composed of the remembered history of that individual. Each body was as full or meager as the memory of the person that had been passed down. One is reminded that what is not remembered, told,

or written down is forgotten, and though it may exist on a metaphysical level, for all practical purposes it is lost.

The title of the exhibit, *Following the Thread*, came from the red thread of memory that stretched along the room. Notes, letters, and photographs from the family history that had been preserved were hung along this dynamic thread symbolizing the life line, the blood line. This red thread of memory eventually led to a major traveling exhibition, *Life line—filo della vita*, at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum in 2000 to 2001. It was published as a book titled *An Italian American Odyssey: Through Ellis Island and Beyond*, by the Center for Migration Studies in 2006 (see Figure 6.3).

Life line was conceived and created for the six former dormitory rooms at Ellis Island. This photograph is the only extant one that shows detained immigrants sleeping in stacked rows of bunks—more like a concentration camp than entry to “the land of opportunity.” The first room was called the *Room of Dreams*, and some of the excerpts from the Ellis Island Oral History Project, which I have previously quoted, were playing softly as visitors entered. The ten longitudinal Columns of History that were present in each room spoke to the general history of immigration in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Many historic photographs from the Center of Migration Studies, the Sherman Collection at Ellis Island, Lewis Hine, and Jacob Riis were interspersed with quotations from immigrants who had come through Ellis Island, often enduring excruciating trials as one of the many “payments” exacted for entering America.



**Figure 6.3** View of the six rooms of the Life line exhibition at Ellis Island from the *Room of Dreams*. Life line was inaugurated in the former dormitory rooms that have now become galleries for traveling exhibitions. *Dormitory Room Panel*, original photograph courtesy of Ellis Island Archives. Artist: B. Amore. Photograph by Kevin Daley.

Even then, in Italy, Ellis Island was a dreaded part of the journey . . . because they, they knew you could be deported, you could be detained if something was wrong with you. It was well known what you had to go through so it was important that we all stay healthy and all be examined. I was only five and this little, this gentleman who had been back and forth several times . . . took me on a walk one day and he said, “you know what? When you go over to Ellis Island, they’re going to be examining your eyes with a hook,” and he says, “Don’t let them do it because you know what? They did it to me. One eye fell in my pocket.” So we get over there and everybody has to pass and I’m on the floor screaming. I will not let them touch me. And you know what? I passed without a physical. I passed without it because the other seven passed.<sup>5</sup>

Using translations of original texts from diaries and letters from the 1800s to the present, the fifteen lateral Following the Thread panels traced the histories of my maternal and paternal families, both from Italy’s *Mezzogiorno* (the South), more precisely the towns of Lapio and Montefalcione in the Province of Avellino. The stories are told in the words of the people who lived them as well as through the beloved objects they brought in their bundles and trunks. The women’s stories are often woven into their *biancheria* (linens) as in the wedding nightgown embroidered by my grandmother, and the dowry sheets of coarse linen woven by my great, great grandmother, Giovannina Forte.

The following excerpt is from an unpublished manuscript:

“Weaving,” Giovannina thought. “Weaving.” Her mind wandered to the loom which she had not used for years. Usually the purview of one of the servants or the women who hired themselves out to create dowry pieces for other women. She had been entranced with the loom as a child—watching the shuttle speed back and forth between the warp threads, creating the weft pattern. She had insisted on learning herself how to use the heavy but movable treadle (nearly standing upright as she leaned against the bench)—her small hands sending the shuttle through only half way the first times she tried. But with persistence, a key to her nature, she mastered the technique and happily wove her own dowry sheets. Her initials embroidered in red, GF, in one corner, clearly marked them as her own.

An installation in a subsequent exhibition, *Memory and History*, at the Godwin Ternbach Museum at Queens College, made use of a “filet net” woven piece from Giovannina’s dowry and became *Great Grandmother’s Ocean*, with the implements of immigrant labor being transposed into boats on the proverbial ocean that linked the Old World and the New.

The second room in the Ellis Island exhibit addresses the challenges of the First Generation, the original immigrants. The “Golden Doors of Opportunity” often brought long hours in sweat shops or doing piecework at home, as attested to by this quotation of Maddalena Polignano Zambrano, born in 1915 in Bari.

He [my father] worked in a factory and he would bring home homework and he would, he worked hard. And he was kind of frail and you live in . . . I think he used to sit on the kitchen table and put his feet on a chair to be closer to the light overhead

and he would sew on collars, men's collars. And my mother would help, help him when he'd bring the homework home. And then she would have her own work during the day. She would work on, I think they were dresses. She would sew beads on the dresses and they used to have this, they call it "*caralla*," it's like a board that they put up in the kitchen, and they would, she would work on that. And then she would have homework for us, my brother and I. We would sew a little, they're little doilies and flowers that you would sew. It's like piecework they used to do. Before we'd go out to play we had to do that type of work. So that's about it. And then she would let us go out to play. My brother was pretty good, in fact, in sewing.<sup>6</sup>

Some fortunate few were able to open private dressmaking businesses, as did Concetta De Iorio who sewed for the Brahmin ladies of Beacon Hill in Boston. Her collections of exquisitely sewn lace work, as well as ordinary objects, comprised the contents of the *Gold Reliquary*, which functions as a transparent archaeological dig revealing layers of lived history through the conserved artifacts (see Figure 6.4).

The men most often became day laborers. Hired at "bottom of the ladder" wages, the Italian men earned \$1.46 for a ten-hour day. A derogatory sheet music cover reads,

I break a da stones  
 so I can make a da mon  
 to giva da wife  
 to put in a sock  
 for Saturday night  
 to paya da bill  
 to buya da food  
 that'll make a me strong  
 so I can breaka da stones.<sup>7</sup>

By 1910, the Italian pick-and-shovel men had constructed more than 25,000 miles of railroad track. To critics who complained that Italian immigrants sent too many American dollars back to Italy President Wilson evenly replied, "But they left the railroads."

Education was one way to move beyond, although it was often a privilege for which the second generation had to fight. In becoming "American" they were constantly juggling the *via vecchia* with the *via nuova* (the old way with the new way).

I was the only one who defied my father. They all brought home their envelopes unopened and put them down. He took out the money and then gave them back a couple of bucks and kept the rest. I looked at him and said, "You're not going to get my money." I told him right out! He never said a word to me. I think he recognized that I was the "Americana." He figured he had to put up with it. No sense fighting it. . . . All the girls on my street never went to high school. They went to work at fourteen. Well, I made up my mind when I was in the fourth grade, only nine years old, that I would become a teacher, come hell or high water! I loved my fourth grade teacher. She was nearly an angel—always rewarding us. I wanted to be like her. My oldest brother knew that. He made sure I went all the way. He kept giving me an



**Figure 6.4** *Gold Reliquary: Archaeology of a Life*, containing Concettina De Iorio's own handmade silk collar; a rolled-lace collar from the nineteenth century; a pillbox she used to store jewelry; assorted mother-of pearl buckles; her pliers from the Raytheon Company; gift silver spoons; her traveling alcohol stove, which she took on transatlantic voyages. (Wood, glass, grandmother's artifacts; 96" × 40" × 40".) Artist: B. Amore. Photograph by Chris Burke.

allowance all through college. Two dollars a week got me car tickets and milk money. I brought my own sandwich. My father was kind of surprised but I think he was proud too, that I was breaking all the rules. I think he admired me for it.<sup>8</sup>

The Life line stories move through the second and third generations, some of whom had the privilege of attending art school and college. Anthony, son of the bricklayer father who dug some of the foundations of Harvard University, was able to complete his education, although not the full dream of his life. He became the resident “family philosopher,” as attested by this quotation from a letter written to his wife during World War II.

It seems as though every one is dying these days. I trust that I will survive the slaughter. I was touched over the recent death of Ann’s mother. You should have sent me her address. I would like to have extended my condolences. In former letters I have expressed my opinion concerning the mail situation—it stinks. I suppose you realize that it’s becoming more difficult for me to write letters. Why? you should be able to surmise. I wonder where I will be celebrating my 33rd birthday. I’m so glad now that I took a course in eschatology [the science of the last four things: death, judgment, heaven and hell]. . . . Nina, these are moments of decision and confusion. . . . I don’t want to sound like Polonius but at this stage of the game, one has to include in a letter as much as one can. All will go well, with the help of God. My reaction is the same as that of the Master “Thine not mine be done.” [. . .] I must say that the few broken years we spent together were memorable ones. Among these I include the happiest moments of my life. (Anthony D’Amore, letter, December 14, 1944)

While keeping the memories of the ancestral roots alive, successive generations have taken these stories and sometimes turned them into literature and art. This is a particularly powerful way of carrying on the legacy we have been bequeathed. The following is a quotation from the fourth generation great-great-grandson of the original De Iorio immigrants, which was published in the hand-bound and printed cookbook he created of his grandmother’s recipes when he was living in Tokyo, Japan.

This book is many years in the making—but fear not, I’ll keep the preface short. I don’t know how long it took Nonna to become the best cook that any of us has ever known. She was already that good when I started remembering things about twenty five years ago. Appropriately, the front door of Nonna’s house entered into the kitchen. No matter when one arrived in that kitchen, or in what condition of stomach, food was presently forthcoming; unfailingly both superabundant and delicious. Whether hungry or not, tired or not, one had no choice but to rather complacently resign oneself to it. . . . I myself have lived quite far from 480 Pleasant Street (Nonna’s home) for many years, and opportunities to eat in Nonna’s kitchen have been rare. I tried my own hand when I got homesick. Of course my own subsequent sallies could not rival the Head Cook, but they are usually still better than what I can order at my local Italian restaurant.<sup>9</sup>

Holiday feasts, where dinners are often still celebrated in the time-honored fashion of a hundred years ago, became the inspiration for an installation, *Nonna’s*



**Figure 6.5** Partial view of the sixth room in the Life line exhibit at Ellis Island, with *Nonna's Table* installation, in which visitors were encouraged to write their own memories and comments. It became a center of poetry readings and performances during the exhibition. Photograph by Kevin Daley.

*Table*, in the final room of Life line. The large, inviting, round table covered with checkered oilcloth provided a focal point where people had poetry readings, wrote down their memories in the books provided, and looked into the mirror of the future (see Figure 6.5). The importance of the “Nonna” is revealed in the words of a granddaughter: “Speaking Italian connects me to a lot of people who are now passed on in my family. It makes a strong connection between my grandmother and me—just because she absolutely loved Italy. And because of that, I understood a side of it. I spent time doing things that maybe she had done when she was a kid. So there was that kind of bond between us.”<sup>10</sup>

I end with this quotation from the fourth-generation great, great granddaughter of the De Iorio family. She is dressed in her great grandmother’s dress in her Nonna’s garden: “In terms of recollections about the garden, you know, it’s a really special place. When I was a child, Nonno used to raise the vegetables up by the house—the squashes and beans and huge amounts of basil and tomatoes—beautiful. Nonna had the more formal rose garden and hydrangeas and the flowers. And it was always interesting because everything from the garden came to the table. So we ate the fruits of Nonno’s labor and we enjoyed the beauty of Nonna’s flowers throughout the house.”<sup>11</sup>

I think that we are all familiar with the oft-used Italian toast, “*Cent’anni di più!*” (One hundred years more!) But the only way to carry the stories into the next hundred years is to write them, tell them, and create art out of them. We are

all repositories. We hold everything we've heard and experienced. What do we do with this? Do we share? Do we pass it on? Do we hold close the knowledge? Does it die with us? Does it go beyond? What are your stories?

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### Notes

1. Calabrese 1992, 4.
2. Baldizzi 1989, 22.
3. Calabrese 1992, 9, 21, 27.
4. Lorenzino 1992, 9–10.
5. Del Bino Willitts 1990–99, 18–19.
6. Zambrano 1991, 22.
7. *Balch Institute Collections*.
8. Sacco 2000.
9. C. Sean Lawrence 2000.
10. Tiffany Lawrence 2000.
11. Larisa Lawrence 2000.

Part III

## **Oral Culture**

# **Cantastorie**

## **Ethnography as Storysing**

*Christine F. Zinni*

The rapid development of technologies for documenting culture begs questions for ethnographers and community scholars alike. Scholars in the social sciences and the humanities have pointed to the lack of theorization on the subject of video documentation. Noting how ethnography has long been engaged with technology, folklorist Robert Baron argues recording technologies are too often viewed only as devices for the mechanical transcription of social life, rather than as representational media with their own “logics” of practice (Baron 1999, 187–203).<sup>1</sup>

As a response to these “calls,” my chapter will interrogate the hands-on experience of working on video and multimedia productions in Italian American communities in Western New York, contextualizing these practices in the light of recent dialogical theory. Illustrating how the affective qualities of speech, sound, and music inform the structure of feeling in these communities and its emotive pulse(s), I will also note how ethnographers’ choice of inscription, transcription, and (re)presentation of these elements is not “innocent.” As I focus on *process*, the emergent and interactive elements of oral history work will come to the fore, demonstrating how its incorporation into multivocal video documentaries and multimedia productions can provide a space for making meaning(s) and culture(s) (Rouch 1978, 2–8; De Lauretis 1987; Elder 1995, 94–101; Sipe 1998, 379–88).

My work on oral history projects began in 1995 when I returned to Western New York State and started videotaping interviews with Italian Americans in the community where I grew up. Struck by the passing of elders, I applied for grants to produce video documentaries based on some of their stories. Weaving segments of individual oral histories and musical performances into larger historical narratives, I saw the pieces as “songs” and even forms of “prayer,” not in a strict religious sense, but as aspirations for the *well-being* of all the narrators and continuance

of their *ways of being*. Combining sound and images into shoestring productions screened at local venues, community centers, colleges, and town halls, I found myself following in the tradition of the *cantastorie*, or “story singer.”

Known by different names on several different continents—as the *cantastorie* in Italy and the *griot* in Africa—story singers have functioned as historians, genealogists, and keepers of communal memories for millennia (Chairetakis 1993, 44; Gardaphe 1996, 37; Lott 2002). Chronicling past events and celebrating histories in local town squares, *piazze* and town centers, villages, and cities, their performances spanned artificial divides between the verbal, musical, and visual arts. Where the Italian *cantastorie* of old might set up storyboards and sell broadsides with illustrations on them, I was using a screen and modern digital technology to bring the oral histories and music of Italian immigrants to town squares. Termed more properly *tecnologia del cantastorie*, my work was motivated by the desire to transmit knowledge on the local level and to create strategic interventions in the historical record.

Produced with the existing video technology of the time, and funded in part by grants from local and national cultural organizations, I found that the dialogical *process* of interacting with others to recall memories paralleled, in many ways, the *ethos* I was trying to convey. Creating a participatory “space,” the productions became a kind of temporary autonomous zone where the object of memory was . . . memories. In the dance of the production, narrators, and storytellers, folklorists and members of diverse religious and civic organizations came together, if only briefly. Some partnered, others moved on; but the stories on video, proudly pirated and reproduced by family members, continued to foster dialogue, prompt more memories, and live on.

### The Ear-Eye Camera and the Digital Revolution

As ethnographer and filmmaker, Jean Rouch suggested in *On the Vicissitudes of Self: The Magician, the Sorcerer, the Dancer and the Ethnographer* that the process of film production induces a trancelike state. It is an interruption of every life that puts the filmmaker deeply inside another space and outside of normal, everyday time (Rouch 1978). Characterizing ethnographic film or cinema as “a mirror into a shared reality,” Rouch stated that “as the art of the double, cinema is inherently a transition from the world of the real to the world of the imagination, and ethnography, as the science of other peoples’ thought systems, is a permanent crossing over from one conceptual universe to another, a form of acrobatic gymnastics where losing one’s footing is the least of the risks one runs” (Rouch 1981, 31).

Written in the 1970s, Rouch’s insights into ethnography as inscriptions of modes of perception, rather than simple records of events, constituted a giant step toward the theorization of practices in ethnography and is altogether pertinent to oral history work in Italian American communities. Maintaining that participants of his productions were his main audience, Rouch attempted to give voice to the fullness of ethnographic experience by focusing on the attitudes, behaviors, and emotions of his “subjects.” Following the interactions of his narrators, he sought to expose the dialogical and reflexive aspects of oral history as a form of conversational narrative.

Rouch's films reveal the links, not distances, between self and others. In his films local narrators and subjects often address or talk to the camera and viewers, encouraging participation and engaging them, like the *cantastorie* of old. As far back as 1978, Rouch anticipated a portable ear-eye camera, which would pass into the hands of "insiders" in ethnic and racial communities—those who were, more often than not, in front of the lens, that is, the subjects of the ethnographic gaze.

### Oral History and the Video Documentary

As relates to my own first-hand experience working in community productions, I found that the process of editing oral histories into documentary form not only put me in a space outside time but, of necessity, demanded total familiarity with the instances of the images as well as minute nuances of "voice": inflections, pauses, and hesitations, what is known in dialogical anthropology as the "paralinguistic" levels of speech. To the extent that the editing process steeped me in soundscapes—music, oral speech, and spoken words often lost in translation into written prose—it was a good thing. It catapulted me into a zone of deep listening, where learning the stories in order to reconstruct them as parts of larger historical narratives became part of the process.

Over the years, the shoestring productions made their way beyond community venues and town squares into an even larger public sphere. One of the first pieces I produced, called *Backyard Angels*, made in 1996 on VHS tape and edited on a 3/4-inch deck at the local community college, focused on religious ecstasy as expressed in devotions of an immigrant woman, her interactions with members of a local Saint Michael's Society, and dancing of the tarantella. When it was played on the "big screen" in 2001 at the renowned Festival dei Popoli documentary film festival in Florence, publicity in newspapers like *La Stampa* likened the piece to Scorsese's first low-budget independent film, *Italianamericans*. The Festival publication noted the humor and spirit of its narrators (Cacopardo 2001, 27–32). As Del Giudice points out in *Performing Ecstasies: Music, Dance, and Ritual in the Mediterranean*, the tarantella and *pizzica* started to enjoy a resurgence of popularity in Italy about this time, possibly a factor in the judges' decision to include the piece in the festival (Del Giudice 2005, 217–72). Moreover, the charismatic figure of Maria Michela, the ninety-three-year-old "star" of *Backyard Angels*, shone through the rough edges of production. Seeking to highlight the humorous and poetic exchanges between her and her family, and the rhythmic patterns of their speech, I edited "in" repetitions and parallel phrasing characteristic of oral cultures and the oral tradition of storytelling.

**Domenica:** We arrived in Batavia, June 29th, 1929  
and we thought Batavia was beautiful  
and

to this day we still think it is beautiful,  
right, Mama?

**Maria Michela:** Yes, everything good, honey . . .

**Domenica:** They, everyone, should have more children so they would be happier like our family, right mama?

**Maria Michela:** (*Looks at the camera, shrugs her shoulder and lifts her eyebrow and smiles*)

But I can't have **NO M O R E !**

**The machine è broke!** The machine e broke. . . .

**My husband è gone!**

In every sense of the word, Maria Michele was a great storyteller, one who, as Portelli suggests, can “open and define a field of expressive possibilities” and convey a structure of feeling through their speech, movements, gestures and person (Portelli 1997, 86). Maria Michela’s very presence and interactions with members of her family and the Saint Michael’s Society underscored the links between spirituality and dance.<sup>2</sup>

**Domenica:** Yes, it was a community of people that came from our area.

They were **F R I E N D L Y . . .**

They **K N E W** us! They were **R E L A T E D !**

**Maria Michela:** Lots of friendly, honey. Everybody **FEEL** for another.

**Domenica:** Ladies would get together and make food, have festivals.

**Maria Michela:** Have a good time, honey. (*smiles broadly*)

**Domenica:** Everyone helped! They had Saint Joseph’s Day. . . .

It was wonderful! Everyone **H E L P E D !**

**Christine:** . . . and they liked to **D A N C E !** Did you dance?

**Domenica:** . . . And they **L\_\_OVED** to dance the tarantella.

My mother danced the tarantella.

**Maria Michela:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, When I feel good, why **NOT?**

**Domenica:** The tarantella is a dance that’s fast, you know

and you put your hands on your head

and your hands on your hips . . . (*moves her hips*)

**Maria Michela:** You move a little bit . . .

**Domenica:** **YOU MOVE A LOT!**

**CRY**

**Maria Michela:** Whadda you gonna do? You **GONNA** all the time?

**YOU GOTTA BE HAPPY** once in a while!

**Domenica:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

(See Figure 7.1)

Emigrating from Valva, a *paese* in the province of Salerno, Maria Michela and her daughter were part of a chain migration of peoples who found work in salt mines, in stone quarries, on the railroads, and in canning factories of Western New York. Forming ethnic enclaves linked to even larger networks of communication and exchange in the nearby cities of Buffalo and Rochester, similar to other peoples from the *Mezzogiorno* who came to the Upstate region, the Valvese immigrants maintained diverse transnational connections. Identifying with communities in Italy as well as America, their solidarity was also defined by strong adherence to religious practices and the ethnic discrimination they faced (Gabaccia 2002, 168–99).



**Figure 7.1** Maria Michela Tenebruso, circa 1990. Photo courtesy of the Tenebruso family.

Like the grandchildren of other Italian and Polish immigrants who shared our Southside neighborhood in Batavia, I had witnessed the popularity of fast-paced dances like the tarantella and the polka and remembered how music was the powerful glue among the immigrant communities. Attempting to recapture this soundscape by interweaving individual oral histories and music into a video documentary in 1997, I produced *Viva La Musica!*, which was shot on SVHS tape. Considered high-quality tape before the advent of digital, the footage was then transferred to 3/4-inch tape so it could be edited on a local deck. The piece featured excerpts from some of the life stories of local musicians as well as performances. Highlighting changes in the “musical sphere” of local communities over the course of several decades, their narratives trace the transition from backyard performances to concert halls, recording studios, and TV. The main narrative thread of the piece revolves around a story of how piano accordions came to towns in the region and is told *in the voice(s)* and *through the interaction(s)* of the narrators who lived the story. Following the formation of a music store and accordion school started by Nellie and Roxy Caccamise, the piece reveals some of the ways accordion music influenced the formation of local Italian American identity and provided a means for musicians to negotiate borders “beyond the tracks.” In this segment of the tape, Roger Kelly, who comes from a long tradition of Irish musicians in the region, relates how Roxy was, in effect, selling dreams.

Roxy's the guy started accordion around here  
 He started everybody.  
 Roxy had an old Chevy coupe with a rumble seat  
 and he had accordions in there.  
 He bring 'em over

and he'd get you started  
 and he'd sell 'em an accordion and give a lesson.  
 He'd get 'em started then he'd send another guy around.  
 Roxy had the candle burnin' on both ends.  
 He was always goin' round here in the early '30, '33, '34.  
 He had everybody playin' accordion.

My production of individual segments featuring the performances and testimonies of local musicians led up to an interview with Nellie Caccamise and her daughter Rose, who now minds the store. I chose this interview with a student of the Caccamises', Joe Robusto, who went on to win state and national accordion championships to set the tone and clue the audience into the importance of music to the structure of feeling in the communities.

As hard as they worked, they loved to play  
 at a drop of a hat they would C E L E B R A T E.  
 They would look for no reason at all to get together.  
 It was just a j o y o u s time!  
 I thought everybody did that  
 but now I realize it was unique.  
 At the time they were just living life  
 And I was just brought on the ride.  
 Music was very very S P E C I A L.  
 It was almost D I V I N E.  
 It went to that place in everyone's heart  
 that unity.  
 That was the bond  
 or GLUE  
 that kept things . . . together.

(See Figure 7.2)

As noted in the writings of Fabian, oral cultures in rural communities have been characterized as static, frozen in time. This “denial of coevalness” has gone hand-in-hand with evolutionary models (Fabian 2002). Informing the bias against indigenous peoples of the Americas as well as southern Italians, it served to rationalize the scientific racism found in anthropological writings on both sides of the Atlantic (Gabaccia 2002, 168–99). According to this worldview, only civilized “urban” peoples have utilized technologies to write cultures. As a historical intervention, *Viva La Musica!* attempts to disrupt this “master narrative” by presenting a different side of the story and underscoring the agency of descendants of Italian immigrants living in rural communities in Upstate New York during the first part of the last century. Utilizing and adapting not only the sounds of the new piano accordion but emerging communication technologies like the radio to their own ends, Roxy and Nellie Caccamise, as well as a host of other aspiring accordionists, were influenced by the performances of accordion masters like Pietro Frosini and Charles Magnante whom they heard not only on large city stages during the



**Figure 7.2** Detail of Southside Batavia mural by Vincenzo Del Plato, depicting Roxy Caccamise, Roger Kelly, and musicians. Author (C. Zinni) is dancer in upper-left-hand corner. Courtesy of Genesee Orleans Arts Council (Go-ART!).

1920s but also through the airways. The playing styles and success of these Italian American celebrities shaped Roxy and Nellie's dream of opening a music store and accordion school, which in turn, impacted the lives of their musical progeny. In their role as cultural brokers in Western New York from the 1940s through the 1960s, Roxy and Nellie went on to become part of an international network of Italian American accordionists who regularly met with Frosini and Magnante in New York City. Organizing media events together with a local Italian American entrepreneur back home in Batavia, New York, the couple brought accordion masters like Magnante, as well as jazz greats like Lionel Hampton, to their hometown for live performances and radio spots. Headlining the artistry of Italian Americans, these "media" events at local theatres and communication technologies like the radio provided venues for exposure to an even larger public sphere. Regular programs featured Roxy's students, who were seen as both carrying on a legacy and breaking new ground (Zinni 2006, 28–34).

The oral histories of these musicians reveal that the new technology of piano accordion provided Italian American musicians with the flexibility to perform a vast repertoire of styles and sounds from concertos to waltzes to fast-paced tarantellas and polkas. These high-spirited dances remained the music of choice in working-class neighborhoods, ethnic dance halls, and restaurants. The currency of accordion music and the ways in which it allowed Italian Americans to walk in several worlds—that of the concert stage, local dance hall, and backyard gathering, was manifest in the songs Roxy wrote. Songs like "La Bella Rosa Mazurka," dedicated to his daughter, and the "Jackson Street Polka," named after the location of

the Caccamises' first music store, illustrate the ways in which dances like the polka, mazurka, and tarantella served as counterhegemonic sites where ethnic Italians and Poles could assert their working-class roots and sense of place.

Quoted as saying "it was one of the best polkas ever written" in the *Accordion World* magazine, Lionel Hampton noted the wide ranging popularity of the "Jackson Street Polka" in the 1950s. Still played by local musicians at Italian and Polish weddings and celebrations, the ear and eye of digital video technology captured some of the lived experience of the music and its participatory power (Keil and Keil 1992; Hetzel Gunkel 2004, 407–27; see Figure 7.3)

### Oral History and New Media

The rapid development of digital technologies for documenting cultures have also led to new ways of presenting oral histories in public venues and classroom settings. Over the course of the last six years, I have continued to explore diverse "logics" of documentary practices through hands-on experience in the community, teaching, and work in oral history and new media with Michael Frisch and a research team based at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Through individual commissions and education-in-technology grants at the university, I have been able to input "raw" footage documented in local community projects into a software program called *Interclipper*, where the material can be indexed, marked, and annotated. Permitting one to cross-reference specific passages in up to seven distinct dimensions, the footage can be searched, browsed, and even exported or incorporated into other forms of media. Making oral history work a shareable process, this new media



**Figure 7.3** Roxy and Nellie Caccamise in Niagara Falls, New York, circa 1934. Photo courtesy of daughter Rose Caccamise.

technology holds the promise of multipathed, nonlinear forms of access to oral histories and creative pedagogical possibilities for bridging distances between the community and the academy (Frisch 2006; see also <http://www.randforce.com>).

In theorizing the issues of ethnographic authority and differences between new media formats and video documentary, I find this new form of inscription and (re)presentation effectively shifts the authority of the ethnographer's, as well as audience's, relationship to the material(s). While the ethnographer still plays a dialogical role in the production of the oral history sessions in his or her capacity as interviewer, the ethnographer retains the choice of levels and degrees of involvement working in and with the encoding, inscription, and transcription of tapes in the postproduction process. Questions that arise range from the extent of the ethnographer's involvement in segmentation, annotation, and coding of the tapes to whether to reconstruct and weave individual segments of the newly formatted tapes in the new media format into multimedia presentations. To the degree encoding or inscription of the tapes in the new media program entails the involvement of diverse peoples, the dialogical interplay of the original encounters and an ethnographer's role as custodian, interpreter, translator, or story singer is transmuted, becoming variously more subtle and possibly less transparent.

While the creation of video documentaries by a new generation of *cantastorie* working *in* and *with* local communities can serve to provide poetic insights into encounters, by stepping back, standing apart but alongside stories in new media programs like *Interclipper*, ethnographers can choose to open up pathways of understanding to oral histories of numerous peoples that would otherwise be lost. Active learning, as I have come to understand through my classroom experience as an instructor of this new media technology for oral history use, evolves out of students' engagement with the stories and, to a great degree, their ability to exercise their own creativity. In this regard new media formats democratize oral history work by offering a range of pedagogical possibilities and providing interactive access to students for commentary, multimedia productions, and creative involvements.

### Oral History and Traveling Multimedia Exhibitions

Continuing to explore the possibilities of shared authority and the diverse range of media to transmit the oral histories of Italian Americans over the course of the last five years, I have been engaged in producing a documentary and organizing a multimedia exhibition around the migration history of stonecutters and their families from the Abruzzo region of Italy to an area near the Erie Canal. Providing a collaborative space for the participation of twenty families and numerous descendants of the stonecutters, as well as historical, cultural, and civic organizations in Western New York and Italy, this "road" picture contains musical performances by Italian American jazz musicians at a local Saint Rocco festival along the canal; soundscape continues to play an important role in conveying a sense of the stonecutters' story and pulsing it forward.<sup>3</sup> The documentary, *The Road from Alfedena*, opens in Italy with the voice of a local artist, Lino Spada, reading the inscription beneath the statue of a stonecutter that sits in the central park of Alfedena. Ambient sound of birdsong and children's laughter set the scene as Lino reads the script in Italian.

Ai suoi selciatori

Che migrati alle cave basaltiche dell'Agro Romano  
 Per secoli squadrarono e modellarono selci e cordoli  
 Pavimentarono e decorarono strade e piazze di Roma  
 con alta professionalità ed abnegazione profonda

ALFEDENA  
 orgogliosa e riconoscente  
 Ad imperitura memoria  
 eresse nell'anno 1966

Using the first-person plural as a form of address, the inscription is written on behalf of the people of Alfedena and memorializes the seasonal migrations of their *selciatori* (pavers) to quarries outside Rome. Commending their work on the buildings and *sampietrini* or pavement stones that grace the *piazze* of the metropolis, the inscription points backward in time to the ancient journeys of local stonecutters *oltremontagne* (over the mountains). The image of the statue of the stonecutter, footage of the pavement stones or *sampietrini* in Saint Peter's Square in Rome, and rhythmic cadences of Alfedenesi are meant to contrast with the ghostly presence of the red medina sandstone quarries in Western New York, now filled with water. Having constructed much of the civic, religious, and vernacular architecture in the region, in the course of the piece, we learn that almost all the immigrant men who worked in these quarries died from "stonecutters disease," or black lung. The last scene, which takes us back to the statue of the stonecutter in Alfedena, sets the stage for the second half of the documentary, which features footage shot in Italy.

As originally conceived, the piece will be a bilingual DVD containing the oral histories of stonecutters on both sides of the Atlantic. The exhibition, which features the documentary, seventy archival photographs, and three-dimensional installations, will travel to six different galleries along the Erie Canal then tour several galleries in the Abruzzo area of Italy. As a result of the preliminary presentations, talks, and screenings of the video in local communities and history centers, more descendants of stonecutters have come forward—adding to the dynamic and participatory aspects of the exhibition as a space for making meaning as well as the additional obligations to grow the story and give back to the participants.

### Voice as the Locus of Consciousness

As the reader has hopefully garnered from a reading of the "scored" transcriptions of oral histories featured in the documentaries, the differences in each narrator's voice reveal something about their "historicity": that is to say, the ways in which their lives, identities, and subjectivities have been shaped by socioeconomic factors and intersections of class, race, and gender. From the parallel phrasing and repetitions indicative of oral traditions of storytelling in the *half* English–*half* Italian rhythms of Maria Michela's speech to the elocution of Joe Robusto reflecting his formal education in American schools; to Lino Spada's reading in Italian of the

memorial inscription of the statue of the stonemason, voice tells us something about not only the way people remember the past, but how their perception has been shaped by other voices. As we are reminded in the writings in *The Dialogic Emergence of Culture*, voice is “the locus of consciousness” containing echoes of other voices and interactions. In this regard, Bakhtin’s theory of *heteroglossia* is especially pertinent for scholars working to document and reclaim “orality,” as it calls attention to the ways in which the past is present in the nuances and inflections of the voice, the choice of words, and musical phrases that inform the everyday lives of peoples (Bakhtin 1981; Jakobson 1987; Tedlock 1990, 133–56; 1991, 309–40; 1995).

Following the theories of Bakhtin and Jakobson, the writings of dialogical linguists like Tedlock, Mannheim, and Ortner, along with longstanding work by numerous scholars of oral history, stress how the active choosing of voice is intricately connected to worldview. In this “actor/action-centered” approach to voice, we are reminded that “culture is found in the interstices between people” and “history is not something that *happens* to people but something they *make*” (Ortner 1981; Passerini 1985; Portelli 1997; Frisch 1990; Tedlock 1995).

In focusing on the so-called paralinguistic features of voice we come to understand that what makes oral history *different* is not only what it tells us about the meanings attached to memories, but how it reminds us that culture(s) are continually emergent phenomena. In this view, attention to affective qualities of voice, gesture, and setting compels the ethnographer-cum-storyteller to realize the poetic and performative aspects of oral histories and attempt to find ways to represent them in written and visual forms. As Tedlock noted back in 1973 in *Envelopes of Sound*, a groundbreaking publication on oral history, edited by Ronald Grele,

POETRY is oral HISTORY  
and oral HISTORY  
is POETRY.

•

FIRST of all, historical information

and the IDEAS of history just spoken of by Mr. Grele  
are found not only in  
the relatively casual  
conversational narratives of the interview situation  
but also in forms of oral discourse which are traditionally classified  
as POETRY—  
songs and chants, for examples.

SECOND

conversational narratives THEMSELVES  
traditionally classified as PROSE  
turn out, when listened to CLOSELY  
to have poetical qualities of their OWN.<sup>4</sup>

Noting that “what oral narrative usually does with emotions is evoke them rather than describe them directly,” Tedlock maintains this is “precisely what we have been taught to expect in poetry” (Tedlock 1983, 51). In the transcription of the spoken word to written prose, rich affective features of voice that convey the emotive structure of

feeling in Italian American communities are often flattened or edited out. As Tedlock asserts, an alternative is the treatment of oral narrative as dramatic poetry. “Scoring” of the acoustic or phonological elements and paralinguistic features of voice for amplitude, intonation, hesitation, pause, and pitch makes for “audible sentences”—allowing aspects of the voice to “breathe” on the page. Such an approach can bring the poetic elements of everyday speech and rhythmic pulse of the spoken word in the oral cultures of immigrant Italians and their descendents to the fore.

Not an either-or proposition, the transcription and representation of the spoken word through alphabetic writing does not preclude the use of video documentary as a viable form of (re)presentation. To the contrary, as I have tried to demonstrate in this chapter, relatively inexpensive digital technologies developed over the last decade hold the promise of the ear-eye camera foreseen by Jean Rouch over forty years ago and lend themselves to the creative development of forms or “schemas” by ethnographers as they emerge in new found roles as storytellers and a *neotecnologia del cantastorie*. In “Oral History and Moving Images,” Dan Sipe notes the particular challenge of using film and video to present oral histories, observing that, although “writing and history have been synonymous . . . oral history is rooted in multiple modes of communication.” Asserting that “oral history and moving images have considerable potential synergy,” he argues that at its core “orality is not merely a conception grounded in sound [but] the spoken word is embedded in a setting, a situation, a context. People *speak* [italics mine] not only with body language, expression, and tone [but] by referring to their setting and objects” (Sipe 1998, 382).

Advocating the use of visual technology as a first choice in capturing narrator- and action-centered oral histories, Sipe asserts that the visual dimension of moving images can counteract the tendency of the interview “to reduce oral narratives to leaden sentences [by retaining] layers of expression and evidence as it captures human interaction and settings.” Going on to outline the ways in which moving images can complement some of the stiffness imposed by the constraints of the interview, he insists, “No other medium can match moving images in their immediacy and ability to both document the signs of the *process* of memory and capture its ‘plastic nature’” (Sipe 1998, 382).

Sipe’s assertions offer fertile ground for further theorizing and debates on the subject of video documentation in Italian American communities, suggesting that, in its capacity to provide documentary evidence, moving images have the potential to demystify and expose the essential “dynamics” of the interview session, revealing the ways in which historians and anthropologists are always already participants in the narrative process. It remains the work of ethnographers, community scholars, and a *neotecnologia del cantastorie* working for, with, and alongside Italian Americans in the community, to create schemas that mirror and refract the experiences of their shared encounters and communal experiences.

### The Restitution of Women’s Life History Narratives

The following example taken from *Backyard Angels* illustrates some of the ways in which video can capture immediacy, context, setting, and the dialogical aspects of

the interview process that might otherwise have been glossed over in the written word. The first interview session conducted with Maria Michela and Domenica was quite formal. The two women dressed for the occasion; their recollections of their migration story were upbeat:

**Maria Michela:** Lots of lights on the boat.

**Domenica:** . . . on the ship.

**Maria Michela:** Beautiful boat, when we come  
they called the boat, “R O M A.”  
The boat they call “Roma” . . . beautiful boat.

During the second interview session conducted a week or so later, on the occasion of Mother’s Day, Maria Michela and Domenica began sharing some of the hardships of the journey. Video captured the change of tone and interactions between Maria Michela and members of her clan. At different points in the conversation, Domenica’s daughters, Mary Ellen and Michelle, contributed to Maria Michela’s story—brocading the narrative with their commentaries.

**Maria Michela:** What kind of work I done, honey!

Any kind of work you find in this country . . .

**Dorothy:** She was only 90 pounds, my mother, when we came to America.  
And me with a great big bow in my hair like that (puffs up cheek).  
It was rough, it was rough  
when we got to Ellis island.  
It wasn’t very easy.  
My father D I D N’ T pick us up  
my mother was going:  
“I think we should **GET BACK** on the boat  
and **GO BACK** to Italy.”

**Mary Ellen:** **H I S T O R Y!**

**YOU WANT**

**You’re going to get History!**

She doesn’t care.

It has made her what she is.

How could she raise seven children in this country?

Not have an education

Work on the muck—and do what?

**How many people live in this house?**

She raised seven children basically on her own.

She is the inspiration of this family.

**That is why women in this family are so strong!**

Men are wonderful and we take care of them,

but **SHE WAS**

**SHE IS** the person that did it!

**Maria Michela:** The woman makes the house,  
not only the father, honey.

(See Figure 7.4)



**Figure 7.4** Maria Michela and daughter, Domenica, circa 1915. Courtesy Tenebruso family.



the statue and retold the story of how it had been salvaged from the old parish church and the backyard grotto opened to community members. The level of emotion around the statue was paralleled only by the sight of members of Saint Michael's Society watching the matriarch dance the tarantella with her progeny on the saint's feast days. Intercutting Maria Michela's migration story, as told and retold by women in her family, with footage of her performances on the dance floor and murals of Saint Mike painted by a third-generation Italian American (who also happened to be related to Maria Michela), I sought to address the lacunae of written words and create a synergistic "text," a "schema" that conveyed something more than scientific assessment of life in ethnic neighborhoods—that is to say, a way of being in Italian American communities.

As the noted ethnographer Ruth Behar asserts in her essay "Rage and Redemption," "history is produced in action and in the actor's retrospective reflections on that action." Underscoring how ethnographers are also interlocutors both observing and making culture, she insists, "A life history narrative should allow one to see the subjective mapping of experiences, the working out of a culture and a social system that is often obscured in a typified account" (Behar 1995, 150). Behar's account of the life story of Esperanza, a Mexican marketing woman, demonstrates how narrators can pull the ethnographer into their stories and simultaneously create a moral obligation to pass them on. Focused on the process of interviewing Esperanza, the account reminds us of some of the unspoken "contracts" that emerge in our restitution work as historians and ethnographers of Italian American culture attempting not only to mirror shared realities, but "extend the life and circulation of narratives" (Passerini 1981).

Like Esperanza, Maria Michela's story demonstrates how abandonment can be transmuted into empowerment, spanning distances between rage and redemption. Filtering Maria Michela's story through the signals of a *neotecnologica* machine, I hoped to capture some of its power and poetry and respond to the challenge presented by the matriarch's granddaughter Mary Ellen, when she looked directly into the camera's eye, and asserted, "You want History? You got History!"

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### Notes

1. In the field of visual anthropology, David MacDougall and Jay Ruby have posed this question in yet another way by calling for self-reflexivity and critical inquiry into ethnographic films as cultural "products" of encounters. See MacDougall 1991; Ruby 1991. Michael Frisch takes up the logics of nonlinear access to oral history in new media formats in "Oral History and the Digital Revolution."
2. My approach to transcription is based on Dennis Tedlock's work on oral narrative and ethnopoetics.
3. The exhibition has been funded in part by the National Italian American Foundation (NIAF), decentralization grants from the regional arts council (GO ARTS!) and the New York Council on the Arts.
4. This ethnopoetic approach is also fully illustrated in *The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation*.

## “That’s Not Italian Music!”

### My Musical Journey from New York to Italy and Back Again

*John T. La Barbera*

As a musician with many memorable experiences of a lifelong journey through southern Italian traditional music that has taken me from New York to Italy and back again, I wish here to let my memory speak by sharing my musical autobiography. How many times have I heard, after my performances of traditional music, “That’s not Italian music!”? I have engaged with this music for over thirty years, and it is time to explain why it *is* Italian music, why this music has been so misunderstood in America, and most of all, what it means to me.

It all began with my first guitar, a fifteen-dollar “Stella” that my father bought for me one Friday night when I was about ten years old. I had merely wanted to play and sing some of the music I had heard around the house. I never expected then that I would be dedicating my entire life to this music, traveling because of it, and reconnecting to the land of my grandparents through it. They had all come from southern Italy by steamship during the period of mass migration in the early twentieth century (ca. 1904) to the lower east side of Manhattan—known today as the East Village. My paternal grandparents, Ciro and Francesca La Barbera, came from Bolognetta (formally known as Agghiasciu), near Palermo, Sicily. My maternal grandparents, Leonardo and Adrianna Mancini, came from Itri, south of Rome, in the region of Lazio. Growing up in New York City in the early 1950s, especially south of Fourteenth Street, I seemed like a curious combination of a young street urchin, a *guaglione*, from a back street of Naples, set inside a Jewish ghetto of Eastern Europe. We had *bocce* ball courts on Houston and First Avenue, right next to Katz’s Delicatessen and the outdoor markets of Delancy Street. My mother still tosses Yiddish words in with Italian dialect phrases, creating a New York “mixed salad.” But what I remember most is the music and stories I heard

about Italy and the Italian records played in the shoe repair shop on East Ninth Street and First Avenue, owned and operated by my maternal grandfather, Leonardo Mancini. He always had music playing, either on the Italian radio station or the small Victrola phonograph in the corner of the room, with the arias of Verdi, Puccini and, of course, the great Caruso. Since he never actually returned to his homeland, it was this music that emotionally transported him there daily. Sometimes an impromptu visit by my two uncles, Jimmy and Joe La Barbera, and the sounds of their guitar and mandolin, would fill the shop with sweet nostalgia. Known as *I Beccamorti della Notte* (“The Undertakers of the Night”), they were popular in the 1930s and 1940s, playing serenades under fire escapes and at weddings and social engagements throughout the Village, and often appearing on local Italian radio stations. We were constantly surrounded by music, and my uncles, who gave me my first taste of live music—of guitar and mandolin—had a lasting effect on me.

By the 1950s, Italian culture had started to be assimilated into the American mainstream and became somewhat acceptable. Louie Prima, Lou Monte, Connie Francis, Jimmy Roselli, Jerry Vale, and many others had crossed over, blending Italian and American songs and lyrics for American audiences. A few generations before, New York City had been the center of Italian culture in America. Italian theatre, *I Pupi Siciliani* (Sicilian Puppet Theatre), feasts and processions for the Madonna and Saint Rocco, music publishers, impresarios, instrument makers, and especially the guitars and mandolins made by John D’Angelico and Jimmy D’Aquila<sup>1</sup> could be found all over New York and its boroughs.

These various Italian influences made a profound impression on me. At the same time, I was also taken by the American folk and rock craze of the early 1960s. The guitar was the vehicle driving it, and it was going to take me far away from the streets of my neighborhood in Queens, to which we had migrated from the downtown streets of the overcrowded city. Not only was I beginning to teach myself songs that I had heard from the traditional American folk music repertoire—the early Beatles, and the top forty—but I had also begun to play some of the Italian songs I had learned from my family. I was fortunate that, in our neighborhood, there were many great music teachers within walking distance from my house. I studied with Don Felice Alfino, Lou Aliano, and Dominick Minassi, all Italians, and they were familiar with the guitar and mandolin repertoire that my uncles had played. It was great to hear and watch them play as they all prompted me to accompany their waltzes, polkas, foxtrots, and even some ragtime. By 1964, my brother Dennis, together with my best friend and schoolmate Eugene Gregoretti, and I formed my first band called the “Fugitives,” named after the popular TV show. Our greatest moment was playing at the New York World’s Fair in Queens, in September 1965 (see Figure 8.1). From that moment on, as a teenager, I decided to become serious about my music and study classical guitar.

To my great fortune, I was accepted into the Hartt School of Music at the University of Hartford, in Connecticut, where I eventually received my bachelor of music degree in classical guitar. It was here that I pursued my classical training and began to be interested in Medieval and Renaissance studies, thanks to one of the greatest lutenist and early music specialists, Joseph Iodone. He was a great inspiration and sparked my interest in Italian Renaissance music. Early music



**Figure 8.1** The Fugitives, 1964–65, at New York World's Fair on September 13, 1965. From left to right (front): Eugene Gregoretti, John La Barbera, Dennis La Barbera, and Billy Giramonte.

had only begun to be revived in the late 1920s, and Iodone had been a member of one of the first early music consorts in America during the 1950s. Upon my graduation from Hartt, another professor, Dr. Joseph Del Principe, offered me a full scholarship to study in Siena, Italy. I had been planning to move to London, since I was attracted to its vibrant music scene, but I went to Italy first. After my first summer in Siena in 1973, I moved to Florence and entered the graduate program at Villa Schifanoia in San Domenico, near Fiesole. The Villa was a private arts institute run by Rosary College (Dominican University) in River Forest, Illinois.

Italy in the early 1970s was full of political turmoil—and it all seemed very familiar to me, having just come from the American unrest of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Being a student myself and surrounded by Italian students from the

University of Florence, I began to associate with some of their causes. Most of the students I met were southern Italians (*meridionali*), and they had accepted me as a long-lost relative from the land of all immigrants: America. I felt at home. Among Italian students, there was a desire to reconnect with their roots and break away from the industrialization of the pop culture and music beginning to enter Italy from America. The resurgence of Italian traditional music during this time was not only a political statement but also a call to preserve some of the time-honored traditions that many felt were slowly disappearing and would soon be lost. Students and workers (*lavoratori*) wanted to hold on to these traditions.

The publication of *La terra del rimorso* by Ernesto de Martino in 1961 started to make people aware of the impoverished economic conditions and the culture of the Italian South at the same time traditional music was beginning to take Italy by storm. The recordings made by Alan Lomax and Diego Carpitella earlier in the 1950s inspired others to continue where the earlier ethnomusicologists had left off. This new enthusiasm motivated the younger generation to research its own roots and to present this music to wider audiences in what has come to be called a folk revival. Students now had a voice, and in using it they gave new life to, and helped preserve, a precious cultural heritage.

I happened to be right in the middle of this movement. I too was reconnecting to *my* remote past. How I came to this place and time, and why I met all these wonderful people, feels like fate rather than coincidence. In any case, I was certainly “in the right place at the right time.” It wasn’t long before I started playing my guitar in the streets to make some extra money to pay for living expenses. I would set out each day, guitar in hand, searching for the perfect piazza—as well as the perfect cappuccino. The Piazza Signoria was that perfect place: the Loggia della Signoria and the corridor of the Uffizi museum provided perfect acoustics. Street musicians and performers had always favored this location, and during this period in Italy the streets were alive with spontaneous performances of all sorts—everything from puppet shows to political demonstrations—filling the streets with an ever-present Carnival.

It was there, in the Piazza Signoria, that I eventually met an extremely talented group of university students: Pino De Vittorio, Gianni Castellana, and Fulvio Sebastio, all from the city of Taranto, in Puglia. During the summer of 1975, they brought me into their southern Italian world. I had heard about them from my best friend, David Blazer, MD, a musician whom I had known since my first year at the Hartt School of Music; he had decided to continue graduate studies in medicine (cardiology) at the University of Florence the year before. He had previously met and performed with them, but his medical studies no longer allowed him much free time to pursue music. He had already told them about me, and I was anxious to meet them in person. It was also the first time I had heard people sing Italian folk music in perfect three-part harmony while playing with a variety of rhythms on frame drums and dancing with castanets. Each time they appeared on the piazza and began to sing, a huge crowd surrounded them. In an instant, they would captivate and seduce their audience.

It wasn’t long before I started to play with them. They needed a good guitarist, and I needed to move on from that bench on the piazza. Soon after, Alfio Antico from Sicily, who would rise to become Italy’s preeminent frame drummer, joined us. We would often see Alfio performing on the Piazza Signoria in the late afternoons with

his large Sicilian *tammorra* (a large frame drum with no jingles, similar to the Neapolitan *tammorra*, except it has small bells inside the frame), entrancing his audience with hypnotizing rhythms and poetry sung in Sicilian. Afterward, he would perform on the *bastone*, a stick lit at both ends, and sing as he twirled the flames around in a sort of shamanic dance. He had perfected these skills as a shepherd in the hills of his native Sicily, where he learned both to use the *bastone* as a form of martial art to ward off bandits and the art of making and playing Italian frame drums (*tamburi*).

This style of performance and the music itself was so new, yet it also seemed so familiar to me. (It was reminiscent of scenes from Fellini's *La Strada*.) We were all looking to perfect our street performances and arrange professional concerts together. My newfound friends had already been singing together for years before they had come to Florence and had a wide-ranging collection of material that they would spontaneously perform in the street. It amazed me that they had learned so many songs from the oral folk tradition. I was unfamiliar with this regional music and later realized that other Italians outside their region did not know these songs either. The group heard me playing in the street and adopted me as one of their own on condition that, in addition to playing my guitar, I would also be sequestered in a room with good food—and wine, of course—to learn *tarantelle*, *pizziche*, work chants, healing trance music, *tammorriate*, *villanelle*,<sup>2</sup> ballads, and other narrative songs. They were a bottomless font of music, and I, like a sponge, wanted to drink it all in. Within a short time, the group came to call itself *Pupi e Fressedde*, which could be translated as “puppets and bread” (*fressedde*, from Puglia, are large donut-shaped toasted hard bread that must be moistened to be edible). The group was familiar with the American-based Bread and Puppet Theatre, known for their social protest style of theatre from the 1960s and very influential in Italy during the 1970s. Gradually, *Pupi e Fressedde* started to attract the attention of several important cultural and social organizations: ARCI,<sup>3</sup> together with the municipality (*Comune*) of Florence, wanted to present us in a concert tour around Tuscany for *La Festa de l'Unità*.<sup>4</sup>

We met every day in a flat on Via dei Renai, where they all lived together. They would sing all day long, perfecting their harmonies, and we together would work out the arrangements to be performed in many of the piazzas and courtyards of Florence. I had to learn their repertoire as fast as possible—which must have included close to fifty songs—since there was to be a real performance a few days later in Prato, a small town in Tuscany. Their music was part of a centuries-old oral tradition that had never really been notated except for the few field recordings made in the 1950s. They would teach me each song, and I had to keep going over it many times until I memorized it perfectly. There was no other way of learning it. We spent hours playing. And it was all fed to me as if I were sitting at a huge table savoring the tastes of southern Italy. I really became a glutton for this music and could not get enough of it. Of course, we always stopped around siesta time—a most sacred part of the day. Then they would cook an amazing meal, which always included some homemade specialties brought back from Puglia, along with their local homemade wine (probably a Primitivo), and a supply of *fressedde*—a staple (especially late at night when there was no other food to be found).

Our first concert was to take place as part of a festival on Prato's main piazza. After I had had only a couple of days of digesting the repertoire with my new companions,

we were all off for an exciting performance. Since we could not all fit into the Fiat 500 (something like a small circus car) with our instruments and costumes, we split up and some of us took the train. Pino, the lead singer, Gianni, and I set out for the *stazione centrale* of Florence to take the next train to Prato. We rushed to get our tickets and ran on board with much enthusiasm and anticipation. As soon as the train left the station, I immediately took out the guitar, while Pino and Gianni began singing and playing their tambourines. This impromptu experience made me aware, for the first time, of the joy of singing and playing music spontaneously, in the streets, on a train, or on a piazza, wherever one wanted to express oneself—and this seemed so *Italian* to me. We were all so deeply involved in the music that no one realized we were on the express train, *L'Espresso*. By the time we figured this out, Prato was zooming by us at a very *double espresso* clip! “Next stop: Bologna!” the conductor shouted. Our *tarantella* began to grow faint. There was no way to get off the train. “*Aiuto!*” (help), we all cried. Arriving in Bologna a mere hour and a half later, we rushed to find new tickets for a return to Prato. The next train however, would not depart for another hour. There wasn’t much to be done about it so, we bought our tickets and resumed singing, right there in the station. We finally did arrive in Prato—after midnight. The town seemed to be asleep, but we were determined to find the piazza anyway. No one could be found; none of our friends had stayed; and what was to have been my first stage performance with my new friends fizzled like a burned-out light bulb. We returned to the station for another long wait and finally made it back to Florence early the next morning. This was nonetheless the beginning of a joyful experience with the street musicians who changed my life, which in turn led to many highly acclaimed performances throughout Europe. I was now becoming part of that passionate musical world to which I became so committed.

By 1976, Pupi e Fresedde had become an official theatre company, a *teatro stabile*, sponsored by the *Comune* of Florence. The group quickly became a leading force within the Italian folk revival movement. Their first productions were held in the streets with singing and dancing to the *pizzica* music of Puglia. With the addition of the theatrical director, Angelo Savelli, the group’s direction moved increasingly toward music, dance, and also ritual theatre. During this time we performed in the streets and piazzas of Florence, dressed in white costumes and playing instruments, in brief spectacles of song and dance. Angelo Savelli wore a long white conical hat with multicolored ribbons and would lead the procession through the crowd. Once we had gathered an audience around us, we would begin to play a *tammurriata* on the large frame drum, the *tammorra*, and a dance would be performed in the center. Next, we would perform the *danza dei bastoni*, a stick dance with two dancers wearing the *Pulcinella*, *Commedia dell’Arte* mask (see Figure 8.2). On several occasions we drove to small Medieval towns around Florence, dressed in colorful Renaissance-type costumes, parked our cars outside the city walls, and made a procession toward the town square. The idea we wished to convey was that we had appeared from another time: we would perform archaic music and dance in the piazza, then parade away, leaving the small village in suspense and wonderment. The group was actually invited to repeat such a performance for the film *Il prato* (*The Meadow*) by the Taviani Brothers in 1979. The story tells of the end of the idealism of the 1970s, creating a crisis for an entire generation whose hopes for utopian ideals never materialize



**Figure 8.2** Pupi e Fresedde, Florence, circa 1976. Impromptu street performance. Tamurriata dances with Fulvio Sebastio (left), Pino De Vittorio (right), and Angelo Savelli wearing hat (far left). Photograph by Pier Paulo Alberti.

(cf. <http://www.imdb.com>). The film was shot in the Medieval Tuscan town of San Gimignano, near Siena. One of its protagonists has recurring dreams of going back to the Middle Ages. The group appeared as naturally as ever in that particular scene, since we were already used to doing this sort of time travel.

Eventually, the group's major focus was to create musical and theatrical productions retracing the journey of de Martino's *La terra del rimorso* and the culture of southern Italy and in doing so, Pupi e Fresedde became the first group in Italy to depict the phenomenon of *tarantismo* in performance. De Martino, as well as Carlo Cecchi and Roberto De Simone, profoundly influenced the group.<sup>5</sup> In 1977, the theatrical version of *La terra del rimorso* was first produced by the City of Florence, recreating through theatre, music, dance, and costumes the pagan-Christian rituals described by de Martino. As for me, I had also entered into a new personal awareness of the power this music exerted when combined with theatre.

It was at this time that I decided to live with the group to become more totally immersed in their world. We all shared a large duplex apartment on Via Maggio, near the less popular Santo Spirito neighborhood in the Oltrarno ("beyond the Arno") part of Florence. During these years I was careful to keep musical notations, transcribing the folk music I heard as best I could. I would often travel to the South with them to their home villages to search for the traditional songs we would later rearrange for our performances. It was during these trips that we heard many stories about the so-called *tarantati*.<sup>6</sup> We all felt a great need to keep the music tradition alive while at the same time allowing it to evolve and still maintain a natural quality.

Peter Schumann, the director of the legendary Bread and Puppet Theatre, was so taken by the music and spectacle that he decided to construct an entire new show around the group (Brecht 1988, 408). We met Schumann in Milano in 1976 when he had invited us to be part of the 1977 “Domestic Resurrection Circus” in Glover, Vermont. We paid our own way, but he invited us to stay at his farmhouse in Vermont, where we could all work together (Brecht 1988, 408). The show was called *The Ballad of Masaniello*, based on a sixteenth-century Neapolitan song called *O cunto 'e Masaniello*, an outlaw broadside ballad evoking the figure and career of the folk hero, Masaniello—a poor Neapolitan fisherman who had led a revolt against Spanish tyranny and exploitation (cf. La Nuova Compagnia di Canto Popolare 1974). The entire narrative and spectacle were based on that one song, which Schumann had heard us performing. He then had its historical and cultural background explained to him and became very attracted to the topic (Brecht 1988, 410). It was very exciting to me to be going back to the United States performing this music with my Italian friends. For them it was a first adventure in America, but for me and for American audiences, it was an entirely new adventure.

Upon arriving in Vermont by train from New York City in August, we were met at the small railroad station in Glover by the Bread and Puppet brass band with a sound reminiscent of New Orleans Jazz mixed with a small town municipal band, so typical in Italy. They played fanfare after fanfare, announcing our arrival. We felt like musical ambassadors embarking on a maiden voyage. The puppeteers were enamored and fascinated by our group and the beautiful music we played, especially our passionate and newly imported sixteenth-century Neapolitan villanelle in three-part harmony. We rehearsed for many hours each day (as well as worked on the land where the pageant was to be held), while Schumann directed us, meticulously weaving each song into a story to be told together with his mystifying giant puppets and masks. With only one full week of rehearsal behind us, *Masaniello* was first performed in a meadow near a pine forest, next to the circus area, with a natural amphitheatre carved into the hillside and capable of seating at least three thousand people.

From then on, the fifteen-foot puppets of the King and Queen of Spain and the Black Madonna danced and swirled to *pizziche* and *tarantelle* in the hills of Vermont, the streets of Boston, and down to Washington Square Church in Greenwich Village, New York. It was political theatre, and of course, the music was the fire that kept the show's engine burning. Our run in New York was at the Washington Square Methodist Church on West Fourth Street from August 29 to September 3, 1977. The show attracted much media attention and was reviewed in the *New York Times* (by Eleanor Blau), the *Village Voice* (by Michael Feingold), and the *Soho Weekly News* (by Tish Dace). During our rehearsals at the Church, writer Stephan Brecht, son of playwright and author Bertolt Brecht, had been trying to track me down for an interview about the show's music and wanted English translations of all of the songs we performed. (It wasn't until 1988 that I realized he had published his book on the history of Bread and Puppet, which included our interview.) During the tour in New York, the Masaniello puppets and masks were on view at the 112 Greene St. Gallery in Soho, where Pupi e Fresedde gave several concerts from September 22 to 25 (see Figure 8.3). We performed another concert on Long Island at the Great Neck House.



**Figure 8.3** The Masaniello Puppets, by Peter Shumann, and Concert with Pupi e Fresedde at the Green Street Gallery, Soho, New York, August 1977. Photograph by Mario Belvedere.

One incident that occurred in Boston's North End (Little Italy), was notable. The entire troupe decided to do a spontaneous procession through the streets announcing the performance we were giving that evening. Puppeteers, stilt walkers, and the band, all in costume, paraded through the streets lined with Italian shops and restaurants, feeling a sense of pride and good energy while hoping people would recognize the Italian atmosphere we were evoking. We began to play a *tammurriata*. To our utter surprise, several people yelled out, "That's not Italian music, get out of here!" They looked at us with disdain. Since most of us had long hair at the time, they may have thought of us as some kind of hippie troupe. I could almost feel a fight ready to break out and I had to hold back my friend Gianni from getting too involved. My Pugliesi friends were all a little mystified and somewhat disappointed by such responses to our music. It was certainly rejection they felt from the Italian American community of Boston. I tried to explain to them that this type of Italian music was unfamiliar here and that most of the folk traditions known by the early Italian immigrants had either been lost or forgotten. (I believe that had we explained to the community more about the music's background, that we were reviving an Italian tradition, they would have totally accepted us and been more curious—as we later experienced at several concerts performed at various cultural institutions during the tour.) I am positive that this tour represented a first encounter, on any large scale, between the Italian folk music revival and America.

At the end of the tour Pupi e Fresedde returned to Italy while I remained in New York. Having had direct experience both performing traditional Italian music all over Europe and collecting and transcribing it in Italy, I was encouraged by Dr. Rose Brandel, the chairperson of the ethnomusicology department at Hunter College, New York, to continue my graduate studies in ethnomusicology. Although she was a noted scholar of African music, her true interest was in Italian traditional music. Since very little was known about Italian folk music in the United States at the time, she had never met any student interested in pursuing it. It was my good fortune that she offered to pay my tuition. It was during this time that I returned to the cafés on MacDougal Street in Greenwich Village, where I had met a vibrant group of people at Café Dante years before, during my brief encounters in New York. Café Dante not only had the best espresso in town, it also functioned as something of a cultural center or artists' salon where many artists, musicians, poets, and writers casually met on a daily basis. I never appeared without my guitar, while the Sicilian poet-musician, Sebastiano Passione, always had his mandolin on hand. We created the ambience with guitar and mandolin music and occasionally Sicilian poetry. It was here that I also met vocalist-percussionist Alessandra Belloni, who often stopped by after working her shift at the Café Reggio down the street and sang in Italian. It was as though we were on Piazza Navona.

By the fall of 1978, I again left New York for Florence and with Pupi e Fresedde participated in two more theatrical productions titled *Sulla via di San Michele* and *Balli di Sfessania*, which toured all of Italy and Europe (see Figure 8.4). It was then I also made a trip to Calabria to pick up the *chitarra battente* that was made for me by Vincenzo De Bonis (of the De Bonis dynasty of luthiers since the 1700s). Pino De Vittorio had first introduced me to the *chitarra battente* when I met the group in Florence. The *chitarra battente* was the first metal ten-string guitar from the



**Figure 8.4** Scene from “Sulla Via di San Michele,” with Pupi e Fresedde, Florence, 1978. From left to right: Luciano Vavolo, Tomasella Calvisi, John La Barbera, Fulvio Sebastio, and Patrizia De Libero. Photograph by Pier Paulo Alberti.

sixteenth century and an original Italian instrument. Its characteristic sound was to greatly influence me in my later musical compositions.

In 1979 we recorded the album *La terra del rimorso*, dedicated to Ernesto de Martino’s book, as a testimony of the group’s dedicated years of research on the music from Puglia and Calabria. Included were our twelve original arrangements of the *pizziche* and *tarantelle* featured in some of the shows that the group had presented over the years. Unfortunately, after that recording, the music company ceased presenting concerts, and I was on my way back home to New York with a suitcase full of traditional songs, my *chitarra battente*, and the experiences of an incredible era coming to a close. This extremely dynamic period, of which I was so lucky to be a part, created the foundation for all my subsequent musical compositions of the last several decades. It also greatly inspired me to continue composing within the context of film and theatrical productions.

I moved back to the East Village, New York, in the autumn of 1979, the very same place this story started, right across the street from my grandfather’s shoe repair shop on East Ninth Street. I seemed to have come full circle. After a few months, it was recommended that I apply for a job funded by the City of New York, which sponsored artist and musicians to work at various senior citizen centers (known as the CETA Act, later repealed during the budget cuts of the 1980s). Fortunately, I was hired to work as a culture specialist at the Ridgewood Bushwick Senior Citizens Center (today known as Council) in Brooklyn, which had a large

Italian membership, many of whom were retired Italian musicians who played, guitar, mandolin, and the *friscalettu* (Sicilian shepherd's flute). My job was to keep the elders inspired to play for the weekly dances and to arrange various performances for them. After getting acquainted, I discovered that some of them were the Italian string virtuosi of the 1920s and 30s and that many had even played with my two uncles, the serenaders of the East Village. One of them, Salvatore Cusenza, gave me some of the original handwritten scores for the mandolin, written by Giovanni Vicari, the leading virtuoso mandolinist of the early twentieth century.<sup>7</sup>

It was also during this time that I met Alan Lomax and his daughter Anna. They too knew about the Italian musicians (many now in their eighties and nineties) at the Ridgewood Bushwick Center and were working on a field recording with them for Folkways Records called *In mezz'una strada trovai una pianta di rosa*. I could not believe I was here with the man who was responsible for preserving the music that had inspired an entire generation! I recalled how we had listened very carefully to his recordings in Italy in order to hear the voices he had encountered in the field.

I was again invited to return to Italy for a tour with Pupi e Fresedde, but this time I decided to stay in New York, since I had already begun working in Brooklyn. It seemed that the situation was beginning to look up for me in the United States. Coincidentally, members of the Bread and Puppet Theatre who had performed in *Masaniello* in 1977 had opened a storefront down the street on East Ninth Street, near Second Avenue. Alessandra had also returned from her travels. She had met another Italian actor living in New York, Claudio Saponi, who had studied *Commedia dell'Arte* and had worked with Dario Fo in Italy. We three set out to recreate the type of street theatre done on the piazzas of Italy and present it to audiences in New York City—with Alessandra singing and playing tambourine, Claudio acting all the leading roles, and me on guitar, mandolin, and *chitarra battente*, accompanying the short skits with the music I had transcribed in Italy. With the support of two priests, Father Kelly, an Irish priest working at St. Bridget's parish—the last enclave of Italians in the Ridgewood Bushwick section of Brooklyn—and Padre Cogo, a key figure for Italian migration in the United States—we were sponsored to promote Italian culture throughout the boroughs of New York City.

We toured the Italian communities of greater New York in my white Volkswagen beetle, which carried our costumes, props, and instruments and the three of us. Thus was born our theatre company, *I Giullari di Piazza*. The name, suggested by Claudio Saponi, can be translated as The Jesters of the Square, although I remain skeptical that the English translation of "jester" may be misunderstood and does not carry the same connotations as the *giullari* of Medieval Italy, as presented by Dario Fo in *Mistero Buffo* (1977).

We were committed to bringing the lost Italian traditions of music and theatre from southern Italy back to the United States. Personally, since I had been so driven to spread the music I had recorded and transcribed in Italy, I also hoped it might inspire other Italian Americans to search for their own roots, just as I had mine years before. The contents of my suitcase contained all my musical experiences, and I wanted to teach other musicians in the United States about this extraordinarily beautiful music. At first, I played all of this music only on the guitar and the *chitarra battente*, but I was missing the fuller sound of the music I was

used to in Italy. I tried to find other musicians with whom to perform, but found I had to first explain the style and the background of the music. I started with a coworker from the Ridgewood Bushwick Senior Citizens Center, Dino Pappalardi, and he later brought in his friend, Greg Dormani. They had already had some experience with traditional Italian and Latin American music. Further, a friend I had met from the *Masaniello* tour in 1977, Ralph Denzer, who already had a great appreciation and understanding of the music (and who also lived on East Ninth Street), joined our ranks, playing recorder, trumpet, and many other exotic Renaissance instruments. As in Italy, I continued to arrange the music for flute, violin, mandolin, guitar, and percussion. At that time, most of the Italian music known to American audiences was from the Neapolitan songbook collection of the late 1800s through the early twentieth century. Even many of the Italian audiences we played to in New York were not very familiar with regional traditional music.

New York in the early 1980s still had plenty of street performers, so we would go out on Friday nights, dressed up in white Pulcinella-style costumes and play *tarantelle* on West Broadway in Soho or in Little Italy. (I was already becoming nostalgic for my remembered performances of Italy.) Once, when we were asked to do an interview for the RAI-USA (the national Italian Television and Radio Network), in New York, they wanted to film us playing in the streets of Little Italy, thereby showing some signs of Italian culture in America. Afterward, we decided to continue strolling, and approaching Paolucci's Restaurant on Mulberry Street, asked if we could play some nice Italian music for the patrons. They said, "Of course," so we felt welcomed and started to play a loud *tammurriata*. Before I could finish the melody on the mandolin, they shouted "Get lost, that's not Italian music!"—echoing the catcalls of Boston. We went from *le stelle* to *le stalle* ("the stars to the stalls"), all in the same night! People did not know where to place us, nor the kind of music we were performing. I recall yet another memorable incident from this period: we were dressed, again in our white costumes, performing on West Broadway, in the heart of Soho, when suddenly, a car pulled up with everyone shouting at us: "Iranians, go home!" This was during the Iranian hostage crisis. Since we all looked "foreign" and were singing in a language they could not decipher, they assumed we were a threat. And one music agent booked us for a tour of the A&P Supermarket chain—to promote prosciutto and salami instead of *musica e teatro*! People would stop and ask where they could find the frozen food isle, not realizing why we were there!

But we did have the special appreciation of a person of some authority, Luigi Ballerini, professor in the Italian department of New York University. Having known us from earlier Café Dante years, he was responsible for helping us find a space to rehearse at the university and officially made us artists-in-residence. Between 1981 and 1983 the group began to take shape at rehearsals in room 707 of the main building at NYU. Professor Ballerini had given me research assistant privileges, which enabled me to continue doing research on early music in NYU's Bobst Library. He also inspired me to believe there was still hope for traditional southern Italian music in New York. We shared many projects that led me to a new phase on my journey, that of composing for theatre and film. With Luigi's encouragement, I was asked to do music for a short film for RAI,

also directed and produced by Luigi, based on the life of the Italian artist Angelo Savelli, a wonderful sculptor and painter from Calabria who was also a resident of New York City. It was a strange coincidence that I would be collaborating again with an artist of the same name as the theatre director of Pupi e Fresedde in Italy, Angelo Savelli. Our first full theatrical production was called *La canzone di Zeza* (1982), a Neapolitan ritual Carnival play performed in the *Commedia dell'Arte* style. This story was preserved in both oral and written traditions (D'Aponte 1987, 72). I had found some fragments of the original theme in the book, *Carnevale si chiamava Vincenzo*, by Roberto De Simone and Annabella Rossi and began to make my own musical arrangements.

During this time, it was largely Italian communities in and around New York that invited the group to perform at cultural functions (usually in parish halls). It actually felt as though we were bringing some of the lost traditions back to them. On several occasions, we had the great opportunity to share performances with the Manteo Sicilian Puppet Theatre (also known as "Papa Manteo's" Sicilian Puppets)—the last family carrying on the traditional Sicilian puppet theatre in the United States (cf. De Nonno, 1982). I was fortunate to have known Mike "Papa" Manteo and visited his workshop in Brooklyn, where he demonstrated how the puppets were made and regaled us with stories of growing up in his family's theatre company. We also shared performances with several of the Italian musicians Alan and Anna Lomax had been recording, especially the De Franco family (originally from Calabria, immigrants to New Jersey), for the 1979 Folkways recording, *In mezz'una strada trovai una pianta di rosa*.

Through the assistance of Luigi Ballerini, the group found a home (for a nominal fee) in a small church on West Eleventh Street and Seventh Avenue, called Saint John's Church in the Village, to rehearse and give performances. This opportunity brought our music and theatre to a wider audience, beyond the Italian community, and as a result, to the attention of a vibrant and curious non-Italian public.

It was also at this time (1984–85), that an agent for Walt Disney's Epcot Center in Orlando, Florida, approached us. Disney was looking for an "authentic" Italian troupe for their Piazza San Marco at the Venetian Pavilion in Epcot to do ongoing daily *Commedia dell'Arte*-style performances. We signed a contract, and Alessandra and I proceeded to put together an alternative group of I Giullari di Piazza to live and work in Florida full time. We had assembled a group of seven talented musicians and actors from New York to whom we had taught the repertoire and acting skills for our version of *Don Giovanni and His Servant Pulcinella*, a lively *Commedia* "farce" adapted for street performances. For almost two years, our Florida *giullari* presented to audiences from all over the world music and theatre based on our research.

In the meantime, in New York, we had our Carnegie Recital Hall debut in 1986 and recorded our first album, *Sullilo mio*, for the Shanachie Record label. Finally, our street performing days were over. We also began to realize that we were likely the only group (or perhaps one of only a very few groups) in the United States at that time, performing traditional southern Italian folk music and theatre. We had found our own voice and were accomplishing what we had set out to do: our music was at last being received and heard (see Figure 8.5).



**Figure 8.5** I Giullari di Piazza at the Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts, Katonah, New York (ca. 1996). From left to right: Carnival puppet (Dario Bollini), Abraham Stuart, Susan Eberenz, Alessandra Belloni, masked Pulcinella (Enrico Granafei), John La Barbera, Ivan Thomas. Photograph by M. B. Lapin.

Over the years, many more concerts, theatrical performances, and recordings took place, and countless numbers of very talented actors, musicians, and dancers have come and gone since the group was formed almost thirty years ago. I have often wondered how different my life might have been if I had never performed on those *piazze* of Italy and had never journeyed to discover my own roots, with my guitar in hand. Since the early 1980s, I have been teaching southern Italian folk music to musicians who had never before heard it, hoping to keep this music alive and evolving. Immersion in the cultural traditions of southern Italian folk music has been a very large part of my life in New York City and in Italy over a span of many years. I could never have imagined such a fantastic journey when I was given my first guitar at age ten, and even later, when I began formally to study music. I have witnessed the ebb and flow of interest in these musical traditions, both on the part of musicians and audiences. At times, of course, this lack of interest was disappointing (e.g., “That’s not Italian music”), but then again, here we are in the midst of another resurgence of interest in this music. That suitcase of songs I had transcribed from southern Italian oral traditions, decades before, has since gone on to create its own unique Italian American immigrant experience.

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- I Giullari di Piazza. 1995. *Earth, sun and moon*, Lyrichord Discs.
- . 1989. *Dea fortuna*, Shanachie Records.
- . 1985. *Sullilo mio*, Meadowlark Records.
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- Pupi e Fresedde. 1979. *La terra del rimorso*, Milano: Divergo/Proposta.

## Filmography

- Children of fate*. 1991. Directed by Andrew Young and Susan Todd. Archipelago Films.
- Cuore napoletano*. 2001. Directed by Paolo Santoni. Ready Made Films.
- It's one family: Knock on wood*. 1982. Directed by Tony De Nonno. De Nonno Productions.
- Il prato*. 1979. Directed by Paolo and Vittorio Taviani. RAI TV and Film Tre.
- Sacco and Vanzetti*. 2006. Directed by Miller. Willow Pond Films.
- Tarantella*. 1996. Directed by Helen De Michiel. Tara Release.

## Online Resources

- Associazione Ricreativa Culturale Italiana: <http://www.arci.it>
- Festa de l'Unità: <http://www.festaunita.it>
- Internet Movie Database: <http://www.imdb.com>, Il Prato (1979). Plot summary by rosebud6.

### Notes

1. John D'Angelico (1905–64) built arch-top guitars and mandolins that have come to be considered one of the highest standards of excellence in instrument making. D'Angelico had only one assistant, Jimmy D'Aquisto, who under D'Angelico's guidance continued to build instruments and is today the foremost authority on these instruments. George Gruhn, *Frets Magazine, The Vintage Collection*, April 1980.
2. Note that the singular forms of these terms are *tarantella*, *pizzica*, *tammorriata*, and *villanella*, and the plural forms are *tarantelle*, *pizziche*, *tammorriate*, and *villanelle*.
3. ARCI, a politically progressive association, is a direct descendent of the original Associazione Ricreativa Culturale Italiana (<http://www.arci.it>), founded in 1957, as an anti-Fascist cultural and mutual-aid society.
4. The Italian May Day celebration was instituted after World War II and organized around the Leftist newspaper *l'Unità*; cf. <http://www.festaunita.it>.
5. Roberto De Simone was the composer, ethnomusicologist, and director of *La Nuova Compagnia di Canto Popolare*.
6. *Tarantati*, amply described in de Martino's *La terra del rimorso*, were individuals who believed they were ill or depressed because of the bite of the tarantula. They believed that only by dancing a type of tarantella known as *pizzica* could they be cured. (Editor's note: For more on *tarantismo*, see Luisa Del Giudice and Nancy Van Deusen, eds., *Performing Ecstasies: Music, Dance, and Ritual in the Mediterranean* [Ottawa: Medieval Music Institute, 2005].)
7. See *Italian String Virtuosi-Banjo, Mandolin and Guitar*, Rounder Records, 1995.

# Simple Does Not Mean Easy

## Oral Traditional Values, Music, and the Musicàntica Experience

*Roberto Catalano and Enzo Fina*

In this chapter we reflexively discuss the pleasures and problems encountered during eleven years of performing traditional music of southern Italy in America, focusing specifically on how we have related to Italian Americans and to Italians. Further, we discuss the commercialization of traditional music, the current trends that are affecting it, as well as how Italian Americans perceive this tradition. Lastly, we address how we, as Italians living in America, currently understand, value, and will seek to maintain our oral tradition in the future both in Italy and the United States.

Both Enzo and I have been exposed to a considerable amount of traditional peasant life since childhood. Our work is informed by such intimate knowledge, as well as by our perspective as immigrants and by our own personal histories and interests. We are more observers and participants than theorists—representing the oral tradition while at the same time representing ourselves. We focus on our lives as artists and immigrants and make our musical selections by ascribing to them specific and privileged *values*. The word *values* is not used incidentally but rather with a keen intentionality of defending and preserving such values.

Italy is known as a land of refined culture, the country that gave birth to poets, scientists, and explorers, and as one of the prime contributors to the European cultural establishment. The value of this heritage is well known and globally recognized.

However, there is more to Italian culture that is much less known. It may be surprising or even foreign to some to learn that there is an oral culture that is at the heart of our country's identity. Knowledge of this cultural base is fundamental to a thorough understanding of "Italian" culture. The importance of this understanding

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The "I" narrator in this chapter is Roberto Catalano

is especially critical today as contemporary Italy flounders in the growing cultural void and identity crises generated largely by the progressive abandonment and systematic dismissal of this crucial historical reality known as *cultura popolare*.<sup>1</sup> Again, this seems a matter of values and the wise or unwise decisions made with regard to such historic values. The personal narrative that follows is but one of the many instances in both of our lives that contributed to our decision to think and act wisely in terms of defining and defending our cultural values.<sup>2</sup>

Many years ago, back in my hometown of Catania, Sicily, I was part of a discussion on the merits, the beauty, the depth and breadth, and the glory of the contribution of Italian culture to the world. At one point, one of the most ardent interlocutors went on a socioideological rant magnifying the endless achievements of Italian high culture. Finally, he concluded with sarcasm and regret that Italy could have been perfect in all aspects had it not had the misfortune of being a country of shepherds. The intentionally racist and vilifying tone of those words made quite an unexpected impact on me. I began meditating on the members of the peasant class with whom I had come into direct contact throughout my life. The images of men, women, and children whom I loved and by whom I was loved could not be reconciled with the ignorance unleashed by those words. That he saw shepherds, and by extension, the entire peasant class, as the cause of Italy's imperfection and shortcomings was, I concluded, a tragic lie. Yes, Italy was a country of shepherds, but the shepherds I knew always felt to me more real than most of the men of the class of *galantuomini*<sup>3</sup> could ever dream to become!

It may be argued that the above story may not represent the terms in which folk culture and the oral tradition are being discussed and represented in Italy today. Indeed, it is a local story, perhaps an insignificant example of provincialism. Unfortunately though, it is more likely only one in a deep and too often unsuspected *sea* of such examples. Opinions, beliefs, and ideas are frequently built at the local level; thus they can be eminently provincial, but history testifies that these can be turned into trends, factions, and movements with impressively influential social force. The adage, "big things have small beginnings" seems applicable here. For at least forty years in Italy there has been a historically, socially, and musically conscious folk revival that produced much relevant and dedicated scholarship. Such intellectual activity has everything to do with counterbalancing the foolishness of individuals who make declarations like the one just narrated. We are positive that the work of those who understood *la cultura popolare* was relevant because they did not dismiss local, "provincial" dialogue—however uninteresting, disturbing, or even hideous it may have been. I concluded therefore, that there was a basic truth and importance in the weight that Italian rural cultures bear on Italian culture in general. Such truth must be equally known, understood, and divulged. We believe that music is the perfect portal to such understanding.

Musicàntica formed in 1994 as a quartet that included Enzo Fina, Luciano Miele (an actor and musician from Rome), Lorenzo Buhne (an Italian Australian immigrant from Naples who lived in Los Angeles at the time), and me. Buhne left Musicàntica shortly after its formation and was eventually replaced by Alissa Simon, a UCLA ethnomusicology colleague of mine. With this configuration, we began establishing ourselves as a group. Early in 1997, Luciano Miele left the

ensemble, and by the summer of the same year we disbanded so that I could return to Italy to conduct fieldwork for my doctoral dissertation. Musicantica reformed upon my return in 1999 as a trio, again with Lorenzo Buhne, and eventually developed into another quartet with the addition of Kedron Parker. Since Buhne and Parker's departure in 2000, Musicantica is a duo.

Since the beginning in 1994, Musicantica's mission has been to take an innovative approach to *musica popolare*.<sup>4</sup> We agreed that the music had to include the traditional repertoire, of course, but that we could modify it by incorporating both musical and extramusical elements from within the peasant tradition, as well as from without. This decision was in line with the World Music approaches to traditional music that evolved during the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s. Such an approach is indicated in Italy by at least two terms: *riproposta* and *contaminazione*. *Riproposta* means to "repropose" something from the past (e.g., a return to traditional music), while *contaminazione* means "contamination," or the grafting of alien sounds, instruments, and overall musical concepts, onto the traditional idiom.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, among the innovations we adopted was the marriage of ideas and sounds between our traditions with those of the Mediterranean at large. We decided to do so given the historical ties and reciprocal influences between European, North African, and Near Eastern cultures.

Our motto could be expressed as follows: *Semplice non vuol dire facile* (Simple does not mean easy). The word *simple* constitutes a basic concept in understanding peasant life and worldview. It is intended here not as the usual paternalistic expression of the dominant culture's view of the peasantry but as *creative ingenuity*. What is simple, as applied to any type of tool, clothing, choice of food, or manifestation of oral culture at large, is readily understood in an efficient, direct, and practical way. The superfluous, or frivolous, is to be discarded. This does not mean that peasant culture is retrograde or inept, because its ways are not about deprivation or ignorance; it is rather steeped in the wisdom of discerning the usefulness of things as well as resorting to the refined art of improvisation. The art of improvising, developed through centuries of living at severe subsistence levels, makes the peasant a rather sophisticated human being. The principles of improvisation are not complex, generally speaking. On the contrary, these principles embody the use of simple but very specific devices, just as hammer, saw, nails, and boards are specific to a carpenter. Complexity comes from compounding the simple.

Antonio Gramsci recognized the importance of a relationship with the "simple." We recognize such a relationship partly as a conflict between the simple or essential versus the complicated or technological in a clash of beliefs, values, and priorities. Gramsci realized that there was no ideological unity between theory and practice in the relationship between the low and higher social strata, between intellectuals and the "simple" folk. He considered as fundamental a philosophic movement that, in the process of elaborating a kind of thinking superior to the *senso commune*,<sup>6</sup> while scientifically coherent, would never lose its contact with the "simple" becoming historical, devoid of individualistic elements and becoming life (Gramsci 1966, 9).

We understand why Gramsci would think in such terms. We see the activity of intellectuals working as mediators between peasants and *la cultura ufficiale*, mainstream culture, as a task that is both delicate and complex. It is delicate because the

understanding of the world of peasants requires sensitivity, practicality, and a significant amount of lived experience of such a world. There have been many brilliant ambassadors of Italian peasant culture. Our favorite, among many, is writer Carlo Levi and his masterpiece, *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* (1945). Conversely, things may get rather complex when the work of intellectuals is detached from direct experience. Ernesto de Martino uses the same reasoning when he comments on the polemical exchange during the second half of the seventeenth century between Neapolitan doctor and humanist Francesco Serao and Athanasius Kircher, the German scholar who advanced a natural-magical interpretation of *tarantismo* (de Martino 1994). Three hundred and fifty years ago, Kircher actually spent time observing and reporting the activities of the peasants of the Salento, especially those linked to the belief of the mythical bite of the spider. He understood and justified the Salentine peasants' worldview through direct evaluation, while Illuminists such as Serao tended to explain (or rather dismiss) it in detached, "scientific" terms. The conflict between the simple or essential and the complex or technological in other words, has been with us for centuries.

The notion of an intellectual attitude that becomes "life" in a historical sense essentially means that it is impossible, or unlikely, that one cannot achieve an understanding of the peasant world without being immersed in it. Luigi M. Lombardi Satriani called such understanding *la concezione del mondo*, or the peasant's worldview, a concept that differs completely from the worldview embedded in mainstream culture, or *cultura ufficiale*. We are aware of the dangers that terms such as "simple" or "humble" imply for peasant culture when used by the establishment. At best, these are used in the most paternalistic and patronizing ways. Gramsci was well aware of such dangers. Lombardi Satriani points out that, for Gramsci, the expression *umile*, or "humble," is "the characteristic for comprehending the traditional attitude of Italian intellectuals toward the people," intended here almost as a measuring stick of attitudes and behaviors (Lombardi Satriani 1980, 21). In his *Letteratura e vita nazionale*, Gramsci stated, "Among Italian intellectuals the expression 'the humble' indicates a relationship of paternalistic protection, a 'complacency' regarding one's own undisputed superiority, a relationship as between two races, one considered superior the other inferior, a relationship like the one between an adult and a child as it was intended in the old pedagogy" (Gramsci 1966b, 72). This sentiment of "complacency" has constituted the basis of the dominant culture's relationship with the peasantry in Italy and a continuous source of problems and misunderstandings.

Conversely, the way we position ourselves vis-à-vis peasant reality reflects for the most part the Gramscian concept of *contrapposizione*, literally "counterposition" or "antithesis." We take this sociopolitical stance and believe that, despite one's best and most honest intentions, there has always been a class conflict between the hegemonic and subaltern classes that, in the end, has not served Italian society well. The cultural diversity of the peasant world, when *contrapposta*, or juxtaposed to official, dominant culture, still surprises us. In understanding our music making, we return constantly—either metaphorically or symbolically—to the idea of an alternative representation of the world.

For Lombardi Satriani, it is a matter of opposing wisdom and righteousness to madness and futility in what he calls a "*contrapposizione* of the concept of the world

and life of the *strati popolari* or ‘lower social strata,’ with respect to the concepts of the official world” or higher social strata (Lombardi Satriani 1980, 28–29). The Calabrian anthropologist further comments that “the difference of the folkloric facts thus comes to be translated in a counterposition of such facts against dominant ideologies” (ibid., 29). We constantly emphasize such diversity in the music we perform, primarily because of the tremendous force, inherent essentiality, and affective power of identity it possesses. Further, it functions as antithesis to both art and commercial music as well as provides the key to debunking the prevailing understanding of what Italian traditional music is believed to be here in the United States.

The strongest and most unique characteristics of our music are the sounds we create through the use of a large number of musical instruments. Ours is a continuous recollection and recreation of the sounds that were imprinted in our memories from childhood. These sounds evoke colors, scents, situations, and milieux we personally experienced while living in Italy mixed with those of today. For instance, central to our lives in Puglia and Sicily is a relationship with the sea. Both physically and culturally, the Mediterranean has always something to suggest in both musical and nonmusical terms. We have navigated its breadths and explored its depths, but above all we have spent countless hours by its shores listening to songs the sea has murmured from time immemorial.

By “Mediterranean Sounds,” however, we also intend the sounds of its cultures. We, of course, use instruments native to Italy, such as the mandolin, the *mandocello*, the Sardinian *benas*,<sup>7</sup> the frame drums, or the *chitarra battente*.<sup>8</sup> But we also routinely use Mediterranean instruments *at large* such as the Arabian ‘*oud*, the Greek *bouzouki*, as well as other custom-made instruments such as the *fina*,<sup>9</sup> or the *bull-roarer*.<sup>10</sup> We change instruments for almost each song, using sounds and colors that best express and enhance shades and hues of its moods and colors. We do not seek to use these instruments as “vitamin added” musical enrichment but rather, our decision to graft foreign sounds to the tradition is consistent with the times in which we live. *Contaminazione*, *riproposta*, globalization, and postmodern theory may have something to do with our choices, but mostly it is a *musician’s* decision, which ultimately dictates change and innovation. Shepherds and peasants in Sardinia, for instance, decided to stop using the cane clarinet called *vena* in favor of the more efficient and louder button accordion (Catalano 1995). Unlike Sardinian peasants, however, we do not have the cultural authority to eliminate one instrument and replace it with another. Nevertheless, the soft voice of the ‘*oud*, paired with a guitar in a Salentine traditional serenade, extends our pleasure, deepens the song’s meaning, and metaphorically makes possible the sharing of a cultural trait that can be called Mediterranean.

We seek to achieve these symbolic and metaphoric sounds naturally by unconventionally using both conventional and unconventional sonorous objects—as customary in the peasant world itself. Shepherds and peasants could make noise and/or music with what was readily available to them in nature. We both remember those who showed us how to pull a stem of wild oat off the side of the road and by piercing it, make a clarinet. In Sardinia, peasants would cut the flower off a succulent plant known as *l’ombelico di Venere*, or “Venus’s belly,” and by blowing into it imitate various animal sounds; or they could make a whistle by piercing a prune

or apricot pit. The list of such prodigious instruments is vast in all Italian regions. Giulio Fara called these objects *giocattoli di musica rudimentale* (rudimentary musical toys; Fara 1915), and Giovanni Dore gave them the more revolutionary sounding term, *ordigni sonori*<sup>11</sup> or “sonorous devices” indeed “weapons” (Dore 1976). By using a number of these instruments, we celebrate the inventive genius of the oral tradition. We learned a fundamental peasant principle: the most unusual, simplest objects can make the most unexpectedly interesting and complex sounds.

By the same token, we learned that objects commonly considered trash could be surprisingly effective from a musical perspective. We make impressive rain sounds with plastic bags, and we involve our audiences in playing soda straws. With a small lamb’s copper bell and a shaker we mimic the chirping of crickets and summer cicadas, while volcanic rocks from the island of Filicudi<sup>12</sup> make dry rattles and clacking sounds reminiscent of workers in stone quarries or of peasants clearing fields before planting. We have used thin-cut, large wooden sheets shaken to create the sound of wind, as well as the soft rumble of approaching thunder.

Another example of our creative process is meditating on the nature of traditional music examples, such as the melodies of cart drivers. The knowledge of the *Sicilian cantu alla carrittera* and the Salentine *cantu te li trainieri* prompted us to consider not only the usual singing style of a lonesome traveling man but also to focus on the complex accompaniment to his enticing songs. We don’t know whether cart drivers were conscious or not of the amazing concert of sounds produced by nature and by the motion of different objects that surrounded them while they traveled. Yet all of these elements produced strikingly different rhythms and ever-changing sounds simultaneously. We imagined these passionate and powerful melodies, normally sung in a slow, free-metered style accompanied by the rhythmic sound of the jingles fastened on the mule’s collar, complemented by the clip-clopping of its hooves on the dirt road. The stones cracking under the weight of the wheels randomly accented the steady rhythm of the animal’s steps. The night lamp rattling and creaking as it swung from the axle under the cart created another rhythmic diversion to the existing rhythmic grooves. On top of all this, the sounds of birds chirping, dogs barking, and wind, rain, and thunder created an overall complex background. Therefore, we directly transposed this idea of a melody progressing against such a sonorous backdrop in some of the arrangements of our recorded and regularly performed songs.

Diego Carpitella frowned upon such interpretations and warned about a facile romanticizing approach to *musica popolare*, calling it “naturalistic descriptionism,” or *descrittivismo naturalistico* (Carpitella 1992, 43), but we are far from the intention of merely *describing* an environment. To think in terms of rendering sounds as metaphors is where our experimentation finds meaning and becomes, without a doubt, the most intrinsic and intentional part of our work. Of course, while we pay utmost attention to the value of our instruments and objects, personal taste also determines the choice of instruments sure to fit the purpose of the piece.

The root music that most influences, inspires, and propels us is the Salentine<sup>13</sup> *pizzica*.<sup>14</sup> It is in this music and the culture that created it that we find the *raison d’être* of our existence as a group of immigrant artists in a complex environment such as Los Angeles. The *pizzica* has been played for centuries in the Salentine

peninsula. According to the late Giorgio Di Lecce, the earliest reports date back to the sixth century (Di Lecce 1997, 80). Di Lecce asserts that he participated as a musician in cases of bitten people, known as *tarantati*, who needed to dance to the music in order to be healed, as recently as 1995 (*ibid.*, 72), despite the commonly accepted fact that such domestic therapeutic rituals ceased altogether during the early 1970s. Although this phenomenon has been alternatively dismissed or highly debated over the centuries by the cultural establishment (which frequently considered such manifestations as absurd behavior inspired by ignorance), the interest in this music has undergone an unexpected revival during the last decade or so, especially among younger Italians. If we were operating in Italy today, we would be lost among the hundreds of contemporary bands performing *pizziche* and *pizzica*-derived music not only in the Salento but all over the country (cf. Del Giudice 2005).

As performers of traditional and traditionally derived music, we find it difficult to conceive our work as mere reproduction or worse as a revival of older material. We are uninterested in “museology,” or the treatment of the oral tradition as a museum piece or as a monument to be dusted off and nostalgically admired from time to time. Furthermore, we do not engage in meticulous reproductions of recorded pieces nor in executions of “legitimate” or “canonic” music of a particular regional style, whether vocal or instrumental. We find it pointless to slavishly copy existing recordings. All music—especially peasant music—was continuously validated and reaffirmed by new impulses. It is difficult for many musicians to think in these terms when the only references to the past they have are fixed-in-time recordings. We are fortunate because we grew up in close contact with the peasant world, so we recognize, perhaps with greater clarity than others, the process of change the music has undergone and continues to undergo. The underlying fact is that there is indeed a discourse between the old and the new, the past and the present. In an inspiring article on hermeneutic phenomenology, musicologist Angeles Sancho-Velazquez writes,

In any living tradition, change is always present. Keeping a tradition alive does not mean a simple repeating of what has been sedimented in the past, but a bringing to life of that tradition by means of a dialectic between sedimentation and innovation. This dialectic is always operating in a tradition, although the degree of emphasis in one or the other term of the dialectic may vary greatly among cultures. In this sense, works considered as the workings of the productive imagination, and not as reified reproductions of sedimented forms, are always introducing new meanings. There is still another sense in which music, and creative work in general, can be thought of as metaphors introducing novel meanings. This is the case when creative works are conceived of as introducing a new meaning, which clashes, not only with prior works, but with the everyday life of a people. No matter how slowly a musical tradition may change over time, the music being created and performed always adds something to the lives of the people sharing that tradition. The claim being made here is that creative works are more than embellished reproductions of what exists in other spheres of life. Instead of being only a reproduction or reflection of social structures, works *reproduce new* meanings and new understandings. (Sancho-Velazquez 1994, 44–45; italics in original)

Reproducing new meanings and new understanding entails some interpretation of the culture. Interpreting does not equate with “wandering all over the music” with the intention of finding and filling in empty spaces or adding to it in order to embellish it. During the last ten years, we have observed musicians who, encouraged by the postmodern-infused cut-and-paste technique adopted in World Music, have opted to add an electric bass or an African *jembe*<sup>15</sup> to traditional *pizzica* instrumentation. In the summer of 2005, at a festival in Taormina, Sicily, we witnessed singers interpreting the *pizzica* with the mannerisms of American rappers. Although there was nothing essentially wrong with these approaches, we asked ourselves if this type of musical manipulation could ever develop into something truly unexpected or new. In the long term, in fact, we wonder how far these experiments may go before hitting a dead end because they may not reproduce the new meanings and new understandings Sancho-Velazquez suggests as necessary for continuity.

In the peasant’s world, however, the reality is rather different. The peasant uses what is readily at hand for his needs and compounds all these elements. Alessandro Portelli states, “The peasant’s is essentially a culture of subtraction: the genius of peasant culture, elaborated in poor and subaltern social conditions, lies in the ability to communicate and create with the minimum of means possible, with the voice alone or the body” (Portelli 2002, 74). Keeping this concept in mind and transposing it into the creative process of music making, we can see how subtraction, then, and not accumulation, is the truth of the matter.

In Italy, the musical process known as *contaminazione* expresses itself as the “culture of adjunction” (Portelli 2002, 74) and maintains a colonialist posture. Such culture is not capable of resisting the temptation of compiling elements, especially in terms of sounds, in order to spice up the music and make it what it was never meant to be. We, on the other hand, do not see the necessity of inserting instruments or sounds that are totally alien to the music, nor of altering the vocal styles for the sake of creating interest or obeying a “coolness factor.” As mentioned earlier, when we decided to search outside the great garden variety of our specific musical traditions,<sup>16</sup> we never moved beyond the Mediterranean and therefore remained within well-delineated historical-cultural boundaries. More importantly, as the peasant uses what is already at hand, so do we work with the traditional material from the *inside*, not adding to it from the *outside*. In this way, traditional music can be used either to speak about the present or to create new worlds (cf. Sancho-Velazquez supra.). By working within what we believe to be the essence of the music, we create continuity by both going beyond the mannerisms of preservation, wary of adventures in *contaminazione*, as well as refusing various postmodern cut-and-paste techniques.

What we have discussed thus far is part of the issue of the commercialization of traditional music. Such issues were subjects for deep debate by Diego Carpitella, who criticized the prospect of a music that was born out of the struggles and sufferings of poverty and underdevelopment suddenly moving to a place of music to be consumed:

Cart drivers’ or shepherds’ songs in their substance reflect, or have so far reflected, with their monotonous, uniform iteration, the psychological and material misery

of the world, the anguish of centuries, the human condition and its possibility of ransom. When one of these songs instead is transferred to a “consumerist music” something changes: the “real” aspects are forsaken, are “consumed,” they become conventional, oleographic, common language. So, if there are shepherds, so is there the onomatopoeia of cow [sounds] or flutes or cow bells [in the music]. If there are cart drivers, [it will be] the sound of the whip cracking through the air which, let us be clear, exists in reality but is only an added determinant of the emotional reasons. (Carpitella 1992, 43–44; interpolations mine)

What Carpitella means is that any process of “stylization” always implies an alteration of the original connotations. This was one of his many preoccupations and a legitimate one, because he knew the dangers of cultural commodification as commercially minded people have, in large measure, made mistakes in the manner of representing traditional music. Carpitella lived through the folk revival movement of the 1960s and 1970s and left a long critique wherein he considered even the faithful remaking of traditional music to be completely meaningless.

The reason we focus on this issue is because we believe that it is necessary to arrange music in order to allow it to live in present and, hopefully, future times. When Carpitella mentioned meaninglessness, he referred to the colonialist exploitation of traditional music by unscrupulous business-oriented musicians and *not* to peasants themselves seeking immediate success. We, however, might reconcile with Carpitella due to the reality of our current economic situation as well as our need to use sounds as metaphors for assuaging homesickness. Moreover, performing this kind of music serves sociopolitical and identity needs, given that we are immigrant citizens living in a highly challenging country.

There are other ways, however, to look at tradition. Popular music analyst Iain Chambers is especially congenial to us when he states,

Tradition as cultural information is always multiplication. In German culture tradition is a place for truth. For this reason tradition becomes that place of translation. This sounds much better in English when we speak of roots that become routes. In the British black community they used to say “roots become routes.” In this both tradition and modernity are modified, transformed. It is not a question of defending tradition from the attack of modernity. If the tradition is the domain in which the language handed down from the past is found in order to reconfigure the present, it means that both tradition and modernity are subjected to modification and translation. (Chambers 1998)<sup>17</sup>

Tradition, therefore, finds a contemporary function in the actions of the musicians who manipulate it to reconfigure and reaffirm values and beliefs of a different worldview. Experiencing different realities is what the music we perform is all about, and the ability to adapt to the changes in history is perhaps its most meaningful characteristic.

What happens then when such cultural richness, embodied in music and the social fabric sustaining it, experiences erosion or the fragmentation generated, for example, by migration? Is it fair to characterize the phenomenon of migration as disruptive calamity diminishing and erasing cultural meaning? If there is one

thing Enzo and I never anticipated was that we too would become immigrants. Moreover, we were never *forced* to leave Sicily or the Salento for economic reasons—unlike millions of our fellow countrymen in generations past—but, nonetheless, *chose* to become immigrants. Each of us in his own different way wanted a more or less dramatic change of life. In this sense, I suppose, we do not much differ from those who came before, all of whom, more or less, desired drastic changes of some sort.

Common procedure for the earlier immigrants was to seek out more established relatives or *paesani* in order to take one's first steps in the new country. Upon our arrival, we never thought or felt the need to look for an Italian community. Nor did we feel the need to look first to Italian American audiences once we began performing. Perhaps this was due to the lack of a cohesive Italian presence in Los Angeles. After all, where were the Italians in Los Angeles, and how determinant was their presence in this city?<sup>18</sup> We knew, for instance, of Sicilian communities in San Pedro and in San Diego, as well as other regional Italians scattered throughout the city, but we weren't interested in looking for them.

We performed at several Italian American gatherings through our years in Southern California, and we can say that our experiences with this type of audience have been varied, even surprising at times, and not necessarily in positive ways. First, we came to terms with audience expectations. The typical Italian American, we concluded, is interested in commercial Italian popular music or opera. These genres are identified as *essentially* "Italian." The music we perform, on the other hand, has been received either with indifference or with exaggerated enthusiasm. We can offer a number of examples. At a Festa Italia in the late 1990s in Santa Monica, California, an Italian woman loudly objected during our performance, criticizing it as "backward" music. She worried that "people [would] think that we [were] still living in the past." We played the Northwestern Folk Festival in Seattle for two years (2002 and 2003), and there we met a woman who expressed an enthusiastic interest in the tarantella. She wanted to make a video featuring us in order to tell the entire world how beautiful the dance was and how much it reminded her of her mother. Several months of negotiations followed, during which we became increasingly aware that the project was going to be a vanity production for her. We wanted her to understand that she had to do some homework before continuing any further. We suggested more research on the subject and, above all, warned her against using the music and the dance merely as a moneymaker. She accepted our suggestions and, in the end, produced a somewhat acceptable work.

Again in Seattle, in 2003, our show was disappointingly cut short to allow for a dance group formed largely of elderly ladies performing Italian folk dances in costume. The sight of these gracefully and carefully choreographed swirling grandmothers—all garlands, ribbons, and swinging plastic tambourines—was charming on the one hand, but pathetic and embarrassing on the other. We mention this experience as a segue into matters that are worthy of discussion.

Americans maintain several stereotypes of the Other—including Italians. For instance, that we wear costumes is one of the most frequent requests we encounter. We have, in fact, been strongly encouraged to use conventional costumes while

performing. We leave people wondering if we are legitimate Italians when we explain that the issue of costumes does not pertain to us. Billed as “romantic,” we have on occasion been used as background music (because it is assumed that guitars and mandolins make an evening so especially “romantic”). This is hard to swallow, given our conviction that the music we play demands focused listening. Finally, we have repeatedly noted that when we have been hired by Italian and Italian American associations, adequate and timely compensation has often not been forthcoming.

There could be several reasons for such behavior. In our view, lack of education about the musical tradition, misunderstanding, parochialism, and an overall cultural distance from current Italian life are, quite sadly, to be indicated as basic factors. For reasons that still elude us, oral traditional music seems to puzzle Italian Americans and is perhaps, not even deemed worthy of consideration. Second- and third-generation immigrants appear rather insensitive to it, although it is true that we have also met elders who could, for instance, play the *tamburello* (frame drum) or dance the steps of the *danza scherma*,<sup>19</sup> and who remembered older songs.

Generally speaking, the type of music Italian Americans consider traditional does not belong to the oral tradition but might be better described as *musica popolare*,<sup>20</sup> that is, music (or any cultural product) that derives from the urban and suburban world. This music is actually part of a written tradition created by trained musicians but consumed by audiences ranging from the peasant to the urban and suburban worlds. Italy offers several repertoires of such music from North to South—among which the most rightly celebrated is the great Neapolitan repertoire. To diminish the value of the Neapolitan repertoire would be arrogant and pointless. Yet, our musical heritage, and the options it offers, is just as rich, and we contend that it is time to reconsider it as equally important as Neapolitan songs or opera.

It is also true that, for some individuals, our music may constitute part of the remembrance of the world of poverty and deprivation left behind by their immigrant parents or grandparents. Living away from one’s birthplace is a cruelty one endures with the conviction that the sacrifices made will pay off in time. But the price paid does not always compensate us for what is lost. We may consider ourselves fortunate because we can return to Italy largely at pleasure, but we know there are many immigrants, both Italian and non-Italian, who will never again see their native lands.

The reality is that the world of the immigrant is one filled with both hope and sadness. Every immigrant, at one point or another, and at some level, comes to term with this reality. Despite our own close and ongoing ties to Italy, we suffer the same homesickness and cultural anxieties mixed with hope and drive for the future. Historian Giovanni Raffaele writes, “The inner history of immigrants is, in fact, a history of ambivalences: of excitement and fear, apprehension and expectations. From the old world to the new they were forced to face the conflict between the great desire of socioeconomic advancement and the fear that success could menace their traditional values and destroy their lives” (Raffaele 1999, 19).

There is a natural tendency in immigrant life, Raffaele contends, to want to become part of the new country but also to maintain a certain distance. It is

impossible for each of us to become “fully American” because of this ongoing tension.

We too must maintain some distance. Our music is the proof and the reason for this, as we recognize that the tendency of the American way is to erode the ethnic identity of origin of its foreign-born and mold it to fit an imagined seamless social fabric. Yet, the United States is not a unified country by any stretch, and never has been, not even during extreme, tragic situations such as 9/11. The need to constantly safeguard our cultural identity, we have concluded, is best met through music. We understand, as Francesco Renda puts it, that

every immigrant is a microcosm of a story that is often an unrepeatable tragedy. Not always the economic reason in its elementary crudity presents itself as the necessitating exclusive and necessary thrust. The one who leaves [the country of origin] often is *not* he who is worst off but often, it is he who is relatively better off and thinks to ameliorate his personal condition. More than a pauper or one persecuted by bad luck or a weak-willed individual, the immigrant is rather a strong-willed fighter who, unfortunately, no longer has faith in the result or the feasibility of his fight in his native country. Above all therefore, he is, a defeated one. (Renda 1989, 17; interpolation mine)

We understand the term “defeated” as a sort of permanent brand burned on the soul of those who moved away from their homeland, and not as a hindrance to successes and respectful legacies created in the new country. Nonetheless, it *is* “an unrepeatable tragedy” for us as well. For now, all we know is that we are caught in a struggle for cultural survival in this country, while wanting to respect the specific stories that belong to each and every immigrant—ours included. At the same time, we do not feel obliged to join the large number of immigrants who made the choice to be both Italian and American simply because we too live here. We are not Italian Americans but rather Italians living in America. Therefore, with all due respect, we will let others salute Old Glory<sup>21</sup> or celebrate Columbus Day in order to feel American, while delighting in spaghetti and meatballs, or singing “*C’è la luna a mezzo ’o mare*” or “*O sole mio*,” to feel Italian.

The tragic and yet understandable choice made by past generations of immigrants, due to either external pressures or personal choice, was to forget the culture of origin, refrain from teaching their language and customs to their American-born children, and thereby assure cultural dilution. Such dilution, of course, presents a range of “attachments” to native Italian culture, and the process of integration for past immigrants demanded a number of cultural sacrifices, first and foremost the renunciation of one’s identity of origin. Today we may not yet be free from this danger, even though the situation has improved, for mainstream America does not miss an opportunity to inculcate, for example, that “we are all Americans.” Again, it is for this reason too that the music we play is such a determining factor in our lives here. We do not play this music only because we like it or because we are culture bearers. We *must* play it—just as we must eat, drink or sleep. It is a matter of personal survival.

On the other side of the Atlantic, the last sixty years of Italian history witnessed the progressive (and definitive) erosion of our peasant roots by mainstream Italian culture. This is due largely to a pervasive adoption of American lifestyles and the myth of America, and the further dilution of the essence of Italian identity. What Italy is today is difficult to say and perhaps painful to explain to ourselves. We here speak about postmodern, industrial, metropolitan Italy, but we believe that contemporary Italy is not a coherent whole because coherence is no longer part of Italian life. But this discussion goes beyond the scope of this chapter. We can say here that *how* we position ourselves in relationship to contemporary Italian life greatly reflects our immigrant experience. We feel as though we stand between two countries. Woody Guthrie would say, “I ain’t got no home in this world anymore.” By this we mean that the “Italian” world in which we live is really of our own making. It is found neither in Italy nor in the United States but is instead a space constructed between and betwixt imagination and reality.

In our view, Italy is a sadder place today than ever before. Just around the 2005 elections, in an online open letter, writer Oriana Fallaci called it a place of “fried air . . . [an empty] bottle littering the environment . . . a place where sociopolitical confusion, administrative corruption, and a progressive involution of the individual, are the rule of life” (Fallaci 2005). One can say that nothing has changed, but indeed everything *has*, and such change is even more evident to us as outsiders returning to visit year after year. Despite its shortcomings, however, it is *our* country, and we love it all the same. We believe that, tragically, Italians in general are no longer able not only to return to the sense of a rooted culture but simply to relate to it. The connection has been decisively severed.

Ironically, though, if a place where such a connection might still find a way of renewing itself, it is in the United States. In the near future, it may be among newer generations of Italian Americans that we find an interest in the meaning of its oral history and traditional culture due to a growing awareness of the importance of peasant culture. Lately, we sensed this emerging potential among a better-educated and more historically connected younger generation of Italian Americans who may reclaim a peasant past. And such a past is exactly whence 90 percent or more of them culturally derive. If trends progress, as they currently seem to, we could be witnesses to a surprising epiphany of Italian oral tradition on American soil.

In conclusion, to really know who we are as a community it is vital to be aware of our past, both the spoken and the unspoken, the written and the unwritten, the Italian and the American. It is a very long past, filled with both greatness and iniquity. In Italy, oral culture was largely denied a place in history, while in the United States it has been substituted by a nontraditional genre that is instead erroneously considered *traditional*. These have been historical decisions that bear no face or heart to which we can attribute direct blame, but they have cost us Italians—everywhere—dearly. Nonetheless, if to music is ascribed the mission and the function of catalyst and mediator of oral culture and history, through it we can shine a strong light on our fuller cultural heritage and help present the Italian American community as more richly articulated and complex.

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## Notes

1. The term *cultura popolare* is translated not as “popular” culture but rather as traditional rural as well as urban working-class culture.
2. Enzo Fina, the coauthor of this chapter, has reasons and stories to fill ten more papers on matters of traditional culture and his life among the peasants into which he was born and raised.
3. The term *galantuomo* means “gentleman.” In the use of this term, I am inspired by Serafino Amabile Guastella, *Le Parità* (1995), in which he reports that among peasants of the province of Modica, Sicily, the *galantuomo*, or gentleman, had nothing gentle nor just about him. Guastella moreover reports that an alternative term for *galantuomini* was *cappelli*, or “top hats” versus the *berretti*, or “caps” for peasants.
4. *Musica popolare* in Italy means music from the lower classes as well as folk music.
5. The 1990s brought new terminologies to the world of Italian popular music, especially in the fusion of World Music with traditional and pop styles. Words such as *riproposta*, or “re-proposal,” and *contaminazione*, or “contamination,” became part of the normal musical lexicon. *Contaminazione* has even lost its ordinarily negative, polluting sense (Catalano 1999) and has been ascribed a new, rather positive meaning that welcomes injections from music and sounds foreign to the music of a given culture. On the one hand, the concept of contamination can be acceptable as a practical label, defining a certain way of making music. On the other hand, the concept in itself is somewhat vacuous because all music is about contamination. The word is here specifically used as a postmodern substitution of terms such as “influence” and “inspiration,” as well as the inherent give-and-take process that characterizes the path of becoming a musician.
6. *Senso comune* generally means common sense. It is intended here as “mainstream thinking.”
7. Sardinian single-beating-reed folk clarinet similar to but not as complex as the *launeddas*. Both the *benas* and the *launeddas* are considered the sound representatives of Sardinia (Catalano 1994). Reed clarinets of this sort can be found in almost every country around the Mediterranean.
8. The *chitarra battente*, or “guitar one can beat on,” is a native Italian guitar that was already quite common in the sixteenth century. It usually features about ten strings of the same gauge (0.09-inch) arranged in five courses. The body is deeper than a regular modern guitar but also slimmer, with a narrow waist and broad upper and lower bouts. The back is made of heat-bent wood slabs in the manner of mandolins or the Arabic *oud*. The rosette on the sound board is usually decorated with shoebox cardboard cut sometimes in a very complicated and ingenious way as it goes down inside the sound hole and is attached by means of a thin metal thread to the bottom of the instrument. This creates a buzz, an extra-musical sound that is much appreciated by peasants and shepherds alike. The *chitarra battente* was common throughout the country, but today it is still made by very few artisans in the regions of Calabria and Puglia. In Puglia it is still actively used in the northern part of the region known as the Gargano.
9. The *fina* is Enzo Fina’s personal elaboration of the African lamellaphone called mbira. It consists, generally, of a wooden trough functioning as a resonator on whose top are mounted a series of metal keys (lamellae) of varying length that are played with the index and the thumb of both hands. Enzo’s version presents three rows of metal keys for each hand mounted on wooden soundboard covering a much larger and deeper resonator. He uses materials such as terracotta, gourds, fiberglass, and wood for his instruments. On the cultural aspects and uses of the *fina*, see Catalano (2005).

10. Bull-roarers, known in Italian as *rombi*, are idiophones making hums or buzzes. The original bull-roarer consists of a rhomboidal-shaped piece of wood to which a string is attached at one tip. The player swings around the string, and as he does so the rhomboid piece of wood spins around its own axis, creating a hum or a buzz. Magic powers are ascribed to this object in many cultures, and it is considered a sacred instrument that only men can touch in Papua New Guinea. In Italy, these instruments can be found in Sardinia and are almost exclusively used by children as noisemakers. The instrument we use in our performance is somewhat more complex. We do not use a string but two rubber bands stretched on a rectangular structure made of light wood sticks and raised by two movable bridges. It is swung vertically, like the propeller of an airplane delivering a dramatic effect both visual and acoustic.
11. The term *ordigno* means “device” as in a “weapon.” The idea of musicians using musical instruments as weapons to symbolically use in a sound revolution intrigued those authors as much as it intrigues us.
12. Filicudi is one of seven volcanic islands just off the north shore of Sicily.
13. The Salentine peninsula is the “heel of the boot.” It stretches strategically like a natural pier at the confluence of the Adriatic and Ionian seas toward the southeast. An ancient land, a point of passage to and from the East, its people witnessed arrivals and departures of conquerors, invaders, refugees, and migrants (Del Giudice 2002).
14. The *pizzica* is part of a large repertoire of songs and dances from the oral tradition of the Salento. Such a repertoire is an accumulation of centuries of music performed during home therapy, called melotherapy (de Martino, 1994 [1961]), as the cure for the tarantula bite. Whether real or imagined, the bite caused the victim to fall into a complex state of prostration. The peasant community agreed on considering official medical science inadequate in solving this sort of problem, while music was deemed most efficient. Therefore, in order that the victim be returned to a state of sanity and normalcy, a quartet of musicians would be summoned by the victim’s immediate family. The quartet featured a violin, a frame drum, a guitar, and a button accordion. The leader of the band would test the patient with different sounds and rhythms and, depending on the reaction of the person, would decide whether or not to proceed with the therapy. Such therapy consisted of dancing for extended periods of time to the frenetic and obsessive rhythm of the *pizzica* until one received Saint Paul the Apostle’s healing grace. Most of the dance time was experienced under a trance-like state of consciousness. (On *tarantismo*, see several of the contributions in Del Giudice and Van Deusen 2005.)
15. The *jembe* is a West African goblet-shaped hand drum very popular in Europe and the United States.
16. The oral tradition has used instruments from the art tradition such as the violin or foreign ones such as the accordion or button accordion. The focal point of this issue is the *way* in which these instruments are used rather than on what they are and their place of origin.
17. In this “alternative” publication the pages are unnumbered.
18. Editor’s note: Some of these mysteries have been recently solved by the Italian Oral History Institute’s Web site: <http://www.ItalianLosAngeles.org>.
19. *Danza scherma*, or *danza dei coltelli*, is a dance simulating the steps and movements of a knife or sword fight. Usually danced by two men, the movements derive from ancient chivalric codes that are believed to have been invented by the patron saint San Rocco.
20. Literally “popular-esque.” Bela Bartók used this same term in *Scritti sulla musica popolare* (1955).

21. The issue of patriotism always catches us off guard because we do not know what to make of it. "Patriotism is the virtue of the vicious," Oscar Wilde once said, and for good reason. If patriotism equates with supremacy, predestination, or nationalism, it is to be rejected. If it means loving one's country of origin as the system of culturally and historically constructed symbolic forms such as language, food, music, and other behaviors defining who we are, then it is to be respected. With reference to Columbus Day, it simply does not exist in the Italian civic calendar as a mandatory holiday. As an Italian, quite frankly, I would not elect this dubious figure as a cultural hero. Today, thanks to the monumental *Repertorium Columbianum* (Symcox 2005), it is clearer how Columbus's legacy has been detrimental.

## The North End Is a State of Mind Surrounded by Water

*Augusto Ferraiuolo*

This chapter<sup>1</sup> presents a historical and cultural investigation of the manner in which the Italian Americans of Boston's North End have negotiated identities by manipulating symbols in their religious festivals.

The perception of the North End as an Italian neighborhood began in the early twentieth century despite the fact that the neighborhood was, and is, far from homogeneous. The Italian settlements in the North End<sup>2</sup> feature ethnic enclaves based on the Italian village of origin and on chain migration based on kinship and friendship. Familial strategies are modeled on an almost endogamous pattern, seeming to encourage the notion of inner separations. The historical and social dynamics that produce and reinforce the racial idea, together with the ethnic group's discrimination (which build symbolic and territorial boundaries in a twofold, self-ascriptive and ascriptive, process of the symbolic constitution of ethnicity) will require analysis.

Religious festivals occur weekly in Boston's North End during the summer and are organized by voluntary religious societies venerating various Madonnas (*delle Grazie*, *del Soccorso*, etc.) and other Catholic saints. In order to explore such symbols, this chapter will first trace the geographic, historical, and political boundaries of Boston's North End from 1630 to the present. Indeed, following Fredrick Barth's seminal work (1969), any discussion concerning ethnicity must involve territorial and symbolic boundaries. Boundaries inevitably influence the life of both insider and outsider, dichotomizing the "we" and the "other." In the case of Boston's North End, settlers were originally well-to-do English merchants and subsequently impoverished Irish, Jews, and Italians (when the neighborhood became a slum). This chapter describes how these latter populations were sustained by mechanisms of chain migration, marriage strategies, job niches, and residential self-segregation.

The second part of this chapter turns to the analysis of festive practices. It is demonstrated that, in contrast to their Italian counterparts, North End festivals

focus not on correct *belief* (orthodoxy) but on the correct performance of *practices* (orthopraxy). This transformation posits a process of “stylization” characteristic of a declared and “imagined community” (Anderson 1983) seeking to safeguard its increasingly valuable and increasingly scarce resource of ephemeral ethnic identity.

### The North End

The first time I went to the North End, I followed the Freedom Trail, a tiny red line painted on streets through downtown Boston to make the tourist enterprise of visiting the historical sites of the city easier. Exiting the subway, I followed the red line all the way to Downtown Crossing, not lingering at the Old State House. I gave a quick look at the window of the Old Corner Bookstore, rapidly crossed Faneuil Hall, but stopped long enough to pay due homage to Sam Adams’s statue. (I am not a proper or even improper Bostonian, I am not even an American, but I do like a good beer.) For consistency, I also indulged at the Union Oyster House in a ritual cup of clam chowder. Although running late, I allowed myself a stop at the Holocaust Monument for another personal ritual of respect. It was Saturday morning, and therefore Haymarket was crowded with people shopping for fruit and seafood, but I found my way through the multitude and reached my final destination: I was entering Boston’s North End.

The small entrance led to a sort of winding concrete tunnel overlooking the Big Dig, the gigantic construction of the subterranean Central Artery. Along the tunnel walls no advertisements of any kind were posted, but instead historical maps of the city, and municipal coats-of-arms of many Italian cities: for example, Naples, Parma, Rome. As I look back over my fieldwork notes, I see that I moved from initial surprise and astonishment at the latter to an explanation of these urban decorations. After all, they were commercial advertisements for the two most appealing and marketable resources of the neighborhood: history and ethnicity. It is around these two fundamental issues that this chapter will unfold.

### Ethnicity

The North End was, as mentioned above, the slum where the social drift, brought about largely by immigrants, occurred. The transformation of Boston’s North End from a desirable place to a slum suitable only for the city’s social outcasts was certainly slow, heterogeneous, and traumatic—and yet it was expected. The process was aided by various economic factors. A new industrialism caused the economic crisis of the area’s small artisans and craftsmen alike. The persistence of a sea-based mercantile economy turned the North End into an increasingly crowded and noisy place where sailor and transient could live, even if only temporarily. The neighborhood’s decay can be seen therefore as a function of the transformation of a society from preindustrial to capitalist. The need for unskilled and cheap workers should be considered a fundamental pull factor for the impressive waves of immigrants beginning in the nineteenth century. The creation of a slum for immigrants, therefore, the only suitable settlement close to

the industrial area—marginalizing them by social if not territorial boundaries—was an urban necessity.

The 1880s were an important turning point in the ethnic fabric of the North End. For the first time after years of Irish mass migration in the nineteenth century, their population began declining. In 1865, of the almost 26,000 inhabitants of the neighborhood, 16,000 were Irish. In 1880 (after only fifteen years), the total population was approximately 23,800. But soon the population increased again. The census of 1900 shows a new trend of growth with figures around 28,000. The changes in population can be explained largely by Irish flight toward new locations and new social status. The departure of the Irish was combined with the arrival of new immigrants from Eastern Europe (Russian Jews) and Southern Europe (southern Italians). The census of 1895 reported the number of Italians in the North End had reached 7,700, while the Jewish numbered 6,200—a considerable increase from the almost 1,000 Italians and the few hundred Jews present in the neighborhood as reported in the 1880 census.

The Genoese community settled in the Ferry Court area and North Bennett Street until the first decade of the twentieth century, when, according to De Marco (1996, 24), they “felt uncomfortable living in a now predominantly Southern Italian neighborhood.” When they left they were replaced not by other northern Italians, who by this time preferred emigration to South America, but by other southern Italians.

Another ethnic enclave can be seen in the area bounded by Prince, Salem, Tilston, and Hanover Streets, inhabited by Abruzzesi and a few Neapolitans.

The area bounded by Hanover Street, North Square, and Fulton Street saw the growth of Avellinesi, who came from the towns of Taurasi, Chiusano San Domenico, Mirabella Eclano, Lapio, Montemarano, and Montefalcione.

The Sicilians, with a large community from Sciacca, came to Boston during a second phase, populating the area around North Street and also taking the place of the Genoese group in Ferry Court.

The settlement pattern is well known and self-evident: the Italians tended to cluster together on the basis of the village of origin, in relatively small enclaves. In order to better understand this phenomenon, it is necessary to remember the Italian scenario at the end of the nineteenth century and their settlement patterns in the United States. I am arguing, on the basis of well-established scholarship (e.g., Vecoli and Gabaccia), the necessity of deconstructing the idea of *Italians* and proposing *Italy* as a place of many diasporas. I therefore agree with the idea that migrants became Italians in the receiving country. A village-based *campanilismo* (the sense of belonging symbolized by the bell tower of the local church)<sup>3</sup> is the cultural reference point carried from the country of origin, and chain migration became the principal engine for constituting microethnic enclaves in the receiving country. Even with regard to language, at the end of the century few migrants could speak standard Italian—that is, the Tuscan dialect imposed after Italy’s Unification (*Risorgimento*). While the literary koiné was no one’s native language, regional dialect was very often the only language known by working-class immigrants (Mangione and Morreale 1996). I report a personal experience in the North End by way of example. One Saturday morning I was at the Fishermen

Club, where the Sciaccatani gather to play cards, chat, or just enjoy the company of friends. An old man approached me to ask if it was true that I was doing research on the club and the migrants. As soon as I told him that this was the reason I was at the club, he asked me to interview him, because he could tell me a lot of things since he was one of the older immigrants, having come to Boston as a child at the end of the 1920s. I immediately asked him if we could tape the conversation, and he answered me affirmatively but also said that he wanted to be interviewed in Italian. Of course, I agreed—but to my great embarrassment, a few minutes later, I asked him to switch back to English. He was using such a very strict and archaic form of Sicilian dialect that I could not understand him. I am fluent in the Roman and Neapolitan dialects and I can understand “modern” Sicilian, as well as other southern Italian dialects, but I was not prepared for *Sciaccatano* of the late 1920s. The importance of dialect as social boundary is often underestimated by scholars but is fundamental. It is a strong identifying and unifying tool, as well as a marker of regional divisions. Assuming the Italian language as the dominant and theoretically universally known language in the country of origin, dialect can even be seen as a form of cultural intimacy, strengthening the ethnic group identity on a local base. But it can also be a source of embarrassment with regard to the outsider point of view.

In the 1930s a new trend became evident that later—and today—can be considered one of the fundamental characteristics of the neighborhood: the food business. The North End, being a self-contained and marginalized area, had always offered to its inhabitants many bars and restaurants. At the end of the nineteenth century, the North End was already filled with inexpensive little restaurants or *pizzerie*. It was possible to eat at La Bella Napoli, Il Garden Turin, La Stella Ristorante Napoletano, or La Cucina della Casareccia, for five, ten, or fifteen cents (Martellone 1973, 284). In 1909, according to the *Boston City Directory*, eight restaurants were active in the North End: Café Marliave (on Bosworth Street), Leverone and Porcella (on North Street), Parker House Restaurant (on School Street), Ponticelli and Palumbo (on Parmenter Street), and four others with no name, in North Square, Garden Center, and North Street.

In the 1930s, restaurants like the Grotto Azura (*sic*) or Posillipo were renowned, attracting not only local customers but outsiders as well. The food business, thanks to a general appreciation for Italian cuisine, became important, then fundamental, for the local economy, deeply influencing present-day negotiations of ethnic identities.

The process of change from a slum to the desirable area it is today was slow. Even if the neighborhood was recognized as poor, other variables determined the increase of a now-continuous centripetal movement of new settlers, mainly young urban professionals. A first factor of attraction was surely the low rent, but the perceived safety of the area also became important. For the first time in many years, the neighborhood was described not as a slum but as a “model of city life” (Jacobs 1961), opposing the “ambience of the Italian way of life” to the hectic American way. This led to another pull factor: the appreciation for a community lifestyle modeled on the Italian village, now evident even to outsiders. Hanover Street became populated with several Italian-style restaurants and other ethnic businesses, attracting tourists

on the Freedom Trail and customers from the city at large. Overall economic prosperity became evident with an increase in real estate prices, even before the dramatic change of the 1970s, with the Waterfront urban renewal.

For the first time in the history of the North End, ethnicity became an economic value, introducing the necessity for local businesses to be, or at least to present themselves and the neighborhood as, Italian. And a strategic essentialism, claiming *authentic* identity and reinforcing or even inventing whatever could symbolize this ethnicity, was necessary for the economic prosperity of the North End. This was even more necessary, given a time when identity was becoming a scarce resource. If in the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s Italians were still overwhelmingly the principal ethnic group, the trend dramatically changed direction at the beginning of the 1970s.

According to the *1970 Census of Populations and Housing*, the residents of the North End represented approximately 10,000, with 63 percent declaring Italian descent. In 1980, with a decreased number of residents, now 8,000 people declared Italian descent, less than 50 percent of the entire population (3 percent were Italian migrants). In the 1990s residents of Italian ancestry represented only 43 percent of the local population.

Data are of course important to understanding the phenomenon, but I am also very much interested—I should say *more so*—in the residents' perception of their own environment.

I asked Sal and Therese, consultants and friends from the Fishermen Society, if they thought the neighborhood was changing in ethnic composition. They said, "It changed, it changed, dramatically. There is not really a lot of Sciacatani left, not even many Italians. The population, if I had to take a guess, probably can be 20 percent . . . Italians here in the North End."

I asked the same question to Jason during a visit to the Saint Anthony of Padua of Montefalcione Club, and the answer (therefore the perception), was quite different. For Jason, Italians in the neighborhood represented approximately 45 percent. Why this difference? Of course, it may merely be a matter of better or worse information, but my hypothesis is that perception is also connected with the job niche markets of the two groups of reference. Jason belongs to the Montefalcionesi, a group traditionally involved in factory jobs or as clerks in small businesses; therefore here social mobility is only partially inherent with relocation of work places. Sal and Therese, belonging to the Sciacatani, who were overwhelmingly fishermen, experienced at least indirectly the emigration of many of their community to different areas, such as Gloucester, following the fishing business, by then no longer viable in the North End.

Leaving the discussion of other social processes aside, I will conclude that the paradox of the North End seems clear. Prosperity is now intimately connected to a declared ethnicity. Therefore, the North End must maintain its Italianness, even if the Italians are gone. The need for ethnic identity, above all now that it is considered a scarce resource, is central to the economy of the North End. And every symbol declaring a sort of *Italianità* must be exploited.

The North End *must be* an "Italian neighborhood" in the general perception, and it is important to reinforce the now necessary Italian stereotypes. The North

End therefore becomes an imagined community, a state of mind surrounded by water, a declared *Gemeinschaft*, where identity and authenticity become economic values and exchangeable goods.

### History

As stated above, identity negotiations, inevitably involving the dichotomization of “we” and “the other,” support a sense of ascriptive identity for exclusive groups, and can be studied through the historical manipulation of territorial and symbolic boundaries. It is interesting to analyze the dynamic transformation of the North End’s boundaries, with the creation and recreation of the so-called Island of Boston, an exclusive and marginal place where ethnic identities have always been claimed.

Boston’s North End is an area of almost a hundred acres, half a mile long and wide, bounded by the Atlantic Ocean on the north and west sides. The ocean can be considered, above all, a physical frontier, even if it is embedded with many symbolic meanings: the proprietary feeling of territoriality and belonging connected with the ocean is certainly very different between a North Ender originating from Montefalcione (in the Monti Picentini, near Avellino), working in a factory or operating a local, *terra firma*, business—and a neighbor from Sciacca (on the coast of Sicily), a fisherman who from generation to generation expanded the idea of territoriality beyond streets and buildings to include ships and waterways. Another physical border, nearer but no less symbolic, has become the Big Dig project separating the North End from the rest of the city on the south and west sides. Despite the many problems connected with this almost endless public work, it formed a barrier around the North End, which became in time more of an exotic, secret destination to protect and discover, favoring forms of *strategic essentialism* (Spivak 1990, 1996)<sup>4</sup> of the “Italian” neighborhood.

Neighborhood boundaries are historically and culturally determined and change over time. The North End was a hilly peninsula, called Shawmut by the local Native Americans. Reverend William Blaxton (or Blackstone) was the first European settler in the area. The solitary reverend settled in the vicinity of present-day Beacon and Spruce Streets, slightly southwest of the North End, until the arrival of the Puritans led by John Winthrop in 1630. The Puritans first settled in Charlestown, on the mainland, but soon moved, perhaps for lack of fresh water, to the Shawmut Peninsula (now called Trimountain, for its topography). On September 7, 1630, they renamed the area “Boston.”

A first manipulation of boundaries can be seen in colonial times with Mill Creek. The erection of a dam and the construction of a trench had two important effects on the landscape of the North End. First, it drained off the shallow water of the Mill Pond covering a large section of the peninsula (today’s Salem and North Margin Streets); second, Mill Creek divided Boston in two, shaping the North End as the “Island of Boston.” The North End was physically separated from the rest of the city, connected through bridges at North and Hanover Streets. The North End is now completely surrounded by water: the harbor, the Charles River, Mill Pond,

and Mill Creek. The making of Mill Creek as a boundary involved a negotiation inside relatively stable and homogenous groups and affirmed the identification of the specific area, at that time the economic center of the town. Mill Creek, desirable for economic reasons, also separated the town, generating differentiations and exclusive groups.

Economic growth during the last part of the seventeenth century and most of the eighteenth was impressive. North Square, adjacent the harbor in continuous expansion, was the social center of the neighborhood and was characterized by the flourishing of many kinds of commercial activity and above all by skilled artisans. But the economic expansion of the North End became the cause of its growth as well as its demise. The area remained the center of the sea-based economy: besides the many wharves for ship departures and landings were built an increasing number of dockyards for repairs and stockyards. This drew an increasing number of sailors and transients to the area, thereby creating a less-desirable neighborhood. Those residents who could afford to move elsewhere did.

The business center of the new industrial and financial economy was now downtown. The neighborhood was still a crowded center of social life but began progressively losing its attractiveness and charm. This social negotiation promoted the filling in of Mill Creek. The water was cut off from Mill Creek in 1828, and the North End was no longer the Island of Boston. The disappearance of this artificial border should be seen as one of the symbols of a fading identity of the original group; the first Puritan settlers, spreading out to different areas, no longer needed a territorial boundary to protect the North End.

The North End was becoming a slum, a place for any kind of social drifter, first of all the immigrants. The next identity phase of the neighborhood was shaped by territorial boundaries and even more strongly by symbolic borders such as ethnicity and social class. These are the effects of an impressive immigration movement lasting through the twentieth century, involving first the Irish, then Jewish, Portuguese, and finally Italians.

The Central Artery Project can be considered (at least it is considered as such by North Enders) the first modern attempt to again divide the city. Started after World War II, the John F. Fitzgerald Expressway was finished in 1959. Again, the process of boundary making inevitably provoked profound changes in the neighborhood, the most important being that the North End was again an island, separated from the rest of the city.

Territorial boundaries are made, or at least affirmed, when the class that inhabits the area becomes economically strong. The slum does not need to be geographically isolated when it is bounded by symbols and representations of ethnic and class identities. Thus why the need for any more tangible boundary? I analyzed the territorial boundaries of the North End by paying attention almost exclusively to the southern border. But that is not the only border. The waters of Boston Harbor represent its other frontier. In 1964, the Boston Redevelopment Authority proposed the North End/Waterfront Urban Renewal Plan. It is important to keep in mind that the late 1950s and 1960s were characterized by an urban renewal systematically directed against working-class people and their neighborhoods, such as the West End, East End, and Charlestown. Boston's urban renewal intentionally

aimed at revitalizing downtown business districts by creating new residences or rehabilitating old working-class areas for middle- and upper-class residents. The strategic indifference toward the lower social groups, provoking their expulsion from the center of the city and the creation of ghettos in peripheral areas (Mattapan, north Dorchester, Roxbury), produced an intense but often unfruitful reaction. A *new* boundary was important to preserve the *new* urban aspect of the North End.

Technically, the Fitzgerald Expressway Project was a failure (see note 3). In order to remedy some of its problems, urban planners proposed the replacement of the expressway with a Central Artery/Tunnel project (CA/T), better known as the Big Dig, thereby replacing the elevated highway with an underground expressway. The final goal of the CA/T was not only to solve the traffic problems caused by an obsolete highway but also to reconnect neighborhoods drastically separated from the city. Is the North End losing a defense for its acquired high social status? No. This time what is in danger is not the economic status but the ethnic identity of the neighborhood.

### Claiming Ephemeral Identity

My current research focuses on a specific symbol of Boston's *Italianità*: its religious festivals as *complex festive practices*. These festivals, venerating different Madonnas and various other Catholic patron saints, occur with weekly regularity in Boston's North End during the summertime and are organized by voluntary religious societies. The North End festivals celebrate a variety of local town origins: the Madonna del Soccorso, celebrated by the Sicilians of Sciacca; Saint Anthony of Padua, celebrated by the Montefalconesi; San Domenico, protector of Augusta, Sicily; and so on.

I suggest that an initial pair of reflections characterize the festive practices of the North End: (a) the heterogeneity of the Bostonian feasts vis-à-vis the analogous rituals in the village of origin, and (b) the homogeneity of the North End's festive practices, which cluster around a specific local performative pattern.

I argue that these practices are evidence of a dislocation from an original *orthodoxy*, or "correct belief," toward the creation and perpetuation of ritual *forms* considered correct, a level that Wilfred Smith and James Watson would call *orthopraxy*. I propose a more complex model, integrating *disemic* declinations (the combination of official and vernacular discourses; see Herzfeld 1980, 1985, 1997b) immanent in the festive performances. It is indeed this combination of the official and vernacular discourses around the feast that make possible the correct practice in its moments of proposal, performance, control, and reproposal. From this perspective a nonlinear model of orthopraxy seems extremely dynamic and becomes the privileged ground of expression of the asymmetric relations of power expressed within and by the social groups themselves.

The term *orthopraxy* (the ritual character, the correct practice or the body of practices accepted and recognized as correct) has a long history in theological study, often related to Judaism and some Islamic sects. It is also used in the

Christian world, with reference to the *Imitatio Christi*, the emulation of Christ's approach to poverty and oppression, as well as to the similar approach of the Christian Eastern Orthodox Church.

The seminal account of Wilfred Smith (1957) highlighted differences within Islam concerning what is good (or, better, right) more than what is true. Another fundamental contribution to the study of orthopraxy was made by James Watson (1988, 1996). His analysis of uniformity in funerary rites in late Imperial China demonstrates how cultural homogenization can be expressed in performance and practice. According to Watson, the sequence of the funeral rites displayed an impressive uniformity: "The proper performance of the rites, in the accepted sequence, was of paramount importance in determining who was and who was not deemed to be fully 'Chinese.' Performance, in other words, took precedence over belief" (Watson 1988, 4).

Boston's North End festive practices likewise display an extraordinary uniformity expressed by the rituals themselves and through historical reconstruction. The two events are not similar: Watson (1988, xi) suggested that the normative structure of the Chinese ritual was produced by complex interaction between actual practices and written codification of earlier customs recorded by literate elites. In the festive practices of Boston's North End, the interactions are not so clearly vertical (i.e., mandated from above) but tend toward the horizontal: no literate elites writing about past forms are involved in the process of codification, but rather an intense mechanism of imitation and control are present. It is here that we can find the disemic aspect of the feast's discourse. Looking at the microcosm of religious societies that ultimately decide the festive practices, the dialectic between leadership and group is still evident even if their cleavage is not glaringly apparent. Practices are not imposed, *sic et simpliciter*, but rather proposed (mainly by the leadership) and modulated by consensus.

Correct practices are simultaneously signal and instrument of the neighborhood's integration. The ritual of the feast reaffirms the compact ethnic enclave through the procession, but the times of rigidly bounded communities are definitively past, and the procession traces symbolic borders not at all coinciding with the original habitat. The ethnic enclave's boundaries are now blurred if not completely dissolved. Yet paradoxically, processions strongly reaffirm the boundaries of the neighborhood. The dimension of heterogeneity (the different and historically formed ethnic enclaves) and homogeneity (the neighborhood) are expressed by the festive practices.

The origin of Boston's North End feast ought to be seen in (a) mythical past of the village of origin, (b) historical past of the ethnic enclave in the North End, and (c) the historical present of the continuous confrontation between the contemporary festive performances of the neighborhood still declaring, on one hand, the microdifferences between ethnic enclaves and, on the other hand, performing the specific pattern of the broader social group.

The mythical past of the village seems to be situated along a metahistorical plane, populated by ancestors not only never known, not only belonging to a cultural and geographical elsewhere, but also shrouded in a mythic dimension. In other words, sustaining the world, and life, means to ritually repeat the founding

myth. The feast celebrates not only the divinities, through worshipping their icons, but also the genesis of the group leaving an imagined land—which is also worshipped. In this part of the ritual, the maintenance of the cult of the local patron saint can be seen as a form of orthodoxy or correct belief.

The second source for the festive performances in the North End is the historical past of the neighborhood itself and is intimately connected with the formation and maintenance of ethnic enclaves. The feast is connected in this case to the historical memory of the group and to the historical development of the specific feast. Notably, during the feasts flyers with the history of the feast and of the society are distributed. Fundamental figures in this case are the founding members of the religious societies, particularly relevant in the United States, where this heroic idea is in tune with the national ethos.

The third source, the comparison with similar feasts of the neighborhood, is the historic present of the festive practices seen as a whole. I am suggesting this third source as the most important to the development and the stabilization of practices seen as correct and seldom violated. The feast becomes an expression of the many feasts.

What kind of mechanism is activated in order to achieve the correct practice? The process is at first characterized by aesthetic stylization. Garcia Canclini (1988, 479) proposed the idea of double reduction: popular forms moved (a) from the rich ethnic diversity of the regional to the unified national and (b) from the flux of social process to that of codified object. Naturally, in the North End there is no national tradition to reinvent, invent, or defend: the North End is just a neighborhood smaller than a Disneyland parking lot. But the necessity of a strategic essentialism is very important for the survival of the local economy.

The term *reduction* carries a semantic halo that in the long run risks invalidating its application in the case of the North End. Reduction (from the richness of ethnic differences) seems to presuppose an esthetic process of *loss* of characteristics. While agreeing with Garcia Canclini's main points, for semantic reasons I opt for the term *stylization*. The term allows one to underline two aspects: the creation of a "style" (in this case, the pattern of practices) and the conformity to a "style" (in this case, the respect of correct practices). But also aesthetic stylization avoids the "dangerous" issue of nostalgia. Rather than thinking of a lost past to be regained, we may consider the political and economic processes involved here. After all, these formerly subaltern classes have increased their status and opportunities and are no longer a marginalized and dispossessed community.

Cultural markers as icons and festivals are thus far from being "authentic"—whatever this term can mean—they are products historically determined in situations of contact between cultures (like the ethnic enclave's culture) and changes over time. They are phantasms, evocations, and they represent ephemeral entities that inevitably can generate only phantasms, evocations, and ephemeral identities. The only claim for authentic ethnic identity is a strategic cry, a cry that is fundamental for the economic good of the social group and is intentionally shouted during festive practice. Identity is a performance, reaching its climax during the procession of the saints, but always immanent in the lives of the neighbors, affecting their lives. Everything is ephemeral during the festive

practices of the North End. More than ever, therefore, the North End, as well as its identities, is a state of mind surrounded by water.

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### Notes

1. This chapter was originally part of a larger study for my PhD dissertation. See Ferraiuolo 2006 and forthcoming in 2009 as a SUNY Press publication.
2. It is possible to trace early Italian settlers in the Irish enclave, anticipating the migrants' wave of the end of the nineteenth century. With high probability the first Italian immigrant in the North End, Marquis Niccolò Reggio, from Genova, arrived in the North End in 1832. This Italian businessman was a shipowner who contributed to the expansion of the shipping trade in the city and who settled in the neighborhood, probably to be close to his business. He served as consul in Boston for the Papal States, Spain, and the kingdoms of Sardinia and of the Two Sicilies. Reggio, even if an atypical immigrant, is representative of the early examples of Italians in the United States. In Boston, Reggio and "exotic" migrants like him were well accepted. The same thing cannot be said about the Italians who fifty years later started to populate the area.
3. The issue of *campanilismo* is extensively discussed, especially in relation to the so-called *questione meridionale*. From this perspective, Gramsci 1971 is fundamental. In ethnic studies, see, for example, Vecoli 1964, 1969; Gabaccia 2000; Mangione and Morreale 1996; and, in anthropological studies, Galt 1992; Bell 1979; Schneider and Schneider 1976; and Schneider 1998.
4. Strategic essentialism can be described as the claim for "authenticity" in order to preserve or even to invent an ethnic identity.

## The Alms-Seeking Tradition of Sant'Antonio Abate in 1920s Western Pennsylvania

*Michael Di Virgilio*

This chapter examines an alms-seeking song (*canto di questua*) from the late 1910s that I recorded in 1995 in Jeannette, Pennsylvania, during an interview with the late Giovanni “John” Persichetti. After providing a brief description of the nature of my research, I will offer some historical background to both Mr. Persichetti’s village of origin in the Abruzzo region, Italy and the town of Jeannette. I will then examine the text of the song itself and posit that it reflected the worldview of immigrants of peasant origin and that its performance in American context altered the meaning and purpose of the song in a manner that ultimately contributed to the demise of the very tradition.

In 1991, I worked with the Folklife Division of the National Park Service’s America’s Industrial Heritage Project in Jeannette, a small city in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania. In conjunction with others researching various aspects of the glassmaking industry in Jeannette, I collected oral histories from members of the large Italian American community there. I returned to the area in 1995 when I received a grant from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission to specifically conduct research on emigration from Torino di Sangro to Westmoreland County.

The agricultural village of Torino di Sangro, located in the Province of Chieti, Abruzzo, at the mouth of the Sangro river on the Adriatic coast, had approximately four thousand residents (called *Torinesi*) by 1880. Like other villages in Chieti, noticeable emigration from Torino di Sangro began in the early 1880s. At that time, a few *Torinesi* artisans traveled to southern France and to Milan, while a few *contadini* (peasants) traveled to work on the Pampas of Argentina. In 1890 and 1891, a few artisans and *contadini* traveled to the United States, particularly Brooklyn, Philadelphia, and Yonkers, to work in construction, clothing manufacture,

and shoe manufacture. Beginning in 1892, both artisan and peasant families took advantage of subsidies and traveled to work on the coffee plantations in São Paulo, Brazil. By 1900, more Torinesi began to travel to the United States. Barbers went to Brooklyn, while tailors and shoemakers went primarily to the Philadelphia area. The Frank Di Berardino agency at 821 Christian Street in Philadelphia recruited Italian migrants of peasant origin, especially from the Province of Chieti, to work in the bituminous mines of Pennsylvania and West Virginia and railroad and construction projects throughout the northeastern United States. By 1901, Torinesi were working in coal mines and with railroads in the greater Connellsville Coke Region in Fayette, Indiana, and Westmoreland Counties in western Pennsylvania and, by 1903, were working in the coal mines in McDowell County, West Virginia.

Over the next ten years, emigration from Torino di Sangro ebbed and flowed, and gradually permanent settlements emerged. Between 1907 and 1909, Torinesi migrants made many return trips between Italy and the United States and to a lesser extent between Italy and Argentina (Priori 1957, 600). By 1910, Torinesi “colonies” could be found in Baggaley, Branch, Ernest, Jeannette, and Philadelphia in Pennsylvania; Brooklyn; Buenos Aires; Holyoke, Massachusetts; Marseille, France; Waterbury, Connecticut; Welch, West Virginia; and Wilmington, Delaware. Other Torinesi migrants and families were scattered elsewhere and found a wide range of employment in areas such as Endicott, Frankfort, Rochester, and Solvay in New York State; Chicago and Joliet, Illinois; Rock Springs, Wyoming; and Zaraté, Argentina. They worked, for instance, in the coal mines of Baggaley, Branch, Ernest, and Welch; with Remington Arms in Frankfort; in metal manufacture in Waterbury; in the textile mills of Holyoke; and in the fiber mills in Wilmington. Emigration from Torino di Sangro increased again between the years 1911 and 1913, when most migrants traveled to the areas noted. During the war years of 1915 to 1918, migratory movement, in Priori’s words, “remained paralyzed” (Priori 1957, 600). In the postwar years, many families left Torino di Sangro to join relatives abroad. There was limited movement in the early 1920s, primarily to the United States. It ceased in 1924 when restrictive immigration laws took effect.

Unlike the majority of the other destinations, Jeannette was unique in that Italians, northern Italians particularly, were present in the town at its incorporation. When H. Sellers McKee and James A. Chambers established the Chambers and McKee Glass Company in 1888, Alexander Del Vitto “came to Jeannette with McKee glass works” the same year. Further, the 1889 application for a borough charter contains the name of one Guiseppi Montain [*sic*]. Giovanni Albertoletti, a master stonemason from Piemonte, “built the Hotel Star on Division Street early” before 1892, and his daughter was “one of the first babies born in Jeannette, May 13, 1889” (*History of Jeannette* 1976, 15, 67, 267). By the early 1900s, Italian immigrants of both northern and southern origin found work in the numerous glass manufacturers including the Chambers-McKee Window Glass (American Window Glass after 1903); the McKee-Jeannette Glass Company; the Jeannette Glass Company; the Westmoreland Specialty Company; the Pittsburgh Lamp, Brass, and Glass Company; and the Jeannette Shade and Novelty Company. Italian immigrants also found work at the Pennsylvania Tire and Rubber Company, a manufacturer of tires for bicycles and automobiles that began operations in Jeannette

in 1902 (Di Virgilio 2002, 15–16). By 1911, the Immigration Commission stated that “the chief foreign population of Jeanette [*sic*] is composed of Italians, about 15 per cent of whom are North Italians, with a total population of between 1,200 and 1,500” (Immigration Commission 1911a, 33).

Torinesi immigrants first arrived in Jeannette in approximately 1906. Many of them had worked as coal miners, coke drawers, and railroad laborers in the greater Connellsville Coke Region through the Di Berardino agency. Quite a few worked at Baggaley, one of the many coal and coke operations of the Henry Clay Frick Coal and Coke Company in the region. By 1913, Jeannette had attracted more migrants and their families from Torino di Sangro as well as Torinesi migrants who had traveled initially to areas in the Connellsville Coke Region, Wilmington, Philadelphia, Argentina, and Brazil. By 1920, many had settled their families on the south side of Jeannette in the city’s fifth ward. Present in the south side were other Abruzzesi immigrants from the villages of Fara Filiorum Petri, Lettopalena, and Palena. There, on adjacent lots in an area that they dubbed *la montagna*, Torinesi and other Italian immigrants either bought existing homes or built homes in a vernacular style that incorporated elements of Italian farmhouses (*masserie*), coal-patch duplexes, and the design of the brick row houses built for Jeannette’s glassworkers in the city’s first ward. The semirural nature of Jeannette was especially conducive to a continuation of the agricultural cycle, and Italian immigrants responded accordingly. Drawing on their agrarian heritage, they practiced subsistence agriculture by cultivating vegetables and fruits, constructed beehive bread ovens, and kept chickens, pigs, and other livestock. They followed many of the cultural traditions of their respective native villages by recognizing certain saints’ days and holidays and cooking and preserving foods in traditional fashion. In short, they kept a tenacious hold not only on their cultural identity (for Torinesi this was reflected in the development of an intricate godparent network), but also on their agrarian identity, particularly through the 1920s and the 1930s.<sup>1</sup>

In 1995, my primary informant was Mr. Persichetti. Born in Torino di Sangro in 1903, he immigrated to Brooklyn in 1921. He then went to work in the coal mines of Whitney, Pennsylvania, where the Hostetter Coal Company operated under the auspices of the Henry Clay Frick Coal and Coke Company. After a few years there, Mr. Persichetti moved to nearby Jeannette and then returned to Torino di Sangro in the late 1920s. He married Rita Marinelli, a goldsmith’s daughter and then returned permanently to Jeannette, where, after a period of unemployment during the Depression, he worked with the Pennsylvania Tire and Rubber Company.

During the course of my research, I visited with Mr. Persichetti often to discuss my work. He would elaborate on my findings and enjoyed sharing his life history and his memories of Torino di Sangro and the colony in Jeannette. One day I found a copy of a 1916 picture of the band of the Loggia Giuseppe Garibaldi (the primary Italian mutual-aid organization in Jeannette, established in 1911) and saw that several Torinesi were members, including Domenico De Vincentiis, who was 99 years old in 1995 and still resident in Jeannette.<sup>2</sup> As I discussed this with Mr. Persichetti, he remembered that De Vincentiis played the baritone and recalled that, during the 1920s, he and his covillagers in Jeannette performed an alms-seeking ritual on the sixteenth of January, the eve of the feast day of Sant’Antonio

Abate. With Giuseppe Di Fonso dressed as Sant'Antonio Abate, Torinesi men, with brass and woodwind accompaniment, proceeded through the south side of Jeannette, seeking foodstuffs. Rocco Di Fonso, son of Giuseppe Di Fonso and godson of John Persichetti, described this ritual in a 1991 interview: "My dad was leader . . . he'd put on some kind of skit and go from house to house." On the actual saint's day, they celebrated by feasting. Frank Di Fonso, Rocco's brother, added, "We had outside ovens . . . big, brick ovens . . . they used to cook maybe thirty chickens, forty, fifty chickens . . . or they'd have a feast, roast pigs in them."<sup>3</sup>

Mr. Persichetti then sang the following *canto di questua* that was written by covillager Rosario Iavicoli (b. 1835), evidently in late 1918 in Torino di Sangro.<sup>4</sup> Although the song itself more than likely returned with those migrants who had returned to Jeannette from Torino di Sangro during the immediate postwar years, Mr. Persichetti transcribed it from memory years later and insisted that "only Torinesi would know it."<sup>5</sup> (See Figure 11.1 for musical transcription.)

Chorus:

*O signori allegramente  
Vien da voi il gran santo  
Lui vi reca col suo canto  
Molte cose da saper<sup>6</sup>*

Oh, good people joyfully  
comes to you the great saint  
He brings you, with his song  
many things for you to know/learn

*Vi promette cose buone  
Di passare, quel poverello,  
E poi viver da fratello  
Come vuole il redentor*

He promises you good things  
to pass out, that poor soul,  
and then [you can] live like brothers  
as the redeemptor wants

Sant'Antonio Abate:

*Ben trovati buona gente,  
Io vi reco l'allegria,  
D'ogni triste picondria  
Io vi voglio liberar.*

Welcome good people,  
I bring you joy,  
from every sadness  
I want to liberate you

*Farò tutto di passare,  
Pane e pasta, vino e olio,  
Carne, carbone e petrolio  
E le uova le sto fa ancor.*

I will pass out everything  
Bread and pasta, wine and oil  
Meat, coal and kerosene,  
And eggs, too

*Son tornati pien di gloria  
Nostri frati già guerrieri  
Che in Guerra lo straniero  
Abbatevan con valor.*

They have returned full of Glory  
our brothers, previously warriors  
who in war attacked  
the foreigner/enemy with valor

*E pertanto per lor vi chiedo  
Qualche cosa da mangiare  
E poi vi poter pregare  
Quel buon Dio che sta nel ciel'*

And for them I request from you  
Something to eat  
And then I will be able to pray for you  
to that good God who lives in heaven



## Chorus:

<i>Non temete nessun male</i>	Do not fear anything bad
<i>Se a lui ubbiderete</i>	If you obey him
<i>Gli animali dubblicherete</i>	The great Saint will multiply
<i>Che il gran Santo benedirà</i>	[and] bless the animals

## Sant'Antonio Abate:

<i>Or se nulla voi mi date</i>	Now if you give me nothing
<i>Andrei per le masserie</i>	I will go to the farmhouses
<i>Gli animali d'epidemia</i>	Without mercy, I will strike the
<i>Colpirei senza pietà.</i>	Animals with sickness

<i>Distruggerei tutti quanti,</i>	I will destroy all of them
<i>Buoi, vacche con vitelli,</i>	oxen, cows with calves,
<i>Maiali, pecore ed agnelli</i>	pigs, sheep and lambs,
<i>Con cavalla e maiali ancor.</i>	and mare and hogs too

<i>Ma se buoni voi siete</i>	But if you are good
<i>Buon sarò anche io,</i>	I too will be good
<i>Per voi pregherei Iddio</i>	I will pray for God to send you
<i>Per un allegro carneval.</i>	a happy carnival

<i>Fra signori e poverelli</i>	Between rich and poor
<i>Non ci sia alcun rancore,</i>	there should not be a grudge
<i>Ma d'accordo con amore</i>	But together with love
<i>Aiutar la povertà</i>	[we can] help the poor

## Chorus:

<i>Su fratelli allegramente</i>	Come! Brothers joyfully
<i>Ringraziate il Santo Padre</i>	thank the Holy Father
<i>Chi con lui vi sarà dorato</i>	who with him [Sant'Antonio] will Adorn/gild you
<i>Su l'emersi ripassar.<sup>7</sup></i>	Listen! He will reappear and pass again

Before examining the song, it is helpful to provide some background to the tradition of Sant'Antonio Abate, which was quite strong in rural Abruzzo during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Sant'Antonio Abate was born in central Egypt around 250 AD and died on Mount Qulzum around 356 AD. According to legend, he lived alone in the desert for a number of years. There Satan subjected him to both spiritual and physical temptation. As people venerated him through the Middle Ages and beyond, they remembered Sant'Antonio Abate as the founder of monasticism and knew him specifically as a protector of farm animals (Attwater 1983, 47).<sup>8</sup> Franciscan Father Donatangelo Lupinetti, an Abruzzese folklore scholar, noted, "His venerated image towers in the houses and stalls of the peasants," and throughout Abruzzo, the peasantry referred to Sant'Antonio Abate variably as "*Sand'Andune—Sand'Andone—Sand Anduone*" and as "*di Jennare*" (of January), "*de la varve*" (of the beard), "*di lu campanelle*" (of the bell), and "*di lu purcelle*" (of the pig) (Lupinetti 1950, 52–53; 1960, 34–35).

Lupinetti indicated that Sant'Antonio Abate was for most Abruzzesi villages the first saint's feast of the new year. In effect, it anticipated and informally initiated the Carnival season and came at a time when "the Christmas celebrations left large margins in the pantry and in the kitchen" (Lupinetti 1950, 53). Most of the rural population abstained from work during this time, although, as Alfonso Di Nola noted, the feast "coincides with the event of the slaughter and butchering of the pigs" (Giancristofaro 1978, 233). Common was the blessing of farm animals—horses, mules, and donkeys—either in the church or in the stalls. In some areas, the peasantry lit huge bonfires and wore masks to represent the demons that tempted the saint. Most common throughout Abruzzo, however, was the alms-seeking ritual. As ethnomusicologist Domenico Di Virgilio notes, "'Lu Sand'andone' . . . is an alms-seeking ritual, tied tied to the round of seasonal agricultural tasks that ordered the lives of the peasant community. Such rituals gave the peasants a chance to obtain extra food . . . they would sing in front of people's houses in exchange for a recompense.'"<sup>9</sup> M. Iavicoli described this tradition in 1920: "The vigil of Sant'Antonio Abate, namely the evening of January 16th . . . the adults go singing house to house for Sant'Antonio and receive eggs, sausage, chicken, then eat a sumptuous dinner the following day."<sup>10</sup>

These alms-seeking processions included a person dressed as Sant'Antonio Abate, with appropriate iconographic items: a chalice, a cape, a frock, a long white beard, a pilgrim's staff, a bell, and a little pig.<sup>11</sup> The pig, Lupinetti argued, "especially for the rural populations . . . represents the wealth of the household, the preferred reserve in the long, hard Abruzzese winters" (Lupinetti 1960, 37). This figure of "Sant'Antonio" would be accompanied by singers and musicians, who played, according to Lupinetti, "button accordions, guitars, tambourines, *acciarini*, etc." (Lupinetti 1960, 38).<sup>12</sup> (See Figure 11.2.) *Acciarini* were curvilinear metal striking irons commonly used by *contadini* to make fire and were played much like a triangle. Their function further symbolized the association of Sant'Antonio Abate with fire.

Folklorist Emiliano Giancristofaro notes that this genre of alms-seeking songs, *canti di questua* were "elaborations of old texts transmitted orally and adapted by popular poets or by groups of singers" (Giancristofaro 1978, 95). Lupinetti developed the following general scheme for these songs: the introduction, which included salutations and recognition of the occasion; a first part, which detailed the life of Sant'Antonio; a second part, which detailed the saint's victory over the temptations of the Devil; an intermezzo, which usually made allusions to the local area; and a conclusion containing salutations, wishes, and final thoughts that typically promised (assuming that alms were received) Sant'Antonio Abate's blessing of the animals, the family, and the household (Lupinetti 1954, 54; 1960, 131–33). Despite the seriousness of the subject matter, by most accounts, the atmosphere was generally joyful and contained an element of the burlesque. This playfulness is reflected in lyrics that Domenico Priori, a folklorist and historian, collected from Torino di Sangro:

*Ci darete, per assaggio,  
Cento libbre di formaggio*

Give us, to taste,  
One hundred pounds of cheese



Rappresentazione scenica di Sant'Antonio Abate

Figure 11.2. Itinerant group of alms seekers for Sant'Antonio Abate in Torino di Sangro. Reprinted with permission.

*E, per grande devozione,  
Di salsicce un milione*

And, for great devotion,  
A million pounds of sausage

Here I wish to specifically examine the song that Mr. Persichetti sang. With other versions of alms-seeking songs available to Torinesi, one must assume that the choice of the Iavicoli version was a conscious one and therefore reflects somewhat the mentality of Torinesi in Jeannette.<sup>13</sup> In the opening lines, the members of the procession address the *Signori*, who were, in this instance, the landowners, the *massari*, and the landowning peasants<sup>14</sup>

*O signori allegramente  
Vien da voi il gran santo  
Lui vi reca col suo canto  
Molte cose da saper*

Oh, good people joyfully  
comes the great saint  
He brings with his song  
many things for you to know/learn

The chorus suggests that rich and poor should live together, like brothers, as God wants:

*Vi promette cose buone  
Di passare, quel poverello,  
E poi viver da fratello  
Come vuole il redentor*

He promises you good things  
to pass out, that poor soul,  
and then [you can] live like brothers  
as the redemptor wants

At this point, the voice of the saint comes through:

<i>Ben trovati buona gente,</i>	Welcome good people,
<i>Io vi reco l'allegria,</i>	I bring you joy,
<i>D'ogni triste picondria</i>	from every sadness
<i>Io vi voglio liberar.</i>	I want to liberate you

The saint then lists the items he intends to collect and redistribute:

<i>Faro' tutto di passare,</i>	I will pass out everything
<i>Pane e pasta, vino e olio,</i>	Bread and pasta, wine and oil
<i>Carne, carbone e petrolio</i>	Meat, coal and kerosene,
<i>E le uova le sto fa ancor.</i>	And eggs, too

It should be noted that the inclusion of coal and kerosene suggests a modernization of the traditional request for firewood, not only a necessary fuel for everyday life but also another symbol of fire.

Sant'Antonio Abate then reminds the audience about soldiers returned from the front:

<i>Son tornati pien di Gloria</i>	They have returned full of glory
<i>Nostri frati già guerrieri</i>	our brothers, previously warriors
<i>Che in Guerra lo straniero</i>	who in war attacked
<i>Abbatevan con valor.</i>	the foreigner/enemy with valor

Iavicoli's patriotic use of "*straniero*" was a reference to the Austrian troops and their incursion at Caporetto in October, 1917. Further, the soldiers on the Italian front, the infantry, were largely from the peasant class. During the early part of the war, when General Luigi Cadorna pushed and punished soldiers relentlessly, Prime Minister Antonio Salandra recognized the peasant contribution to the war effort and promised that Italy would "give land and everything that goes with it to the peasants, so that every hero who fought bravely in the trenches can become economically independent."<sup>15</sup> According to Schmidt, "this statement was printed and distributed widely at the front" (Schmidt 1928, 25).

For the Torinesi of Jeannette, the reference to soldiers returned from war was undoubtedly salient. Many Torinesi migrants returned to Italy, fulfilled their military obligation, and went to war on the Italian front (including John Persichetti's brother Antonio). Seventy-two young men from Torino di Sangro perished. Among them were men who had worked either in Jeannette or in the adjacent coal mining areas in the region.<sup>16</sup> Several members of the Torinese colony served in the U.S. Army, and one, Giovanni Cannone, died in combat with the American Expeditionary Forces in France in 1918. Many who did return from battle suffered from both the physical and psychological effects of combat. By 1919, there were many Italian war veterans in Jeannette who had served either with Italy or with the United States. Late that year, the Loggia Giuseppe Garibaldi "held a banquet in honor of the returned Italian

soldiers,” eighty-nine in all.<sup>17</sup> Torinesi and other Italians in Jeannette likely remembered Salandra’s broken promise and Cadorna’s harsh leadership. Indeed, in 1922, Italians in Jeannette, with Torinesi in their ranks, organized the Società Armando Diaz Mutuo Soccorso, named after the Italian general who replaced Cadorna after the failures of Caporetto. Diaz, writes Keegan, offered “the common soldier a more indulgent regime of leave and comforts as an inducement to sustain the fight” and ultimately led Italian troops to victory at Vittorio Veneto (Keegan 2000, 350).

Returning to Iavicoli’s song, we find that the saint, in exchange for advocacy in heaven, makes a request for food on behalf of the soldiers.

<i>E pertanto per lor vi chiedo</i>	And for them I request from you
<i>Qualche cosa da mangiare</i>	Something to eat
<i>E poi vi poter pregare</i>	And then I will be able to pray for you
<i>Quel buon Dio che sta nel ciel'</i>	to that good God who lives in heaven

The processional singers then implore obedience to the request:

<i>Non temete nessun male</i>	Do not fear anything bad
<i>Se a lui ubbidirete</i>	If you obey him
<i>Gli animali dubblicherete</i>	The great Saint will multiply
<i>Che il gran Santo benedirà</i>	[and] bless the animals

Then, one hears a harsh warning from the voice of Sant’Antonio Abate:

<i>Or se nulla voi mi date</i>	Now if you give me nothing
<i>Andrei per le masserie</i>	I will go to the farmhouses
<i>Gli animali d’epidemia</i>	Without mercy, I will strike the
<i>Colpirei senza pietà.</i>	Animals with sickness
<i>Distruggerei tutti quanti,</i>	I will destroy all of them
<i>Buoi, vacche con vitelli,</i>	oxen, cows with calves,
<i>Maiali, pecore ed agnelli</i>	pigs, sheep and lambs,
<i>Con cavalla e maiali ancor.</i>	and mare and hogs too

The great saint threatens to destroy the very core of agrarian life, sources of wealth for the landowners and sources of subsistence for the peasants. This good-bad ambiguity is best expressed by Alfonso Di Nola: “He is seen to possess an ambiguous power. Thus on the one hand there are beliefs about him that provoke terror . . . and other beliefs, by contrast, that portray him as the good-natured protector of the peasants and the humble, [someone] rough-hewn and cheerful. Certainly, it is the second aspect that prevails, [but the fact remains] that in the Abruzzo, Sant’Antonio, San Sebastiano, and San Biagio are saints that are very much feared.”<sup>18</sup>

Torinesi called Sant’Antonio Abate “*lu Varvúte*” (the beard), San Sebastiano “*lu Furzúte*” (a reference to his strength as a soldier and possibly a dialect

variation of *freccie*, “arrow” in reference to the nature of his martyrdom); and San Biagio “*lu Garehazzúte*,” (in reference to the throat (*gargarozzo*) of which he is the patron saint). As Priori (1964, 111) indicates, a common expression in Torino di Sangro was “*guàrdati* [beware] *da lu Varvúte, da lu Furzúte, e da lu Garehazzúte*.”

Returning to the song, we find that, after the harsh warning, Sant’Antonio Abate promises a good carnival if alms are received:

<i>Ma se buoni voi siete</i>	But if you are good
<i>Buon sarò anche io,</i>	I too will be good
<i>Per voi pregherei Iddio</i>	I will pray for God to send you
<i>Per un allegro carneval.</i>	a happy carnival

The saint then recommends that rich and poor should get along and together alleviate poverty:

<i>Fra signori e poverelli</i>	Between rich and poor
<i>Non ci sia alcun rancore,</i>	there should not be a grudge
<i>Ma d'accordo con amore</i>	But together with love
<i>Aiutar la povertà</i>	[we can] help the poor

Finally, the chorus suggests gratitude to the saint and alludes to his return:

<i>Su fratelli allegramente</i>	Come! Brothers joyfully
<i>Ringraziate il Santo Padre</i>	thank the Holy Father
<i>Chi con lui vi sarà dorato</i>	who with him [Sant’Antonio] will adorn/gild you
<i>Su l'emersi ripassar.</i>	Listen! He will reappear and pass again

The use of Sant’Antonio Abate to convey a political message was not unprecedented. Priori indicated that during Bourbon control, when the Bourbons prohibited mustaches and beards, peasants and artisans alike used the figure of Sant’Antonio Abate, with his long, flowing beard, for the purpose of subtle criticism and resistance (Priori 1957, 352–53). As Domenico Di Virgilio (2000, 96–98) has pointed out in a post–World War I version of an alms-seeking song from Fara Filiorum Petri, the subaltern speaks through the song:

<i>Lu quindici arrivà</i>	1915 arrived
<i>pure la guerra sa preparà</i>	and war preparations began
<i>a le classe l’ha richiamate</i>	soldiers were recalled
<i>vivo sempre Andonio Abate</i>	long live Antonio Abate
<i>Menutà pure lu sidice</i>	1916 came
<i>se spara le cannonate</i>	[and] cannons were fired
<i>cannonate e fucilate</i>	cannonfire and gunfire
<i>vivo sempre ‘Ndonio Abate</i>	long live Antonio Abate

<i>Ha menutə lu diciasette</i>	1917 came
<i>mi sa messe n'affann 'm pette</i>	and put sorrow in my heart
<i>tutte le class l'ha richiamate</i>	all ex-soldiers were recalled
<i>vivo sempre 'Ndonio Abate</i>	long live Antonio Abate
<i>Ha menutə lu disdott</i>	1918 came
<i>mi sa messe n'affan 'a lu stomache</i>	and put sorrow in my gut
<i>novecento la chiamate</i>	[those born in] 1900 were drafted
<i>vivo sempre 'Ndonio Abate</i>	long live Antonio Abate

The “classes” here referred not to social class but instead to those who, because of their birth year, were eligible for the draft. Those “recalled” were ones who had already served their military obligation (a “*richiamato*” is a redrafted soldier).

Like the version from Fara Filiorum Petri, Iavicoli’s version suggests an element of class consciousness. Implicit in the lyrics is the belief that Sant’Antonio Abate, as an advocate for the peasants, desires economic equality and recognition of the soldiers’ great sacrifice during the war. This perhaps reflects existing socialist views within the southern Italian artisan classes and the postwar political atmosphere that was fueled by the disillusionment of returned soldiers.<sup>19</sup>

In examining the Torinese performance of the alms-seeking ritual in Jeannette from another perspective, Douglas Holmes’s ideas of the “peasant-worker” and “peasant-worker society and culture” are especially useful. According to Holmes, these two notions are “the idea that wage labor, indeed industrial wage labor, can be adopted by countryfolk without the need to sever ties to small-scale cultivation or indigenous traditions.”<sup>20</sup> As noted, Torinesi practiced subsistence agriculture and simultaneously worked as merchants, coal miners, glassworkers, railroad workers, and rubber workers.<sup>21</sup> In addition, Jeannette’s economy required services and goods for industrial wage laborers and their families throughout the year. Developing mass production in the food industries created surplus. The “leader” of the Torinesi, Giuseppe Di Fonso, was an importer of Italian foods and belonged to a grocery cooperative. In this capacity, Di Fonso ordered pork to produce large quantities of sausage for sale. Rocco Di Fonso recalled that “he’d get pork butts . . . on a Friday . . . we’d start making the sausages. By the time Saturday came around, it was all sold.”<sup>22</sup> Essentially, there was an abundance of fatty meats throughout the year.

With this in mind, the irony of the alms-seeking tradition in the context of 1920s Jeannette was that it was not based on need. It deviated from the “ritualized form of socioeconomic exchange” and was no longer what Di Nola described as “the mechanism of fictitious redistribution of economic goods that tended to offer to the wealth-owning class an alleviation of the guilt associated with exclusive ownership and class division.”<sup>23</sup> Instead, it became a symbolic marker of identity, a reenactment of village tradition. Surely, the Torinesi of Jeannette remembered the rhythms of peasant life—planting, cultivation, harvesting—and the dependency on markets, weather, and landowners. Surely, they recalled the lean times during the winter months when the request for fatty foods was practical. Yet, through emigration they acquired the ability to earn and to save. The Torinesi performing the

alms-seeking ritual in Jeannette sought alms from their own families and friends. With the absence of the landowning class, the Torinesi were, in effect, simultaneously both benefactors and recipients.

In summary, it is clear that, at the simplest level, the performance of the Sant'Antonio Abate procession in Jeannette was a direct transfer of cultural tradition and popular veneration. The performance provided an important link with Torino di Sangro and affirmed village-of-origin identity within their colony and within the greater Italian community. Further, the use of the Iavicoli version suggests that Torinesi in Jeannette, as Italian peasants, were well aware of their history as a subordinate class and their role in history, particularly in the war.

The tradition of Sant'Antonio Abate in Jeannette ended in the early 1930s (ironically, at a time when seeking alms may have been necessary). The tradition did not continue with the American-born children of Torinesi, the majority of whom had never experienced directly such agricultural cycle events as the harvesting of wheat, the pruning and harvesting of grapes and olives, or, for instance, how the peasants covertly gathered figs at night before they divided the harvest with the landowners. As the lean Depression years of the 1930s ended and postwar prosperity ensued, the fires in the brick beehive ovens were less frequent and the ovens themselves slowly crumbled. Gardens became smaller. The fig trees, without the necessary burials, died back every winter. As diets changed and industrial society created year-round surplus and abundance, the need for Sant'Antonio Abate, the intermediary between rich and poor, diminished.<sup>24</sup> When that need disappeared in Jeannette, the alms-seeking ritual of Sant'Antonio Abate disappeared along with it.

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## Notes

1. The *comparaggio* network of the Torinesi in Jeannette extended beyond Jeannette and included Torinesi in Baggaley, Connellsville, Dunbar, Greensburg, Latrobe, Lucerne Mines, Martin, and Whitney.
2. Alessandro Portelli (1991, 145) notes that in Italy in the early 1900s Garibaldi was “a radical anti-church symbol at least as much as a patriotic one.”
3. Interview with Rocco Di Fonso and Frank Di Fonso, July 9, 1991.
4. Iavicoli was born circa 1835. He was a tailor by trade but civil records listed him as an *usciera* (doorman) and as a *messo di conciliazione* (mediator). According to Priori (1957), he was a member of the National Guard in the early 1860s. Iavicoli, Persichetti recalled, had a long white beard and, in tragic irony, burned to death when his straw bed caught fire.
5. Interview with Giovanni Persichetti, July 27, 1995.
6. I would like to thank Emanuele Licastro for his assistance in transcribing the song.
7. “Emersi” is perhaps a corruption of *emèrso*.
8. Michael Carroll (1992, 45) notes that the idea of Sant'Antonio Abate as a protector of animals appears in Boccaccio's *Decameron* and that the saint's association with the pig and the bell icon likely originates with the monastic order the Antonines: “One of the special prerogatives that was granted to this order very early on, and later confirmed by the papacy, was the right to raise pigs, which were allowed to circulate freely throughout the communities in which the Antonines maintained houses. It was expected that these free-roaming pigs would be fed at the expense of the local communities as a way of subsidizing the order. Each pig wore a small bell around its neck; they were called ‘porci di Sant'Antonio’ [Sant'Antonio's pigs], a term that turns up in a number

of places.” Lupinetti (1960, 36–37) and Priori (1964, 346–47) also present this association with the Antonines. Giancrisofaro (1978, 98–99) notes that the tradition of the free-roaming pig was a common tradition in Abruzzo and that the tradition persists in the village of Ateleta.

9. Domenico Di Virgilio, “Lu Sand’andone,” in *Italian Treasury*, recorded this version in 1954 in Terranera, province of L’Aquila.
10. M. Iavicoli, “Usi e costumi, Abruzzo gastronomico,” quoted in Giancrisofaro 1978, 225.
11. Lupinetti (1960, 34–35) provides other iconographic items. A book alludes to the doctrine of the saint, a flame alludes to the “*fuoco di Sant’Antonio*” (Herpes zoster) and to “all the types of fire: spiritual (hellfire), moral (fiery passion), material (housefires and skin burns).”
12. Braccili and Polla note that offshoots of municipal bands—*bandicine*—“*eran impiegate nei funerali, nei divertimenti di Carnevale, da supporto alle allegre brigate di S. Antonio Abate (17 gennaio) e nella spillatura del vino nuovo a S. Martino (11 novembre)*” (Braccili 1992, 78).
13. Priori published a version of an alms-seeking song in *Torino di Sangro*. Priori called the unnamed author a “popular poet” and the verses “rough,” while Lupinetti argues that the song “*nella sua semplicità e rozzezza stilistica rispecchia bene una mentalità*” (from Priori 1957, 349n1). Other versions of Sant’Antonio Abate songs can be found in Finamore 1991, which contains a version from Teramo; Lupinetti 1960; and Di Virgilio 2000.
14. Priori notes in *Torino di Sangro* if, during the wheat harvest, *la patrone* (the wife of the cultivator or owner of the property), was late in distributing wine and sweets, the contadini harvesters would sing, “*Purte, Purte, signora patrone—purte, purte, signora patrone! Purte vino e cagginitte—e a lu vine ’n gi mette l’acque!*” (Bring, bring, Signora Padrona—bring, bring, Signora Padrona! Bring wine and pastries—and don’t add water to the wine!) Priori 1964:353–54. *Cagginitte* are pastries with a filling made from chickpeas, honey, nuts, orange rinds, and wine.
15. Carl Schmidt 1938, 27, as quoted in Holmes 1989, 116. Page described the situation for Italian soldiers before the disaster of Caporetto: “First and foremost, the soldiers in all that region—were tired; worn by constant labor and by even more exhausting vigil—they were, in fact, worn down. Month after month, winter after winter, they had been kept at it with little respite or relief. In winter in snow and sleet, rain and mud; in summer in sun and dust—ever toiling, ever watching, ever on a strain; they had fought and won ridge upon ridge, mountain after mountain, with infinite courage, giving up their lives, pouring out their blood like water, in assault after assault, with more to follow; yet they were apparently no nearer the goal of their aim than before their comrades had died by the thousand” (Page 1920, 306).
16. They included Donato Di Fonso, Rocco D’Intino, Antonio Dragani, Domenico Giammarino, Donato Moraschi, Agostino Mordini, and Giovanni Nicolucci.
17. “Garibaldi honors returned soldiers,” *News-Dispatch*, November 28, 1919.
18. Di Nola 1976, 208, as quoted in Carroll 1992, 76.
19. Hoare and Smith (1971, xx) note that “the socialism which spread in the South and the islands was not that of the PSI (Socialist Party of Italy) or the trade unions, but a kind of mélange of socialist and liberal theories which can be traced back to the ideas and activity of Carlo Pisacane during the Risorgimento, and which was propagated most notably by Gaetano Salvemini in the period preceding the First World War.”
20. “From the ‘peasant’ perspective, the wage economy offers solutions, however modest, to the social and financial predicaments of small-scale agrarian producers. From the

'worker' standpoint, access to an agrarian holding provides subsistence security in the face of chronic uncertainties that circumscribe marginal wage employment" (Holmes 1989, 206).

21. During the 1920s and 1930s, Francescopaolo Giovannangelo ran a butcher shop; Tommaso Saraceni ran a shoemaker shop; Carlo Ciocchi ran a seafood store; Giuseppe Di Fonso had a grocery and import store; Giovanni De Santis, Luigi Dragani, Luigi Giovannangelo, Nicola Moraschi, and Giovanni Persichetti worked with the Pennsylvania Tire and Rubber Company; Domenico Cannone, Francesco Saverio Cannone, Giuseppe Persichetti, and Nicola Tullio worked at the glasshouses; and Domenico De Vincentiis and Nicolino Tullio worked at the Pitcairn Yard with the Pennsylvania Railroad.
22. Interview with Rocco Di Fonso, July 9, 1991.
23. Di Nola 1976, 196, quoted in Felice 1990, 46.
24. Camporesi (1993, 165) argues that "the victory of the machine over God, the eclipse of the sacred, the triumph of the demon, of the perfectly reproducible, the unchallenged hegemony of mass production, have brought us to the uniform diet of the unchanging workday, the one-dimensional week and year. . . . Pauses, alternations, Sunday time and weekday time, times of feasting and fasting, the dialectic of Carnival and Lent, holidays and holiday eves—all are fading into the mists of the past."

# In Search of the Roots of *Stregheria*

## Preliminary Observations on the History of a Reclaimed Tradition

*Sabina Magliocco*

This chapter is a preliminary exploration of the links between three layers of vernacular religion and the experiences underlying them: Italian vernacular religion and healing, Italian American versions of these customs, and *Stregheria*, or Italian American revival Witchcraft,<sup>1</sup> a Neo-Pagan religion practiced by second-, third- and fourth-generation Italian Americans seeking new ways to connect with spirituality and construct ethnic identity. I argue that Italian vernacular religion was linked to a number of geographic, economic, religious, and social factors that were particular to the regions and towns in which it developed, but also partook of a broader cosmology that I am calling “the enchanted worldview.” In this chapter, I will outline some of the parameters of this worldview and sketch its particulars, especially in the areas of vernacular healing, magic, and witchcraft. I also propose that American scholars reconsider historical approaches to the study of tradition, especially when these can shed light on how traditions change over time to incorporate elements from elite and ecclesiastical cultures. This is the first step of a much broader study in which I hope to examine each of these aspects of Italian vernacular culture in greater detail. It grows out of my previous research on Italian religious festivals, Italian American ethnicity, and the reclamation of European folklore by contemporary Pagan religions.

I first became interested in this subject as a result of reader response to my critique of Italian American Neo-Pagan foundation legends, particularly the work of

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Raven Grimassi, the architect of Stregheria, an Italian American variant of modern Pagan Witchcraft based on nineteenth-century folklorist Charles Leland's *Aradia, or the Gospel of the Witches* (1899). Leland claimed to have discovered a sect of Tuscan witches who worshipped the goddess Diana and her brother or lover Lucifer and used magic to resist the oppression of greedy landowners. Many nonacademic readers disagreed with my portrayal of these as "invented traditions" (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), claiming instead to have inherited an authentic pre-Christian religious practice from their Italian grandmothers. Rather than ignoring or dismissing their claims, I asked my critics for additional details about the practices they remembered from their relatives. I was intrigued by their answers, as they recalled beliefs, customs, and narratives I knew from my study of Italian folklore. Drawing from the historical work of Carlo Ginzburg (1989) and Gustav Henningsen (1990), both of whom described Medieval trial records detailing legendary night flights associated with music, feasting, and magical healing, I hypothesized that vernacular healing practices, with their mixture of Roman Catholicism and popular magic, might provide a link between Italian traditions and those being recast as ancient pagan practice by the new Pagans. I was particularly interested in the spiritual and mystical experiences that Italian American immigrants brought with them to North America and the ways they informed the imagination of reclamationists. Historians have recently focused attention on the strong mystical, imaginative components of vernacular healing, or cunning craft, in other parts of Europe (Pócs 1999; Davies 2003; Wilby 2005). By "imaginative," I mean having to do with what anthropologist Michele Stephen calls the "autonomous imagination," a part of the human imagination that operates without the individual's conscious control, freely mixing cultural and religious material with more personal elements (Stephen 1989, 42). The autonomous imagination is responsible for experiences that emerge through visions, dreams, trances, spirit possession, and hypnosis. More than simply a wish-fulfillment mechanism, it is part of the way the human mind creatively processes information, and it plays a central role in creating cultural and individual religious landscapes (Stephen 1989, 44). If Italian cunning craft is similar to other European cunning traditions, and preliminary comparisons suggest many parallels, I suggest that it is these imaginative components that are now being reinterpreted as survivals of pre-Christian religions and reclaimed by New Age practitioners. My intuition is that individuals who represent themselves as bearers of ancient pagan religions may in fact have grown up with bits and pieces of Italian vernacular mysticism and magic preserved in an immigrant context. For them, Stregheria and other forms of reclamation represent important ways to make sense of and recontextualize their heritage of vernacular magic.

In the eyes of New Agers, the rich Italian American spiritual tradition, so different from that of other North American Catholics in its focus on saints, the cult of the Virgin Mary, and complex material culture of festivals, altars, and icons, is understood as a Christianized version of an ancient goddess religion that was once diffused throughout the Mediterranean. In this pre-Christian religion, as it is imagined by reclamationists, the world was permeated by enchantment. Humans did not see themselves as separate from nature and the divine. Goddesses were worshipped as well as gods; in fact, the feminine form of the divine was usually given prominence,

often in the form of a mother goddess. Women had important liturgical roles as priestesses, but also as shamans and healers who communicated directly with the spiritual world. In these recontextualizations, Italy and Italian identity are projected millennia beyond the formation of the present-day Italian state in 1861. Like other exemplars of the New Age movement, reclamationists mine folklore for symbols that can be used for individual development and empowerment, and there is an emphasis on healing a world that has torn asunder the bonds between nature, the individual, and the sacred. Some of my earlier work examined this process in the works of Raven Grimassi, an Italian American writer and the architect of Stregheria, or Italian American revival Witchcraft (Grimassi 1995, 1999, 2000). Grimassi (a pen name), the son of an Italian mother and an American father who met during the allied occupation of Italy during World War II, defines witches as practitioners of ancient pagan religions who suffered persecutions by those determined to wipe out their spirituality during Medieval and early modern times. Their practices survived in secrecy, and Grimassi claims to come from a family whose occult practices preserved these traditions. His works attempt to make the Old Religion accessible to contemporary Pagan practitioners. Except for a few individual charms, Stregheria bears little resemblance to vernacular religious practices that have been documented by Italian ethnographers. Instead, it parallels other forms of Neo-Pagan Witchcraft in structure and practice, substituting Italian glosses for deities, feasts, and spirits. Its principal deities are Diana (also known as Tana and Fana) and her consort, called Dianus (Tanus, Faunus; Grimassi 2000, 266). The central prophet in Stregheria is Aradia, a legendary character drawn from the writings of nineteenth-century amateur folklorist Charles Leland, loosely based on the New Testament character of Herodias as reworked in Medieval Christian legends (Leland 1990 [1899]). Leland identified her as the daughter of the goddess Diana, sent to earth in the fourteenth century to teach Italian peasants to resist political oppression through magic. Elaborating on Leland, Grimassi deepens her biography, giving her the surname “di Toscano” and a birthplace in Tuscany. Grimassi’s Aradia is herself engaged in reclamation, reviving and reinterpreting the religion of the ancient Etruscan peoples in order to empower fourteenth-century peasants. After spreading her gospel throughout the region, Aradia herself disappears, but her twelve followers travel through Italy to further diffuse her teachings. Grimassi presents himself as the heir to this magical tradition, which, according to him, has been handed down in certain Italian families for seven hundred years.

In some of my earlier work, my principal concern was to contextualize this creation as reclamation: a modern historical phenomenon that seeks to revive and revalue some Italian vernacular religious practices stigmatized by the dominant culture when Italians immigrated to North America (see Magliocco 2002, 2005, 2006). Distinguishing between Italian vernacular magic and its reclaimed forms is meant not to delegitimize the latter but to draw attention to reclamation itself as an integral part of the process of tradition. The reclamation of Italian American goddess-centered spirituality is most popular among middle-class, second- and third-generation Italian Americans, especially women disaffected with traditional forms of ethnic identity rooted in neighborhood, church, and family-based organizations. It allows adherents to feel a sense of belonging to an ethnic community without some of

the constraints associated with older ethnic structures, such as the limitations of Catholic morality and the restrictions of belonging to a small community in which one's actions are subject to popular censure. At the same time, it revalues some of the more ecstatic, imaginative, and mystical components of Italian spirituality that have long been considered signs of superstition and backwardness by both Italian high culture and mainstream North American culture. These elements are stripped of their Catholic superstructure and reinterpreted as the vestiges of ancient religion, resistant to the oppression of church and state.

If we are to better understand some of the impulses behind reclamation, it is important to understand the actual religious and spiritual experiences and beliefs that Italian immigrants brought with them to North America and the ways these have now been understood by reclamationists. What are the building blocks of contemporary spiritual movements such as *Stregheria*? One way to understand them is to turn to evidence provided by historians—religious and otherwise—regarding the practices of Italian Americans in the early years following immigration. The works of Phyllis Williams (1938), Rudolph Vecoli (1969, 1977), and Robert Orsi (1985) are fundamental in understanding both the social context and the religious practice of Italian Americans from about 1900 to the mid-twentieth century. In order to understand the roots of these traditions, however, it is necessary to go beyond the historical records of Italian immigrants in the New World. Magicoreligious traditions in North America were influenced by a constellation of factors, including the negative judgment given them by the surrounding Protestant culture and the Irish-dominated American Catholic Church. But perhaps the largest factor to affect these traditions was their decontextualization from the Italian agro-pastoral peasant to an urban diasporic context. Once their adherents were stripped of their relationship to geography, economy, and social structure, many features of these belief systems simply crumbled, while others evolved in new directions. In order to better comprehend both beliefs and experiences and the longing for them represented by reclamation movements, I wish to recontextualize them within a broader cultural, historical, and social framework.

One of my contentions, based on my earlier fieldwork in Sardinia, as well as on the work of other Italian ethnologists, is that magicoreligious traditions were deeply embedded in everyday life. They could be found in the cycle of rituals and celebrations connected to the individual life cycle, the agro-pastoral year cycle, and the Roman Catholic liturgical cycle (Grimaldi 1993; Staro 2005, n.d.); in local songs and musical traditions (de Martino 2005 [1961]; Del Giudice 2005; Staro 2005; Magrini 2003); and in the most ordinary aspects of day-to-day life (Wilson 2000). Italian peasant lifeways and religiosity are built on a magical worldview that exists throughout the whole peninsula and the islands of Sicily and Sardinia. This worldview is difficult to systematize, and it varies in its particulars according to region and locality, as expressed through a variety of folklore genres, from festivals and celebrations to legends, folktales, and beliefs. It is always framed in terms of Roman Catholicism but may indeed contain elements of older belief systems. I believe that many individuals who represent themselves as carriers of "*La Vecchia Religione*," to use Leland's term, may in fact have grown up with bits and pieces of this worldview preserved in an immigrant context. For them, *Stregheria* and other forms of reclamation represent

important ways to make sense of and recontextualize their heritage of vernacular religion and magic. My task here is to trace these elements to the various regions of Italy from which immigrants hailed, to explain their meaning in its earlier contexts, and to address the question of their relationship to pre-Christian forms of practice.

The connection between folk customs and pagan practices was one of the principal concerns of early European folklorists, who saw peasant practices as “survivals” of an earlier stage of human development. While these interpretations became very influential in popular circles, mostly through the work of James G. Frazer, mid-twentieth-century folklorists and ethnologists rejected them in part because of their ethnocentric and colonialist biases. Inevitably, survivalist schemes stigmatized the practices of subdominant population groups, positing a unilinear development of human cultures unsupported by empirical evidence. Here, American and Italian lines of ethnological inquiry dramatically diverged. Following World War II, academic interests in the United States moved away from historical origins and toward the processes of tradition themselves. Folklorists began to feel that the search for origins, which had dominated the discipline during the nineteenth century, was pointless and instead concentrated on the microcontext of events: their relationship to exquisitely local economic, political, and social factors, and the way such factors shaped traditions. A number of historical studies in the late twentieth century, such as Hobsbawm and Ranger’s *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), demonstrated that many traditions that were assumed to be of ancient origin were actually of fairly recent derivation and were cobbled together for political reasons, often to enhance the power of the state or the identity of a particular social group. All of this made historicism hopelessly out of fashion. In contrast, Italian ethnology never entirely abandoned its historical perspective. While leaving behind survivalism, Italian ethnographers such as Ernesto de Martino and his followers turned their attention to the microhistorical context within which certain Italian peasant practices developed. De Martino’s study of *tarantismo*, a practice of dance, trance, and healing in the Salento, as well as Clara Gallini’s parallel treatment of the Sardinian practice of *argismo*, are typical examples of this genre, which examines folklore in its historical, literary, psycho-social, and ethnographic contexts (de Martino 2005 [1961]; Gallini 1988). This combination of disciplinary approaches, with careful attention to history, continues to be part of the academic paradigm in Italy.

Perhaps it is time for American folklorists to reconsider the question of the development of traditions from a historical, as well as a political, economic, and social, point of view. My reconsideration of Italian vernacular magical tradition is therefore not a search for pagan survivals, nor is it an attempt to do violence to the ways contemporary magical practitioners perceive themselves by attributing a pagan identity to practices they understand within a Christian context. Rather, it involves applying the historicism of de Martino to the issues I am considering here. Influenced by Marx and Gramsci, de Martino proposed ethnology as a historical science, examining southern Italian vernacular religion as a way of understanding how Christianity had imposed itself on indigenous belief systems, leading to syncretisms; and as a kind of archaeology of custom, as a way to piece together a history of southern Italian culture from ancient times to the present (de Martino 2005 [1961], 7). For him, folklore was a historical document through

which to reconstruct the past—not as a survival but as “a document of a single history: that of the religious civilization in which it is a relic, or of the religious civilization in which it remains or is more or less profoundly remolded” (ibid.). This, then, is essentially a historical project, but one for which I am using ethnographic methodologies. My data come from my fieldwork in Sardinia, in the Emilian Apennine, and in Campania from the early 1980s to 2006; from the works of Italian ethnologists working mostly in the twentieth century; and from secondary historical sources from a variety of periods and regions. The risk in using such disparate sources is that culture is everywhere local, and it may indeed be misleading to compare elements from historically different times and places, especially in Italy, where any concept of a national culture is still fragile at best, even after over 150 years after unification. This can result in the same errors of the reclamationists, who pick and choose elements to compare without attention to history or local context. At the same time, to ignore parallels between data over a period of time and a geographic spread is also to betray the most fundamental principles of folkloristics. While folk traditions are everywhere localized and exist in a state of continual flux, they also demonstrate remarkable continuity over time and space. The roughly one hundred years between the great wave of Italian American immigration to North America and the present day is an eye-blink in the timeline of tradition; some of the traditions brought to North America by Italian immigrants still exist, in approximate or analogous form, in the regions of Italy from which they hailed. Because the process of immigration freezes culture at the moment of exodus, certain customs may have in fact survived longer in the immigrant periphery than in the national core: immigrant communities are often more conservative than the parent cultures from which they derive.

In the summer of 2005, I began to research this hypothesis in two key areas of Italy: Campania, the area of origin of Raven Grimassi's mother (and not coincidentally an area from which a large percentage of Italian Americans migrated) and the Emilian Apennine between Florence and Bologna, according to Charles Leland, the area of origin of Maddalena, his key informant and source for *Ara-dia*.<sup>2</sup> If modern Italian American Neo-Pagan traditions were based on folklore that had somehow eluded the attention of Italian scholars, it was in these areas that I would find their roots. I decided to focus first on vernacular healing traditions, as I knew that many of these were indeed passed on from one relative to another and required a kind of initiation. But I quickly found my research widening to include other Italian regions and geographic areas, because these phenomena are not discrete from one another but form a part of what I am calling, after Max Weber, the enchanted worldview.

### The Enchanted Worldview

In *Science as a Vocation* (1918–19), Max Weber argued that one of the central features of modernity is its distance from the magical, the spiritual, and the religious: “The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the ‘disenchantment of the world’” (155). This disenchantment

involves not only the secularization of public and private spheres, but the distancing of the subject from the spiritual on both the personal and the social levels. The disenchanting world is mostly a feature of Western elite and bourgeois urbanites. I argue the sense of an interconnected universe filled with spirit and enchantment has persisted in many parts of the developed world, including rural Italy, until well into the twentieth century; in fact, it is still alive today.

A number of anthropologists have argued that all human societies recognize that multiple levels of reality coexist—that the visible, logical world of causation exists parallel to a spiritual reality. One of the first to make this argument was Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, who argued that “primitive mentality” was characterized by a principle he called the “law of participation.” In this system of thought, there was no strict boundary between the natural and the supernatural worlds; supernatural reality was not devoid of logic but had its own form of it based on the association of things and ideas that would not be considered relational in a strictly rational model. Indeed, for Lévy-Bruhl, relationality—the interconnectiveness of all elements in the universe—was one of the touchstones of “primitive” mentality and “mystical thought” (Lévy-Bruhl, cited in Tambiah 1990, 21). Lévy-Bruhl was criticized for making too great a distinction between “primitive” and civilized societies, repeating the errors of the unilinear evolutionary anthropologists (Evans-Pritchard 1990, 91), so in his later work, he postulated that both “mystical thought” and rational-logical thought can coexist in any society. As Evans-Pritchard argued in his critique of Lévy-Bruhl, it is a case of multiple “levels of thought and experience” existing simultaneously within the same society (Evans-Pritchard 1990, 91).

A parallel idea is articulated by de Martino in *Sud e magia* (1987 [1966]), which traces the historical development of the evil eye and *jettatura* (intentional giving of the evil eye) in the Kingdom of Naples. According to de Martino, the concept of the evil eye permeates all aspects of Neapolitan society, from the lowest to the highest. Enlightenment and scientific concepts are layered on folk belief and practice to form a syncretic amalgam that attempts to rationalize this belief complex. Since among educated elites there is some embarrassment attached to belief in the evil eye, many articulate their belief accompanied by a self-disparaging irony (de Martino 1987, 176). Magic and rationality, then, are not opposites in Italian vernacular culture but exist side by side, in contrasting but overlapping realms of knowledge. I would argue that this continues to be the case in contemporary Italy as well as a number of other cultures. It is not that the enchanted worldview is an index of primitiveness and thus survives only in the countryside among culturally backward people, while educated and sophisticated urban dwellers cleave to a more rational standard. Rather, both worldviews exist side by side in the same society, only the enchanted worldview is more closely tied to specific social structures, economic systems, and ways of organizing labor and time. For this reason, it is easier to find in rural areas. Because it is relational, it is associated with systems in which landscape, time, labor, social relations, and religion are intimately interconnected and interdependent.

The enchanted worldview in rural Italy is rooted in specific premarket economic and social systems. It has persisted longest in marginal areas where small-scale agriculture and pastoralism continue to exist, often mixed with hunting and gathering as subsistence strategies. In these areas, the family remains the basic unit of social organization, but it is bolstered by the small face-to-face community—the town or village in which people know one another personally and have regular interactions. These communities are characterized by what sociologists call “dense” networks: people’s relationships to one another are characterized by multiple roles, including kinship, economic relationships, and relations of patronage.

Because of subsistence activities associated with the land, time is organized according to seasonal cycles; these are reflected in the ritual year, even when this is dominated by the Catholic liturgical rites. These are almost always locally interpreted in ways that connect them to the economic cycle: for example, in Campania, where wheat and hemp crops have been replaced by tobacco, which has a similar growing season, the ritual year begins near St. Martin in mid-November and extends until the end of the harvest season at St. Cosimo and Damiano in October. In pastoral areas such as Sardinia and the Apennine, May and September, the months that frame transhumance, are emphasized in local ritual practices. The exact shape of the ritual year thus differs markedly from one area to another. The symbols—the Madonnas and saints—are the same, but each township differs in the way it situates these characters within its symbolic and economic system. The enchanted worldview is not only rooted in the ritual year cycle; it also pervades the individual’s life cycle. It begins at birth and penetrates every phase of life and every rite of passage, from the moment of birth, when most Italian babies who are not born with a caul (*la camicia*, or “shirt,” in Italian) are given a lawn (finely woven cotton) shirt by a relative, often a godparent, to protect them against evil influences, to funerals, where a variety of beliefs about the otherworld are made manifest through practices.

The core of Italian vernacular religion is thus the correlation of its symbolic systems with *local* economic and social structures. The primary connection is never with the dominant structures of church and state. Hegemonic structures may or may not coincide with indigenous ones, but elements that do not match are simply ignored. As a result, the landscape of the enchanted worldview in Italy is everywhere local.

Despite its exquisitely local character, the enchanted worldview exists throughout Italy, in both northern and southern regions, with significantly more commonalities than one might think, given the differences in language, culture, and economy that characterize Italy’s twenty *regioni*. Certain concepts are ubiquitous: for example, the evil eye and its diagnosis and cures are found in all regions and are similar throughout. Yet the enchanted worldview defies systematization. Beliefs and practices are part of everyday life, part of praxis. German ethnologist Thomas Hauschild, who spent nearly twenty years studying Basilicata, a region in the south of Italy, wrote, “There is no system, only practice” (Hauschild 2003, 19). The practice *is* the system. Practice and belief, of course, exist within a particular cosmology, but their details seldom preoccupy its technologists. However, in some cases, individual practitioners and believers develop their own highly idiosyncratic systems

and cosmologies based on an array of vernacular beliefs, often combined with elements drawn from ecclesiastic or elite culture. At the same time, the enchanted worldview does not exist in isolation from dominant discourses. As Ernesto de Martino makes clear in *The Land of Remorse*, his epic study of tarantism, each successive layer of interpretation, from Christianity to Enlightenment paradigms, leaves a historic trace on magical traditions (de Martino 2005 [1961], 7), so that what Italian immigrants brought to North America, and what exists today in parts of Italy, is emphatically not a pagan religion but a syncretic layering of interpretations, superimpositions, and rationalizations on top of very ancient material. The modern Pagan revival and reclamation of these practices is merely the latest of a series of readings to which they have been subjected for millennia.

The main characteristic of the enchanted worldview is a belief in the omnipresence of spiritual beings that can influence human lives. These beings range from the dead to saints, the Virgin Mary and Jesus (who are, after all, nothing more than particularly powerful dead). Spirits are responsible for certain kinds of illnesses, although the type of spirit and the type of illness are generally determined by local lore. In Basilicata, the unquiet dead are said to cause skin diseases such as erysipelas and herpes zoster (St. Anthony's Fire); in Campania, children who fail to thrive are said to be taken by witches on their night flights and worn out with flying and dancing; in Emilia Romagna, Puglia, and Sardinia, spiders and insects are responsible for a range of illnesses from *tarantismo* to *argismo* to *arlia*. Some scholars suggest these insects actually embodied spirits who possess their victims through the bite or sting (de Martino 2005 [1961]; Gallini 1988).

Even spirits such as saints and the Madonna, who belong to a greater Catholic pantheon, are everywhere localized: the Madonna is usually worshipped in one or more of her local manifestations, and the devout have their personal favorites based on each Madonna's attributes and the qualities she "stands over," or rules, and their own individual needs or interests. For example, in Monghidoro, a town in the Bolognese Apennine, there are four principal local Madonnas, each with her own sanctuary in a different geographic location, each venerated at a different time of year, and each standing over a particular set of characteristics, from children and fertility to grief and death. In addition, a number of local springs are ruled over by a Madonna, as are certain trees and geographical boundaries. Informal shrines are erected at these locations, and the signs of ritual activity and veneration are omnipresent there: fresh flowers, photographs, and evidence of *ex votos* are found at these locations. Sometimes springs and trees may be associated with healing, and the shrines there may serve to activate or commemorate specific curative rituals, often consisting of prayers and pilgrimages.<sup>3</sup>

For many Italians living in rural areas, the world is permeated by the spirits of the dead. "The dead are everywhere," one informant told me; "in stones, in trees, in the earth. . . . You must learn that the dead are omnipresent" (interview with D. S., June 18, 2006). The dead are gone to us, their human relatives; but this does not mean they no longer exist. They manifest to us in small signs, which the living must learn to read and interpret. For example, Diana (a pseudonym), a forty-five-year-old woman in the Emilian Apennine who had lost a child, described how after his death, the area around the house and garden where he used to play was

filled with butterflies. She explained how, several months later, a particular type of blue flower sprang up in the garden spontaneously, where no one had planted it. In the same way, she said, when her neighbor had lost her daughter, pink flowers of the same type had appeared in her garden. Pink and blue are linked here to the gender of the dead children, but blue was significant to Diana because it was also her son's favorite color. She interpreted the presence of butterflies and the apparently spontaneous appearance of the flowers as signs of the continuing presence of the spirits of the dead children in the natural world.

The appearance of flowers as signs of the dead is idiosyncratic; but spirits can also manifest as animals traditionally associated with the dead. In the Apennine, these include butterflies,<sup>4</sup> moths, and other winged insects, white dogs,<sup>5</sup> snakes, and spiders. The last two in particular are associated in this region with an affliction known as *arlia*, in which adolescent girls or new mothers suddenly and inexplicably lose the ability to speak (Staro 2005).<sup>6</sup> Spirits of the dead interact with the living in a variety of ways, some helpful, some not. For example, they figure prominently as helpers of healers: one healer in the Apennine told me that the spirit of her uncle helps her to diagnose illness and that her father's spirit appeared to her when she was pregnant to reassure her that her child was a boy and would be born healthy (interview with T. D. E., June 17, 2006). This function has also been noted by numerous Italian ethnologists, for example de Martino (1987, 68–85ff.); Guggino (1997, 38–55ff.); Hauschild (2003, 294–310ff.). But the dead can also harm, “because evil spirits exist, too,” as one healer explained (cf. Guggino, *ibid.*; Hauschild, *ibid.*). She told me how her cousins had lived in a haunted mill that had once been a convent. A priest had trapped the ghosts in a container and had put a heavy stone on top to keep them in there, but when the stone was inadvertently removed, the spirits of the dead nuns returned to haunt the place (interview with T. D. E., June 17, 2006). In some regions of Italy, the restless dead are also thought to cause illness (Hauschild, 2003, 388–89; Guggino, 1993, 41–51ff.); living in a house that is disturbed by spirits, or even coming into contact with a ghost inadvertently, can lead to a series of consequences necessitating a spiritual cure and a visit to a cunning woman or man.

### The Italian Cunning Tradition

Everywhere in Italy, there are experts who specialize in interfacing with the enchanted world; much of their work consists in the diagnosis and cure of spiritual illness. Their names vary according to region; but they are never called “witches” except when speakers wish to disparage them. Instead, they are known as *guaritori* (healers), *donne che aiutano* (women who help), *praticos* (cunning folk), and occasionally *mago* or *maghiarja* (sorcerers; de Martino 1987; Berghameschi 1978; Romano 1987; Hauschild 2003; Guggino 1997). Healers are predominantly female, as this role is an extension of women's domestic role as nurturer (Lussu, in Bergameschi 1978); but male healers are not unheard of. There are two principal strains of healing in Italian vernacular culture: healing through the use of herbs and spiritual healing. In some cases, both may be practiced by the same individual.

Of the two, healing with herbs is considered less a matter of spiritual ability than of practical knowledge. Local plants are known as *erbe* (herbs) if they have useful or curative properties, even when they are in fact trees or shrubs. Plants with no medicinal or practical use are often not even named. Depending on their nature, plants may be pounded into a poultice, or dried and made into infusions or decoctions. Even in the use of herbs, there are those whose use borders on the magical. Near the Apennine town of Monghidoro, my informant Massimo and I took a long walk one afternoon during which he pointed out plants and explained their curative properties and modes of employ. Along the way, I sometimes pointed to plants and asked about their use. When I asked about mugwort, Massimo identified it (correctly) as an artemisia and indicated that it had a use, but for purposes that were not discussed—in other words, the plant was potentially harmful and associated with witchcraft.<sup>7</sup>

Spiritual healing, in contrast, is believed to be more connected with personal power. This is variously called *la forza* (power), *il dono* (the gift), or *la virtù* (virtue or attribute; Guggino 1997, 62; Hauschild 2003, 277). But power alone is useless without the prayers, magical formulas, and techniques that make up the cunning person's craft. Knowledge and power are passed on through an initiation, most commonly at midnight on Christmas Eve Mass, during the elevation of the host—that magical moment of transformation in the Catholic liturgical year at which the world is transformed by the birth of the Savior and the host is transformed into his body—and thus, by association, any transformation can take place. The knowledge takes the form of formulas that call upon a saint or the Madonna, and in some cases an accompanying technique that varies according to the nature of the spiritual cure. These formulas and techniques are secret; they cannot be passed on to others without the healer losing her or his power, and they can only be passed on at the appointed time in the ritual cycle. Often, this is the only initiation and training necessary for the transmission of simple charms. Healing knowledge and power are typically passed down within the family, though occasionally a nonfamily member may also receive the healing charms and prayers. In the case of more complex technologies, healers sometimes serve an apprenticeship with more experienced cunning folk. Ada (a pseudonym), a well-known healer who serves clients from Bologna, Florence and other cities, claimed that she had served seven years as the apprentice of a local *strega* (witch).<sup>8</sup>

Hauschild writes, "The *donne che aiutano* [women who help] are in constant duel with the dead" (Hauschild 2003, 242–43).<sup>9</sup> Magical tools are part of healers' craft, but these vary greatly from one healer to another; there is no standardization. Common tools include fiber ropes or cords to bind, knives or scissors to cut away illness, mirrors, and weapons to frighten away evil spirits. Guggino and Hauschild both describe how cunning folk from Sicily and Basilicata, respectively, keep ritual weapons on hand—ropes, daggers, scissors, swords, and rifles—to frighten away evil spirits that cause illness in their clients (Hauschild 2003, 253). These instruments recall the tools of modern Neo-Pagan Witches, whose altars, like those of vernacular healers, are places where the relationship to the spirit world is negotiated and maintained (Magliocco 2001b). Modern Pagan Witches may not use their sacred blades to frighten away the dead nor

their cords to bind them; but the parallels between the tools are striking. Additional tools may be created as part of healing spells: for example, charm bags to be worn upon the person as protective amulets. Italian healing traditions are largely oral, although some healers do possess notebooks of magical formulas, as cunning folk from other parts of Europe also did (Davies 2003; Hutton 1999, 90–95). Akin to Medieval and early modern grimoires, these may be considered the precursors of modern Neo-Pagan books of shadows.<sup>10</sup>

The most widespread form of spiritual healing is the removal of the *malocchio*, or evil eye.<sup>11</sup> Particularly in the Campania, there was scarcely anyone I spoke with, even in casual social contexts, who did not name a mother, grandmother, or aunt who performed this kind of healing. In both Campania and Emilia, the removal of the evil eye typically took the form of dripping several drops of olive oil into a dish of water that had been placed on the patient's head. By observing whether the oil diffused into the water or floated on its surface, the healer diagnosed the presence or absence of the evil eye. She then said a silent prayer that would remove the ailment. When the oil began to coalesce and float on the water in discrete bubbles, this indicated that the healing had been successful and the evil eye had been removed. The prevalence of this form of vernacular magic, especially in Campania, is significant, because this region saw a very high rate of migration to North America during the years between 1890 and 1920. It may be that the descendants of these early immigrants can now look back and interpret this tradition, which is passed on in a hereditary fashion through a kind of initiation and involves practices that are certainly outside of official Catholicism, as evidence that their ancestors practiced a pagan religion.

The practice of *i segni*, or healing by the signs, is less widespread and requires more training. Besides prayer, the technique involves the movement of the hands over the affected part of the body in a clockwise manner. After several minutes of this, the healer moves her or his thumb vertically, then horizontally, tracing a series of crosses on the affected part. Some healers will use a sacred object, such as a small cross or religious medal, to sign; others combine *i segni* with massage using olive oil infused with herbs or with hot poultices made with herbs, cooked vegetable material, or salt. The use of the sign of the cross in the practice of signing strongly suggests its Christian origin (cf. Gay 2004), although it could also represent a Christianization of earlier practices.

More than the removal of the evil eye, signing involves close physical contact between the healer and the patient. Massimo, who heals with both traditional herbs and the signs, emphasized the importance of *disponibilità*, roughly translatable as openness to others, in the personality of the sign healer. During the period of my fieldwork, scarcely a night went by when someone did not come by Massimo's cottage to request a healing. Healing by the signs creates an intimacy between healer and client, since it involves close physical contact and can even serve to incorporate a newcomer into a community.<sup>12</sup> Sign healers are never paid for their work and must accept as a patient anyone who asks them for a healing.

In many areas, healing is essentially conceptualized as a battle against malevolent spirits—whether those of witches, the unquiet dead or others. Healers need spiritual allies in these battles, and many claim to regularly receive messages from

spirits who guide and help them in their craft. Many are highly localized as well as idiosyncratic: they may be saints, personal ancestors, or helpful dead. They appear to the healer in dreams and visions. Relationships with spirits, like human social relationships, are based on the principle of reciprocity, and healers maintain these relationships in a variety of ways. One of the most common is by keeping household or local shrines to the protective spirit. The image of the saint or departed loved one may be displayed in a prominent spot, such as a shelf or mantel, and flanked by votive candles, vases of flowers, and objects such as rosaries and sacred bric-a-brac that can be purchased in the gift shops of popular Roman Catholic sanctuaries. In the Emilian Apennine, shrines may also be found at specific outdoor locations: near springs and fountains, along footpaths, and at boundary markers. Often erected to commemorate a departed loved one, these shrines also act as memorials and serve as portals through which individuals communicate with the spirit world (Staro n.d.). Saints can act as powerful godparents, with all the ambivalence associated with that term. St. Paul, the protector of victims of tarantism, was perceived as both curing and on some level *causing* the ailment; while dancing in an ecstatic state, the afflicted reported alternately dialoguing with him and with the possessing *taranta* (spider), asking for healing; the husband of one *tarantata* told de Martino and his research team that the saint had actually sent the spider to bite his wife (de Martino 2005 [1961], 47).

Besides healers and magical practitioners, Italian rural society has a range of ritual specialists with very specific roles in their communities. Since relations with the spirit realm are partly governed by the ritual calendar and nearly all the occasions marked by the ritual calendar demand festivity, another layer of ritual specialists include those who organize festivals, maintain local shrines, or play music at religious festivals. These specialists may or may not overlap with those who dedicate themselves to ritual healing, but they constitute an important category that has often been overlooked by ethnographers but has received attention in the ethnomusicological literature (Gallini 1988; Del Giudice 2005; Magrini 2003; Staro 2005, n.d.).

### Witchcraft

In my own writings on Italian vernacular magic, I have consistently distinguished between actual local healers and magic workers, who could sometimes be accused of doing evil, and what I call the “folkloric witch,” an imaginary creature of legend whose activities—killing through magic, causing terrifying nightmares, flying through the air on broom straws, and dancing around the walnut tree of Benevento, to name just a few—could only take place in the realm of folk narrative. But this distinction is much easier to make on paper than in the minds and narratives of informants. It is clear from the oral narratives I collected that belief in witchcraft as *maleficum* still occurs occasionally in Italy. In one striking case, I was told that the tragic murder of a young man had been a result of witchcraft performed against a club of which he had been a member. The narrators claimed to have found evidence of magic hidden on the property where the club met.

These items were ritually disposed of, but a local unwitcher (a person specialized in undoing witchcraft) suggested that another club member was responsible for the actions. The suspected witch is none other than a local healer, albeit one who refers to herself openly as a *strega* (witch) and so perhaps attracts these kinds of accusations on some level. Thus, those who practice vernacular healing, cunning craft, and the removal of spells become easy suspects; when something goes wrong in the community, they are the first to be blamed.

Legends of witches working as part of a secret society are also alive and well in modern Italy. In Benevento, the legendary meeting place of witches, many people remembered very specific legends from their childhoods about witches who were well-known members of the community, and who, it was said, met secretly with other community members to work magic. Several described witchcraft to me as an initiatory organization that passed its secrets on only at Christmas during midnight Mass, just as the ability to heal is transmitted. Again, the threads linking the cunning tradition with beliefs about witches as harmful, yet hidden, community members are fine but present nonetheless. Here we are beginning to find some of the parameters that not only form a part of European witchcraft beliefs going back at least to the fourteenth century but are also part of the structure claimed by Italian American Streghe: witchcraft as a secret communal activity, handed down within families and through apprenticeships, much like cunning craft. I should emphasize that these links take the form of legend; there is little evidence that groups of healers or cunning folk participated in organized meetings and revels. Nevertheless, the widespread nature of these legends may be one reason the narratives of Leland and Grimassi find such resonance among Italian Americans today.

### **Vernacular Healing and Witchcraft in the Italian American Diaspora**

With the exception of research on the evil eye (Malpezzi and Clements 1992; Migliore 1997), surprisingly little inquiry has been done on vernacular healing and witchcraft beliefs among Italian Americans. A preliminary search in the Folklore Archives of the University of California, Berkeley has revealed a wealth of material, ranging from charms for warts and worms to narratives about intentionally placed curses. These materials were usually collected from individuals who were on the receiving end of the cures or who had heard about hexes, not from the charmers, healers and hexers themselves. Nothing I have found so far addresses the issue of the experience of vernacular religiosity, with its strong imaginal and spiritual components, which I hypothesize lies at the root of Stregheria. The archival materials are also plainly disconnected from their geographic, economic, and social links in Italy and inserted into an immigrant context in which the stigma against them is frequently mentioned. Clearly, much further research needs to be done to elucidate how Italian vernacular magicoreligious practices and experiences made the transition to the New World and the New Age.

## Conclusions

What can we conclude about the roots of Stregheria from these preliminary observations? I hypothesize that some Italian Americans who today see themselves as carriers of Stregheria grew up in families that preserved aspects of the enchanted worldview and the Italian cunning tradition. I hope that further research will substantiate more concrete links between the magicoreligious experiences of Italian immigrants and some aspects of vernacular magic that they are now reclaiming. Like modern Paganism and revival witchcraft, this way of life was organized around a ritual year that followed the cycle of the seasons; the moon and sun influenced rhythms of work and production. Women were recognized as life-givers and nourishers and were closely involved in the maintenance of shrines to a feminine divine figure, the Virgin Mary. Their immigrant ancestors may have been carriers of a tradition of healing that involved herbal and magical practices. Since these traditions could often be conflated with witchcraft in popular narratives, it is possible that this link persisted into the second, third, and fourth generation after immigration, giving contemporary Streghe the impression that their ancestors belonged to an organized, hierarchical but secret society of witches. Stregheria provides a framework into which these disparate, and by now decontextualized, beliefs and practices may be united and systematized. It revalues them as evidence of spiritual authenticity and continuity, transforming them into sources of ethnic pride and distinctiveness and creating new ways for Italian Americans to imagine themselves. As each successive generation interprets esoteric material according to the reigning dominant paradigms and predominant discourses of the time, the discourse of reclamation is itself but the latest of these to be layered upon this material.

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### Notes

1. In this chapter, I will capitalize Pagan, Witch, Witchcraft, and Stregheria when referring to the modern religions but use lowercase when using the terms in a historical or ethnographic context. Thus a witch or *strega* is a person believed to have the ability to harm others through supernatural means, while a Witch or *Strega* is the practitioner of a modern Pagan religion.
2. This area, however, saw comparatively little migration to North America. It was selected to test Leland's claims.
3. This observation comes from the author's fieldwork in the Emilian Apennine, 2005 and 2006.
4. This recalls the ancient Greek belief reflected in the dual meaning of the word *psyche* as both soul and butterfly.
5. This parallels associations in Celtic literature, in which white dogs with red ears were associated with the realm of the dead.
6. Cf. the association of spiders with *tarantismo* by de Martino (2005) and of winged antlike insects with the Sardinian *argismo* by Gallini (1988). Both scholars hypothesize that underneath these cures of Medieval origin there may have been an earlier belief in the presence of spirits of the dead in insects and spiders.
7. Mugwort in fact possesses hallucinogenic properties and is toxic in large doses.
8. Her use of this term is unusual in that the majority of healers I interviewed did not refer to themselves or their teachers with this word, which has overwhelmingly negative connotations in Italian folk culture.
9. Translation by Consuelo Griggio-Kuhn; I am grateful to her for her invaluable help with the intricacies of Hauschild's text.
10. Grimoires are written collections of magical spells and formulas from European Medieval and Renaissance practitioners. Many continued in existence well into the nineteenth century. Modern Pagan books of shadows are also written collections of rites and spells, either held individually or, in the case of specific traditions, shared by a coven or an entire tradition (e.g., Gardnerian and Alexandrian Witchcraft traditions).
11. The evil eye has been the object of extensive study in the ethnology of the Mediterranean. For a preliminary overview, see Dundes 1980, 1981; Elworthy 1986; Di Stasi 1981.
12. When I was in Monghidoro in 2005, I suffered one of the worst attacks of sciatica I have ever experienced, probably due to dragging around a suitcase full of books and photographic equipment. I was worked on by two different healers, Massimo and Tina; my willingness to be worked on, to enter into the system that I was observing, may have hastened the formation of rapport with the social group I was observing.

## My Homer

*Joanna Clapps Herman*

I often say that I was born in 1944 but raised in the fifteenth century because although I was born in Waterbury, Connecticut, in a New England factory town, in post–World War II, I grew up in a large southern Italian family where the rules were absolute and customs antiquated. My sister and I were doing the jitterbug to Chuck Berry’s “Maybelline” coming from the radio on the kitchen counter, my father was singing Nat King Cole songs in the shower, and my grandfather was singing “*Vicin’ ’u mare*,” and “*Non sona più la sveglia*” under the grape arbor.

My grandparents were all born and raised in two tiny *paesi*, Tolve and Avigliano, in Basilicata, the backwater of a backwater. Naples is “the North” to us. Roughly old Lucania, Basilicata is composed of steep parallel mountains precluding easy communications, making it one of these least-known parts of Italy. Even Calabria, to our south, the famously backward toe of our famous boot, is better known. Sicilians have the wild pride of their stunning and infamous island. But if you are *Lucano* (from the Italian *Lucano*), you are from a place that even other Italians barely know. “*Abash*,” my grandmother said when I asked her what she thought of the Tolvesi, her people. Real low, said this southern Italian woman who was filled with pride of blood, pride of self, pride of her American prosperity. It is still one of the poorest regions in Italy. There is little tourism, less industry, a place with more past than present.

Is this why layers of the great ancient cultures which swept through Sicily and southern Italy have been preserved? The Greeks were powerfully present in this part of the world beginning in the seventh century BCE. Though all the ancient Mediterranean cultures left their imprint in the region, the deposits of Greek colonization are among the most richly apparent. Just to point out two strikingly obvious remnants, throughout the south of Italy and Sicily are the stunningly beautiful Greek temples, as well as the countless regional museums crammed with statues of Greek deities, so voluminous that they are literally stuffed into cabinets, in room after room, museum after museum, without note or comment. There are simply too many of them to catalog. The Greek colonial world seems more richly inscribed than any of the other ancient empires. What I am exploring here

is perhaps a subtler layer, remnant of that Greek “new world,” one inscribed in cultural mores and oral traditions. Though subtle, they were, and are, so strongly a part of my people as to have successfully survived up to, and right alongside, the intense transforming forces of post–World War II America. My grandparents carried with them an ancient world preserved as if in simple, breathing amber, and passed it onto us, not as a relic but as our everyday lived reality.

The archaic ways with which I was raised were so natural as to be effortless. Absolute tribal cultures keep you busy. There are a lot of rules to keep. We were so preoccupied with making sure we lived according to the absolute customs of our family that we never questioned them.

But once I left my sealed Italian existence and went out into the modern urban world, I found myself at the doorway to the 1960s. Even though I was of the second generation, born in America, I had so little ability to reconcile the southern Italian immigrant life I had come from with the one I moved to that I found myself mute. But the word mute isn’t quite accurate. I was so literally stunned, *stunada* “out of it,” “out of tune,” that I had no ability to form thought nor to find a language with which to describe this switch. So, for many years, I lived in two irreconcilable loci.

Only long after I left Waterbury did I begin to understand the distance between these cultures and only fairly recently, some 45 years later, have I discovered a perspective to help me understand *why* these two places are so irreconcilable. There is a single author who acts as a useful guide to the land and tribe whence I came. Homer and his epics, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, are my guidebooks. At first, I thought it humorous that there were so many particulars I recognized at once in his epics, but gradually I began to appreciate that Homer wasn’t telling us about a mythical, distant people, but rather stories about a tribe like mine.

One of the major functions of myth is to embody and teach the values of a culture. In its stories are embedded the culture’s codes of behavior. In Homer I found a means of understanding why the eighty-nine-mile journey from New York to Waterbury actually represented a span of millennia. Homer’s archaic terrain is as familiar to me as the Formica table in my mother’s kitchen.

So in reality, it makes more sense to say I was born in 1944 but raised in Homer’s time. It was the fifteenth century, but fifteenth century BCE! Although during my childhood life in America would soon be closing in on the posthistorical second half of the twentieth century, much of what formed the paradigms of our family life had to do with pre-Christian, prehistorical ideas of pride and honor, shame and hospitality, of singing and storytelling, the palpable reality of dreams, and a strict code of what it meant to be a man and a woman. What was emphasized was shame not anxiety, honor not accomplishment, hospitality rather than individual ambition, song and storytelling, not writing.

This psychogeography will be familiar to other Sicilian and southern Italian Americans. Even the basic Homeric concepts were at the heart of the ethos in which we were raised. We watched our parents, grandparents, and even those of us not born in Italy experience a lifelong preoccupation with *nostos*, or the longing for home or return, which lies at the heart of the *Odyssey* and the immigrant experience. There is the idea of *nekyia*, the calling up of ghosts or the dead, as well as all the stuff of daily life in a southern Italian family. There are the linked concepts of

*moira* or fate, and *time* or reputation. *Moira* is someone's share or portion of what life gives but really implies fate or what is inevitable. Aunt Mena, who had more than her share of misery, always said, "What are you going to do?" with a cosmic shrug. There is the companion concept of *time*, the share of gifts or prizes accorded someone, depending on their heroic deeds and commensurate with their set of obligations and risks taken. We can think here of the heroic stature of Achilles but also the idea of the *primo figlio* (from Italian *primogenito*). There is of course, the idea of *kleos*, glory or fame, but more literally "reputation," what people will say about you. Etymologically, *kleos* comes from the word for *call*, so inherent is what is said about one out loud. One of my grandmother's favorite rhetorical questions was, "Ma whadda the people gonna tink?" making it clear people thinking badly of us was not a risk we could take. Perhaps most important, however, is the idea of *xenia*, in both Homer's world and mine, which defines the absolute obligations on either side of the guest-host relationship. More specifically, the term defines coded responses to a stranger or a foreigner's arrival. Finally, in my family, there are the distinctly Homeric practices: the singing of songs and the telling of tales.

There were the stories about "the other side," (again *nostos*), but there were also repeated oral cycles about set characters told with the same refrains and phrasing. Their oral storytelling practices could easily have been studied by Milman Parry and Albert Lord, who would have found in Waterbury the same extemporaneous composing, using age-old narrative strategies of repetitious epithets and oral formulae. These stories reflected the values by which we lived, the values that were transmitted to my generation as they had been for centuries, explicating who was foolish or corrupt and what constituted virtuous behavior. There were stories about the outsized behavior of men who contended with terrible and startling events. There were stories about scandalous and virtuous women.

Indeed, one of the main characteristics of a good woman in my family, almost as important as being a good cook and being utterly faithful, were her skills with thread and needle, a key measure by which the women in Homer are judged. Penelope could have sat at her loom on my grandmother's farm with ease, just as my grandmother had when she was a girl in her mother's home.

I mention in passing that one grandfather ran a large pig farm—remember that upon his return to Ithaca, Odysseus finds his first *xenia* with Eumaios, his loyal swineherd, who sits "Odysseus down on brush and twigs he piled up for the visitor, flinging over these the skin of a baggy wild goat warm and soft, the swineherd's own good bedding" (bk. 14, lines 50–60) before "the stranger ate his meat and drank his wine ravenous, bolting it all down." Eumaios says to Odysseus, "It's wrong, my friend, to send a stranger packing, even one who arrives in worse shape than you . . . Here I sit, my heart aching for *him*, my master, my great king, fattening up his own hogs for other men to eat." Fattening pigs and butchering and roasting them, were all a part of our everyday life. My other grandfather, indeed all the men on my father's side, including my uncles and my father, were blacksmiths, later ironworkers. In Book 10 of *The Iliad* we hear, "And the bellows . . . blew on the crucibles, breathing with all degrees of shooting, fiery heat, a blast for heavy work, a quick breath for the light, the pace of the work in hand all precisely gauged." This same "fiery heat . . . the pace of work in hand, all precisely gauged," along with the

forge, the bellows, the anvil and hammers, were as much a part of our landscape as they were for Hephaestus, the smith who makes Achilles's new suit of armor before he finally enters battle with Hector.

So, to begin, let us drift into dreams. In Homer, dreams, augurs, omens, and prediction are part of the landscape. What they mean, who interprets them, and what they predict are essential pieces of Homeric reality. So too were they for us. When we wandered into the kitchen of the ranch house my father had built for us in 1950 (from plans he had cut from our newspaper, the *Waterbury Republican*), and we were still stupid from sleep, we plopped ourselves down on the green vinyl chairs at the white Formica and chrome-legged kitchen table, we typically started our day the same way: "I had this dream last night," or "You'll never guess what I dreamed last night," or "It was the darnedest thing last night."

And every day these introductions were interrupted by my mother turning away from her preparations, her face strung with the same worry: "Was it a good dream or a bad dream? If it was a bad dream, have something to eat before you tell it. If you don't eat something, your dream will come true." She stopped us before we could continue to speak. She said this every day, and every day it had the same annoying, disruptive effect of breaking the mood of our still loose-limbed trances, that paranormal state between sleep and waking, between the unconscious and the conscious. Dreamscapes in my home were ones that were clearly between the lands of the spirit and the flesh. It was that site where you followed neither the rules of sleep nor wakefulness, the one you traveled from one place to the other. We reveled in the telling, but we wouldn't know what the dreams meant until we told our grandmother, who had her own code of signs, augurs, and predictions.

My superficially Americanized mother's anxiety about our dreams was intense and real. Only food had the power to stave off the forces of the dream life. Dreams had the power to follow us into consciousness. By the time you ate a piece of bread or took a swig from the glass bottle of milk, the somnolent trance had been disturbed, and thus my mother's goal achieved. An interruption of the corporeal dampened these forces from the other cosmos. As my mother lives so too we lived in turn, in a universe where spirits walked at our side, where dying loved ones appeared at bedsides to say goodbye or to tell us good news, where dead baby brothers walked up the stairs calling out for Mama.

Then we always proceeded to tell our dreams. While the coffee was being poured from the percolator, the Sunshine 'Merican bread or Spinelli's Italian was being toasted, we took turns telling what had happened in our dreams. The wilderness of our dreams was brought into the kitchen: lions roared, we walked naked down streets, people chased us, or large dogs lunged for our jugular. We pleaded before authorities that didn't see we hadn't committed an offense. We were innocent and powerless. Or we flew, our arms *were* wings, we pumped ourselves up toward a sky as real and as meaningful to us as Penelope's eagle swooping down on her geese. Dreams were deeply embedded in our ordinary daily life. Although we had no official oracles or diviners for interpretation, my illiterate grandmother served as the diviner and interpreter, having brought with her an ancient code of interpretation from Italy's deep South. Strong spirits, signs, and oracles, were all part of my grandmother's sphere, and so in turn, a part of ours.

Underlying all the unspoken assumptions in our kitchen was the idea that dreams portend and then reveal the truth, just as they do throughout Homer. To take a single important example from *The Odyssey*, we recall the crucial moment between Penelope and Odysseus, after he has returned to his home disguised as a beggar and they finally sit together on either side of their hearth, the symbolic center of the household. Penelope tells him her recent dream, in which an eagle swoops down and kills her geese. The geese represent her suitors. In the dream the eagle settles, then speaks to her in Odysseus's own voice. Odysseus, whose chair is drawn up near to hers, his identity still hidden beneath rags, responds like this: "Twist it however you like, your dream can only mean one thing. Odysseus has told you himself—he'll make it come to pass. Destruction is clear for each and every suitor, not a soul escapes his death and doom" (Book 19). Although Penelope makes the disclaimer, "Ah my friend, dreams are hard to unravel, wayward and drifting things, not all we glimpse in them will come to pass" (bk. 19, lines 625–50), within a few lines she is essentially colluding with this beggar about the contest she's going to hold over the stringing of Homer's bow, which we all know *only Odysseus can possibly string*. It is in this crucial scene that Homer, the master storyteller, leaves us with the "does she or doesn't she know" question. This moment is one of the critical turning points of the story, and the meaning of the dream is at its center. Dreams bring knowledge from beyond. My grandmother typically sat in an old, worn, upholstered chair next to the wood-burning stove, telling us family dreams and interpreting what extraordinary messages they carried to us.

My grandmother's interpretations of all our dreams had the same mythic importance to us. Long after her own four daughters were married—my generation was already in college—my grandmother dreamed that a man had come and abducted one of her daughters. Sick with worry, she kept saying to herself, "No, no it's not true. I have all my daughters, all my children are safe." Still the dream haunted her. After a few days, one of her daughters went to her mother, my grandmother, filled with shame and humiliation. Her daughter was pregnant and was going to be married immediately. This was in the very early 1960s when such news was still a horrifying breach of our sexual code. My grandmother's response was to start laughing with relief and pleasure. "Oh thank god. That's what my dream meant. I was so worried, *figlia mia*. It's okay. No one took her. It's just that she's going to be married." And she told her daughter her dream. We have here another embedded Greek myth: the Persephone and Demeter story, where sex and marriage are seen as the abduction of a daughter.

In Waterbury we told our dreams, we sat under grape arbors in the warm weather, eating and drinking, singing and telling stories. Both grandfathers filled cellars with innumerable barrels of wine each fall so that the long tables so frequently filled with guests could be served abundantly throughout the entire year. In Homer, too, a home without plenty of good wine and food to offer guests, either familiar or strange, was a home in shame.

My father loved to tell this story about the importance of wine to his family: His grandmother, his father, and his father's closest friend, Canio, stood solemnly in the cellar passing around the first taste of Canio's wine. They were the arbiters. The glass was passed in turn to each. No one said a word for a moment. Then

Mamanonna, my father's grandmother, broke the silence grimly: "Canio's season is shot to hell." Poor Canio's wine wasn't any good, and so now he had no way to welcome guests to his home.

In the south of Italy, a place of poverty, it was deemed essential that you conceal that meagerness and share abundantly what you had so little of. The poorer members of my family had to find a way to fulfill this duty even if it was a hardship because hospitality marked the essence of seeing ourselves as a civilized people.

Because after the fall of Troy Odysseus travels for ten years to return home, always in a perpetual state of *nostos*, one of the great concerns of this epic is *xenia* or hospitality. His journey is often defined by those who help or hinder his way home, those who violate the code of *xenia* and those who uphold it. *Xenia* is at the very heart of this epic. One could say it is *the* central value. Kalypso and Circe break this code by not helping Odysseus to get on with his journey: this is an essential piece *xenia*. The true horror of *xenia* being violated is made clear when we meet the Cyclops, who not only does not extend proper hospitality but threatens instead to make his guests into dinner. This is to say, if you are so inhospitable as to not observe *xenia* properly, you turn into a creature who instead of feeding his guests eats them. In *The Odyssey* good *xenia* is good character.

For us in our closed communities, these were the absolute rules: we were not sure if that which lay beyond our neighborhoods would welcome us, so the rules of hospitality required rigid certainty. If you were a stranger in the land (an immigrant), away from your own people, would you be welcomed or harmed? In fact, you could say *xenia* marked for us the essence of our morality. It is based more than anything on obligation rather than love or friendship. The host must more than welcome the guest or even the stranger. Family and friends herded strangers to our tables and our beds. If members of the family had to sleep on two chairs pushed together instead of a bed, and if children had to sleep on tables, then so be it. Hospitality determined our reputation as *custumade* (with custom or courtesy). To be *scustumade*, or without custom or courtesy, was shameful. If we took a walk to a neighbor's house to ask about some incidental piece of information and they left us standing at the door and did not invite us in, the full force of my mother's scorn rose in her: "They didn't even invite us in. They didn't even make us a cup of coffee." Nothing could be more ill-mannered.

My grandmother was loathe to leave her pig farm, especially on the very rare occasion when no one else was going to be home. She'd protest, "*Ma* [But] what if the people come and nobody *è ca* [is here]?" In my own household, there were many occasions when, although we had plans go out, when a Pontiac or Terraplane appeared with friends, relatives, or *paesani*—they might only have driven from across town—our plans immediately changed. We might be, and often were, already in our car. Dad could be backing the car down our driveway, but guests had arrived at our door. Lucia and I would look at each other and sigh. We knew the car would be pulled back up the driveway, "Put the coffee on Lucia; Jo, get the cold cuts and a jar of pickled eggplant from the cellar." Later we'd bring the cookies in from the roasting pan where they were kept in the garage cupboards. We were going to be sitting on the porch, or at our kitchen table for the rest of the night, visiting and telling stories.

Lucia and I would roll our eyes at each other, but so embedded were these values in my family that we never dared to question this practice. My father and mother reassured our guests, “Come in, come in. No, no we weren’t really going anywhere. How nice to see you Dominic and Louise,” even if we had just seen them the night before. “We weren’t going anywhere.” It was essential that you deny reality because “You don’t want them to think we don’t want them in our house.” Lucia and I would never have dared display our sullen responses to our company. We would never have wanted to be seen as *scustumade*.

Telemachus, as Odysseus and Penelope’s son, like us, was the inheritor, and therefore the upholder of this code. In fact, in the first four books of *The Odyssey*, Telemachus, as both host and guest, displays the primacy of place that *xenia* holds in the Greek homeland. We are shown here a terrible violation of *xenia* by the suitors, who have stayed too long, who are eating and drinking Penelope and Telemachus out of house and home. This behavior is considered so terrible that if it is not at one with the suitors’ plan to kill Telemachus, it does nonetheless signal a grievous violation of the Homeric ethic.

We first see Telemachus’s moral fiber when Athena arrives at his door disguised as a guest, “Mortified that a guest might still be standing at the doors . . . he clasped her right hand and relieved her at once of her long bronze spear. . . . Greetings dear stranger. Here in our house you’ll find a royal welcome. Have supper first, then tell us what you need” (bk. 1, lines 140–44). He escorts her to a high chair of honor, taking only a low chair for himself. Water is brought so that the disguised Athena might wash her hands before she is lavishly served. Only after all this has been attended to—and this is the key to *xenia*—does Telemachus ask his guest for a name and identity. The code of *xenia* rests on the fact that the host must be willing to take a guest into his household and take care of him *before* he has any idea of who he is.

Here is a parallel story that is part of my family’s myth cycle. My mother often tells of the hordes who would visit her home when she was a child:

And I do mean hordes, these people would come up from New York and bring their friends and their friends’ friends to stay with us or even sometimes live with us for the summer. It was their summer vacation, and we were happy to have them. We’d wait on them hand and foot. This was our fun. To have company. People would come and live with us, with their children and everything. They’d take over our bedrooms, and we’d sleep on the sun porch. We set out platters of my mother’s homemade *prosciutto* and sausage. We’d cook and clean for them.

Up the farm—whoever came there, was always welcome. There were people who came to the door and asked for sandwiches. They were drifters. Once a big man came to the farm and he was Russian and he said, “Mama, can I have something to eat?” So my mother made him a sandwich and gave him something to drink, she looked down at his legs and they were a mess, full of sores and pus. So she had him take his shoes and socks off. Then she got down on her hands and knees and bathed his leg with disinfectant. This is a perfect stranger: she never asked his name! He never asked her for this and she got a basin and took off the old bandages and washed and cleaned his feet and legs and cleaned them and put ointment [a substance made up largely of oil] on them and wrapped them up again. He was a big Russian guy, Big

John. He had burned his feet with gasoline. I don't know how that happened, but my mother felt so sorry for him. When my father came home he said, "What are you doing?" She said, "He doesn't have any place to live. You have any work for him?" So my father asked the guy, "You want to work for me." Big John called my mother "Mama" and us girls "Little Mama." He worked on the farm for a long, long time.

There are a couple of Homeric values encoded here. First, one welcomes a stranger, especially a stranger in need. One offers him food, drink, even the ancient value of bathing the stranger when the stranger enters your house, particularly his feet, since presumably he has been traveling and his feet are dirty and tired. Most importantly, one does not ask his name until these other needs have been attended to. This task is not beneath the woman of the house—in fact it enhances her status—to attend to these welcoming duties. She is the one who knows the value of welcoming the stranger. And although Big John was not given the comfort of a lustrous rug and mattress and settled under the eaves of the porch, as Odysseus is with Nausicaa's family, he is given a job and a bed and a place in my grandparents' household. He worked and lived in the little house for the men who worked on my grandfather's pig farm for a long time, ate all his meals at my grandmother's ample kitchen table, and there was certainly always wine with dinner.

If this narrative echoes, as it surely does, the Nausicca chapter filled with details of bathing and welcome, food and drink, the two details that especially caught my attention are the way my mother says casually, and only in passing, "She didn't even ask his name." This was so much a part of the fabric of the culture that she barely notices its importance. But Homer would have noticed.

My mother's tale parallels yet another Homeric story—and I assure you no one in my family ever read Homer until I did—the story of Odysseus's encounter with Euryclea, his childhood nurse and the family retainer. In Book 19, after Penelope and the beggar (Odysseus) have concluded their talk at the hearth, Penelope says, in line 364: "But come women, wash the stranger and make his bed, with bedding, blankets and lustrous spreads to keep him warm . . . then tomorrow at daybreak bathe him well and rub him down with oil." Penelope is showing her superior virtue by offering even a beggar the finest *xenia* (notice the lustrous spread, beyond the bathing and bedding).

Because Penelope's maids are not virtuous—they have been consorting with the violating suitors—they now actually mock Odysseus instead, so Euryclea steps in to perform this righteous task. "The work is mine. . . wise Penelope bids me now and I am all too glad. I will wash your feet for both my own dear queen and for yourself." At that point there is a foreshadowing of recognition. "You're like Odysseus, to the life! Then she took up a burnished basin she used for washing feet and poured in bowls of fresh cold water before she stirred in hot." And it is at that moment that in bathing his feet, just as my grandmother bathed and oiled the drifter Big John's feet, before *she* knew his name, that Euryclea recognizes the beggar as her master. She started to bathe her master. . . then in a flash, she knew the scar. This beggar, this hero, is finally among his own people. This is the beginning of his stunning homecoming.

I often say jokingly about Homer, “I know these people.” When my grandmother washed and dressed the legs and feet of the drifter Big John in so similar a posture as Euryclea washing Odysseus’s feet, I would like to suggest that Homer would have recognized my grandmother, and that is why I recognize in him the people whence I came.

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# Alessandra Belloni

## In Her Own Words

*Interview and Translation into English by Luisa Del Giudice*

### Summary

Introduction; 1. Beginnings: Rome, New York; 2. “No Mom, I’m Staying!” 3. A Very Clever, Beautiful Mother and a Tyrannical Father; 4. Mother and Daughter in Film; 5. Maternal Grandparents and Traditional Music: “We Were All Embarrassed”; 6. Early Musical Tastes: Cabaret; 7. Fellini’s Advice; 8. Anna Magnani and a Thwarted Acting Career; 9. Alone in New York; 10. Return to Rome and the Discovery of Traditional Music; 11. John La Barbera, I Giullari, and New York University; 12. *Tarantismo*: First Exposures; 13. Rhythm Is the Cure: Calling Down the Spirits; 14. Puglia and Pizzica: Knives, Sex, and Women; 15. “This Thing Against Women”; 16. “They Live in a Spider’s Web”; 17. Women Have Lost Their Strength; 18. Percussion: Entering “A Real Male World”; 19. I’m Not a Feminist; 20. New Age Nonsense; 21. World Musical Fusions: We are all One; 22. “I’ve Always Felt Part Indian”; 23. Italian Americans: A Love–Hate Relationship; 24. “The Kids are Wild About It”; 25. Dressing Up; 26. The Black Madonna: The Great Mother; 27. Southern Reincarnations: Naples, Calabria; 28. Current Musical Inclinations and World Music; 29. Artists-in-Residence at St. John the Divine Cathedral, New York; 30. “Mediterranean Volcano” and “Black Madonna”; 31. Priestly Callings

### Introduction

This extended interview was conducted on February 2, 1998, at my home in Los Angeles. While our actual oral history encounter can be measured in hours, weeks

instead were required to transform the sound recording into this written transcription. Oral history is labor intense.<sup>1</sup>

The interview was transcribed at the close of 2006—approximately nine years after it took place. Listening at such a distance in time, to recover the actual words and intonation, inferable gestures, and other modalities, required the most acute sort of attention—and sometimes conjecture. It is this intense listening, though, both within the context of the original interview and with hindsight, that makes oral historical research the unique exercise it is and provides many of its challenges and rewards. Listening to another's life—its joys, pains, beliefs, and hopes—is always a privilege. Sharing the deepest parts of one's life, as Alessandra Belloni does with candor here, is a generous act indeed. Listening for these deep stirrings is hard work. It requires a focus of attention (for speaker and listener) that cannot be sustained for long periods of time.

This edited transcription is intended nonetheless to give a sense of the sounds and flow of an actual oral interview, the laborious process by which it becomes transmittable, while glossing and contextualizing discourse. It includes ellipses (. . .) wherever passages were deemed unnecessary for public dissemination, superfluous verbiage, or acoustically incomprehensible. Condensation was further dictated by the publisher's word-count. Much of the work of segmentation, insertion of pauses and ellipses, and labeling of sections,<sup>2</sup> is, of course, subjective. I have also attempted to convey some sense of the physical cues, of setting, timing (e.g., interruptions, reflective hesitations, need for breaks), and other factors that play a role in the flow of conversation—as points of instigation and response by which interviewer and interviewee thrust forward.

A word on silences: the ethical dimensions of oral historical work demand care to represent any exchange or conversation in as honest a way as possible, balanced by a wholesome regard for privacy, even when such opinions strongly conflicted with my own (e.g., her views on feminism). Alessandra's passionate personality eschews equivocation and enjoys emphasis. Her opinions are bold, she speaks with candor, and she generates not a little controversy in many of her interactions, both personal and professional. Consequently, it seemed to me that some comments, openly and strongly stated in private, may not be appropriate for publication, even when release forms have been duly signed. In the few instances of cosmetic surgery (careful editing), I have nonetheless practiced restraint and sought to allow her personal opinion free rein. It was no more my aim to conceal than to expose. Rather, this transcription represents a conscientious effort to share what has driven and shaped Alessandra and to let her own voice communicate this essence.

Why publish an interview, now a decade old? First, because this interview could not be more central to this volume—given that it is an *oral history* about *oral culture* and about an *Italian in America*. Indeed, the 2005 Italian Oral History Institute Award recognized “the extraordinary rôle of Alessandra Belloni, John La Barbera and I Giullari di Piazza, in the transmission and translation of Italian oral traditions in America.”<sup>3</sup> I Giullari di Piazza have been the *only* fully professional United States-based folk music ensemble devoted exclusively to presenting the oral traditions of southern Italy—not an insignificant feat. John as composer, musician, and musical director of the company, and Alessandra, as percussionist,

dancer, and artistic director, have for three decades brought this remote traditional music to concert stages across the United States—even though their paths have more recently diverged.

Further, Alessandra has initiated an entire generation—and perhaps two—of (largely) women and girls into the dance rituals of *pizzica*, *tarantella*, and *tammoriata*. Under various sobriquets such as the “Mediterranean Volcano” or the “Black Madonna,” Alessandra may be considered an important female figure in a rarified (and decidedly male) field of World Music percussionists. She is certainly a central figure in Mediterranean musical traditions in the United States and in emergent areas of women’s spirituality and the Italian folk revival still unfolding. It is here fitting to acknowledge and record her pioneering contributions and to hear this account in her own words. This oral history is further enriched by John La Barbera’s overlapping account in the form of his musical memoir (this volume, Chapter 12).

Among their most significant theatrical works (“folk operas”) may be listed *La Lupa*; *La Cantata dei Pastori*; *Stabat Mater: Donna de Paradiso*; *The Adventures of Don Giovanni and His Servant Pulcinella*; *1492–1992: Earth, Sun and Moon*; *The Voyage of the Black Madonna*; and more recently, Belloni’s concert programs: *Tarantata: The Dance of the Ancient Spider* and *Rhythm Is the Cure*. A Giullari di Piazza CD was produced in 1995: *Earth, Sun and Moon* (Lyrichord); and Belloni has CDs of her own: *Tarantata: Dance of the Ancient Spider* (Sounds True, 2000) and *Tarantelle e Canti d’Amore* (Naxos 2003).<sup>4</sup> Some of these works were extensively discussed during the interview itself.

In 1995 and 1996 I taught a course I named “A Singable Feast: Food and Song in Traditional Italian Culture” at UCLA; it featured a live performance series of traditional Italian song and dance (for students and the general public). Following these concerts, informal musical gatherings took place in my home. I met and grew to know Alessandra Belloni within this context. During the summer of my fortieth birthday, I accompanied Alessandra and her husband, Dario Bollini, on a musical tour of the Italian South (Campania, Calabria and Puglia)—a birthday gift from my husband. I had wanted to avert a midlife crisis, which, according to popular wisdom, comes crashing down on one’s 40th birthday! Our travels proved a meaningful way for me to ritualize this life passage. We swam by day and went to *sagre* by night. Alessandra played tambourine and danced on public piazzas night after night. And I slowly moved from being an attentive observer to active participant, thus making that transformative passage, something so many others have accomplished under Alessandra’s watchful eye. This interview, therefore, is also offered as a labor of gratitude for Alessandra’s mentorship.

Her career and life have, of course, taken new directions since 1998, as may have her ideas, opinions, and goals; thus, a more current interview could not help but add new chapters to her life history. And such revisitations form a recognized strategy in oral historical research. But here we read a slice of life at an arbitrary point along the path of that life. Such “time travel” and stock takings may be as intensely personal for the interviewer as for the interviewee. And so it has been for me here. Coming as it does at a time when I have been reevaluating many aspects of my own professional and personal life, this transcription and publication have become intimately tied up with my return to the intersections of ethnography and

spirituality. In some ways, Alessandra's reflections on her professional "callings" and the spiritual dimensions of her work mirror a few of my own.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, I wish to make a few linguistic observations about this interview. Alessandra is a fluidly bilingual (English/Italian) speaker who frequently inflects her Italian with Roman dialect speech patterns: for example, contractions (Rom. "me so' ricordata" = It. "mi sono ricordata"); Rom. "co' 'sta prova" = It. *con questa prova*; Rom. "mi' fija" = It. *mia figlia*); or regional terms: for example, Rom. *mo'* = It. *adesso, ora*; Rom. *non c'era manco bisogno* (Rom. *manco* = It. 'neanche,'nemmeno'). Recourse to Roman dialect is most marked when Alessandra makes an emphatic statement or when quoting or mimicking a Roman speaker (e.g., her mother, Anna Magnani). Another noteworthy feature (of which she is cognizant), is that specific topics (e.g., discourse on New Age goddess worship, healing practices), tend to induce code switching from Italian to English, as does the remembrance of conversation which originally took place in English. Alessandra is an emphatic speaker, and hence one will note the frequent recourse to italics. Where instead, emphatic voice is also tinged with incredulity or embarrassment, her speech becomes drawn out, staccato, her voice low, and she enunciates each syllable: for example, "*coi calzettoni bianchi!*" Further, Alessandra has been called a Mediterranean "volcano," and indeed, I frequently experienced her eruptions, as many of my questions remained incomplete—with, at times, a veritable verbal duel between an attempted questioning *thrust*, countered with a quick response *parry*—nay, a response before any question could be made! She frequently caught my questions on the fly, before they were fully articulated: "A *buon intenditor poche parole*!" ("For he who understands, few words suffice"). Alas, this oral history cannot be a thing of few words, but includes many—in Italian, Roman, and finally English (Alessandra's own)—along with my own modest translation of her words. *Note:* I have employed the use of asterisks in the translations to serve as markers to the corresponding endnote numbers in the original dialogue.

### 1. Beginnings: Rome, New York

LDG: . . . Perché sei venuta negli Stati Uniti, e quando?

*Why did you come to the States and when?*

AB: Io so' venuta nel '71, d'estate, a trovare mia sorella. . . .

*I came in '71, in the summer, to visit my sister. . . .*

AB: . . . E' stata l'idea di mia madre . . . Io quando so' partita, mi ricordo, c'ho avuto proprio questo feeling: io non torno più. Poi so' arrivata a New York. Era un periodo pazzesco, perchè era il periodo delle droghe [nell']East Village. Allucinante. Però nello stesso tempo io l'ho sentito proprio affascinante. . . . Io poi ero proprio *naif* su tantissimo. . . . Volevo fare musica e teatro. Mio padre non me l'avrebbe mai permesso. E' stata mia sorella (che non se lo ricorda più [laughs]) che m'ha consigliato

di restare e poi m'ha trovato questo lavoro alla FIAT come segretaria. Io non sapevo fare niente, però, colla faccia tosta che c'avevo io . . . . . Poi dopo m'hanno richiamato e hanno detto: siccome pari una sveglia ti diamo questa possibilità. . . . Guadagnavo \$100 alla settimana, che mi sembrava una cosa . . .

*. . . It was my mother's idea . . . When I left, I remember, I really had this feeling: I'm never returning. Then I arrived in New York. It was a crazy time, because it was a time of drugs [in the] East Village. Mind-boggling. But at the same time I found it absolutely fascinating. . . . I too was really an innocent about so much. . . . I wanted to do music and theater. My father would never have permitted it. It was my sister (who doesn't even remember it anymore [laughs]) who advised me to stay and then found me this secretarial job at FIAT. I didn't know how to do anything, but, with my chutzpah . . . . . Then they called me back and said: since you seem to have a good head on your shoulders we're going to give you a try. . . . I earned \$100/week, which seemed like it was really something. . . .*

## 2. "No Mom, I'm Staying!"

AB: . . . Poi mia madre ha deciso di ritornare. . . . Io avevo già deciso di restare, però, mia madre non lo sapeva. Lei ha cominciato a fare le valige e io no [laughs]. Lì c'era il primo dubbio. Ma dice: "che fai, non ti prepari"? E io ho detto: "No mamma, io resto!" Un po' di pianti, un po' di tragedie, però mia madre, una donna estremamente intelligente, ha capito che in effetti, a Roma, non m'aspettava niente. Cioè, la nostra situazione era tremenda. . . . I nostri genitori erano separati, però mio padre era molto tiranno. . . . Siccome io ero molto attaccata a lui, lui su di me c'aveva sempre questo potere. . . .

*. . . Then my mother decided to return. . . . I had already decided to stay, but mother didn't know that. She started to pack the bags and I didn't [laughs]. There was the first moment of doubt. She says, "What are you doing, aren't you going to get ready?" And I said, "No, Mom, I'm staying!" Some tears, some drama, but my mother, an extremely intelligent woman, understood that in fact, nothing awaited me in Rome. That is, our situation was horrible. . . . Our parents were separated, but my father was a real tyrant. . . . Since I was very attached to him, he always had a lot of power over me. . . .*

LDG: E lui non voleva che tu venissi qui?

*And he didn't want you to come here?*

AB: No. Quando siamo partiti per New York, è rimasto scioccato, però alla fine non ha detto nulla perchè poi pagava tutto mia madre. Mia madre era indipendente. Però non si aspettava che io non tornassi indietro, sicuramente: io dovevo torna' a scuola. Io non ho finito il liceo. . . .

*No. When we left for New York, he was shocked, but in the end, he didn't say anything because it was my mother after all, who paid for everything. My mother was independent. But he surely never expected me not to return: I had to go back to school. I never finished high school. . . .*

LDG: Fino a che scuola hai fatto?

*What year of school did you complete?*

AB: Il terzo liceo linguistico internazionale.

*The third year of an international languages high school.*

### 3. A Very Clever, Beautiful Mother and a Tyrannical Father<sup>6</sup>

LDG: E il rapporto con tua mamma?

*And the relationship with your mother?*

AB: E' . . . bello e un po' tormentato perchè penso che mia madre . . . (Questa è una cosa particolare.) Mia madre mi ha visto spesso come l'unica [favorita] di mio padre e questo ha creato degli squilibri, no? Perchè, io ero vicino a lui in certe cose: nel divertimento, nello sport. E poi eravamo abbastanza simili come personalità con mio padre. . . . Però, comunque, è una grandissima donna e non m'ha *mai* fatto sentire in colpa di questa decisione, *mai*. . . . Mia madre ha fatto la casalinga per 23 anni. Quando si è liberata da mio padre ha cominciato a fare l'attrice.

*It's . . . wonderful and a little tormented because I think my mother . . . (This is a little delicate.) My mother often saw me as the (only) apple of my father's eye, and this created some hard feelings, you know? Because I was close to him in some things: in entertainment, in sports. And we were fairly similar in the matter of personality. . . . But, in any case, she is a really great woman, and she never made me feel guilty for this decision I made, never. . . . My mother was a housewife for 23 years. When she freed herself from my father, she started acting.*

LDG: . . . Com'è successo!?

*. . . How did that happen!?*

### 4. Mother and Daughter in Film

AB: Perchè lei era una donna molto bella, molto affascinante, molto esotica. E nessuno gli faceva fare quello che voleva. Lei voleva fare l'attrice e [grating sound] *mai*. Figurati, padre e fratelli, e poi marito . . . —infedele da morire. Quando lei s'è separata, ha cominciato a lavorare per l'avvocato che l'ha difesa, ecc. E . . . a fare rappresentanze di enciclopedia. C'aveva l'*Enciclopedia del cinema* e ha conosciuto questi del cinema: ma lei signora, è così interessante, così simpatica, perchè non lavora al cinema. . . . E s'è presentata *da Fellini!* Infatti, è *lei* che m'ha fatto lavorare con Fellini.

*Because she was a very beautiful woman, very alluring, very exotic. And no one allowed her do what she wanted to do. She wanted to be an actress and [grating sound], never.*

*Yeah, as if: father and brothers, then husband . . . —terribly unfaithful. When she separated, she began working for the lawyer who had defended her, etc. And . . . began selling encyclopedias. She sold the Encyclopedia of Film and she began to know these cinema types. . . . And so she introduced herself to Fellini! In fact, it was she who arranged for me to work with Fellini.*

LDG: . . . Tuo padre cosa faceva?

*. . . What did your father do?*

AB: Mio padre c'aveva un cantiere di marmi, per cui era operaio . . .

*My father had a marble yard, so he was a workman . . .*

LDG: E tua madre, di famiglia?

*And your mother's family?*

### 5. Maternal Grandparents and Traditional Music: "We Were All Embarrassed"

AB: Mia *madre* è quella . . . che c'ha la parte di musica popolare. . . . Perché suo padre . . . che era sordo, era analfabeta, faceva il pane a Rocca di Papa, suonava il tamburello, la grancassa, e il mandolino. [telephone interruption; reconnects with question] . . . Dopo tanti anni mi sono ricordata che in realtà, questa musica, i tamburelli e tutto, lo faceva mio *nonno*! Però noi, quando eravamo piccoli—a parte che mio nonno è morto che io c'avevo, tipo, otto anni . . . c'erano queste riunioni di famiglia, sai? tipo ai Castelli Romani, e mio nonno suonava il mandolino e le percussioni. Suo fratello e suo cugino suonavano la fisarmonica e poi facevano i saltarelli laziali. Però noi, i cittadini, eravamo tutti in *imbarazzo*, ti rendi conto?! Tutti in imbarazzo. . . . Poi mia nonna cantava, perchè lei c'aveva questa casa ad Arpino in Ciociaria, no? E anche se lei è nata proprio a Roma, conosceva tutti però 'sti pezzi laziali, romani. Io mi ricordo mia nonna che era invalida di guerra che cantava 'ste cose: "E quando la ciociara se marita . . ." e noi tutti imbarazzati! . . . E io che continuo con queste tradizioni . . .

*My mother is the one . . . whose side of the family had traditional music. . . . Because her father . . . who was deaf, illiterate, was a bread baker in Rocca di Papa, played the frame drum, the bass drum, and the mandolin. [telephone interruption; reconnects with question] . . . After many years I remembered that, in fact, this music, the frame drums and everything, was played by my grandfather! But, when we were little—aside from the fact that my grandfather died when I was about eight . . . there were these family reunions, you know? like at the Castelli Romani, and my grandfather played mandolin and percussion. His brother and his cousin played accordion and then they danced saltarelli from the Lazio region. But we, city folk, were all embarrassed, can you imagine?! Everyone was embarrassed. . . . And my grandmother sang, because she had this house in Arpino, in Ciociaria, you know? And even though she was born right in Rome,*

*she still knew all these Lazio and Roman pieces. I remember that my grandmother, who was war wounded, sang these things: "E quando la ciociara se marita . . ." ("And when the Ciociara woman marries . . .") and all of us embarrassed! . . . And me who continues these traditions . . .*

LDG: paradossi . . .

*paradoxes . . .*

AB: . . . E poi, in *America!* Perché quando io sono rimasta qua, in effetti, io non pensavo neanche, ma neanche lontanamente, a 'ste cose. Era il periodo del rock.

*. . . And in America, no less! Because when I remained here, actually, I never, even remotely, dreamed about such things. It was the age of rock.*

LDG: E com'è successo allora che ti sei messa a fare questo tipo di musica qui?

*So how did it happen then that you began playing this type of music here?*

AB: Allora, andando in ordine cronologico: so' rimasta qua e ho fatto un po' di tutto, come tutti, all'inizio. . . . Poi ho viaggiato parecchio negli Stati Uniti.

*OK, going in chronologic order: I stayed here and did a little of everything, like everybody else, in the beginning. . . . I also traveled a good deal in the United States.*

LDG: Da sola?

*Alone?*

## 6. Early Musical Tastes: Cabaret

AB: Sì, un sacco da sola: su in Virginia, Kentucky, Arizona, poi spesso qua [California]. . . . Per divertimento, dovunque andavo mi trovavo sempre a fare dei pezzi . . . di Fabrizio De André, Luigi Tenco. Mi piace[vano] tantissimo quel repertorio cabaret, me piaceva da mori'. Poi quando è uscito quel film *Cabaret*, m'ero proprio fissata che dovevo fare il cabaret. Mi sentivo proprio *lei*, . . . Liza Minelli! . . . Per cui, nel '74 ho deciso di fare questo passo. Mi sono iscritta alla scuola di teatro a New York, Herbert Berghof Studio e studiavo là . . . quasi full time. Facevo scene study, acting technique, mime, speech, the whole thing . . . ! E facevo la cameriera a Greenwich Village e lì ho fatto la prima parte in un film, che era, *Next Stop Greenwich Village*, con Paul Mazursky, Christopher Walken. E poi so' tornata in Italia. Ho lavorato su *Casanova* co' Fellini . . . qualche altro film. Ho scoperto che la carriera del cinema non era per me . . . perchè è corrotta da morire.

*Yes, alone a lot: up in Virginia, Kentucky, Arizona, then often here [California]. . . . For fun, everywhere I went, I also found myself singing some songs. . . . [those of] Fabrizio De André, Luigi Tenco. I loved the cabaret repertoire, loved it a lot. Then, when the film Cabaret came out, I became (really) obsessed about doing cabaret. I felt I was really her. . . . Liza Minelli! . . . So, in '74 I decided to take this step. I enrolled in acting school in New York, Herbert Berghof Studio, and I studied there . . . almost full time. I did scene study, acting technique, mime, speech, the whole thing . . . ! And I was a waitress in Greenwich Village, and there I had my first acting role, which was, Next Stop Greenwich Village, with Paul Mazursky, Christopher Walken. And then I returned to Italy. I did Casanova with Fellini . . . some other films. I discovered that a career in film was not for me . . . because it's incredibly corrupt.*

## 7. Fellini's Advice

LDG: In che senso?

*In what way?*

AB: Perché è tutto basato sulla donna. Ogni volta che te vedevano, spogliare . . . allucinante—a parte Fellini. E la cosa più bella, che ci tengo a sottolinearlo, è che Fellini m'ha preso perché gli piacciono i miei occhi, e m'ha fatto fare la principessa turca, per cui ho imparato a fare la danza del ventre. . . . E ho conosciuto bene Donald Sutherland. E' stata un'esperienza meravigliosa. Io c'avevo ventun'anni.

E poi una delle cose più incredibili, proprio questa me la ricordo come fosse ieri: Fellini m'ha fatto chiamare, e io pensavo che era una prova, perché quando mi chiamava a Cinecittà, o me dovevano provare una parrucca, o un vestitito, e 'gni volta che Fellini chiama, io prendevo 200,000 lire! . . . Lui m'ha telefonato, so' arrivata là, e lui stava nel suo appartamento a Cinecittà. Lo stavano massaggiando. Pensa te, lui me fa . . . (c'ha questa voce *dolcissima*, stupenda), e lui me fa: "ciao patata." M'aveva preso proprio a benvolere. Ma *con rispetto*. Incredibile. Lui m'ha detto: "Guarda, niente, non è che dobbiamo fare una prova, però, io devo parla' e te devo di' sta cosa: io ho notato che tu sei molto seria . . . sei un'artista. Tu non sei come quelle che stanno qua . . . Sai che te dico: che tu devi torna' a New York. Non resta' qua perché se io avessi potuto fare quello che faccio qua in America, se sapessi meglio l'inglese, l'avrei fatto."

*Because it's all based on the female [body]. Every time they'd see you, [they'd] undress [you] . . . crazy—apart from Fellini. And the most wonderful thing that I want to point out, is that Fellini took me on because he liked my eyes, and had me do the part of the Turkish princess, for which I had to learn to belly dance. . . . And I really got to know Donald Sutherland. It was a wonderful experience. I was twenty-one.*

*And then, one of the most incredible things, this I remember as though it were yesterday: Fellini had me called in, and I thought it was a rehearsal, because when Cinecittà called, it was either to try on a wig, or a dress, and each time Fellini called, I got 200,000*

*lire! . . . He called me, I get there, and he was in his apartment in Cinecittà. They were giving him a massage. Imagine that, and he goes . . . (he has this really sweet, fantastic voice), and he goes: "Hey, kid [little potato]." He had really become affectionate with me. But in a respectful way. Incredible. He said to me: "Look, hey, it's not that we have to rehearse anything, but, I had to talk to you and I had to say this: I notice that you are very serious . . . you're an artist. You are not like the other girls here . . . Do you know what I say: that you've got to return to New York. Don't stay here because if I had been able to do in America what I do here, if I knew English, I would have done it."*

LDG: Che consiglio!

*What advice!*

AB: Pazzesco! E dice: "Ricordati una cosa: che dopo de me, tu continuerai qua, a fare il cinema qua, ti chiederanno *tutti* d'anda' letto co' loro." E m'ha detto: "Ricordati che nessuno è come me." . . . E io so' rimasta così [that is, stunned; laughs]. . . Dice: "Scusa"—perchè era a dorso nudo, no? a pancia sotto, che lo massaggiavano. Dice: "Scusa tanto di questo però era l'unico momento che c'avevo per dirti questo." . . .

*Crazy! And he says, "Remember one thing: that after me, [if] you continue to do film here, everyone will ask you to go to bed with them." And he said, "Remember that no one is like me." . . . And I was like [that is, stunned; laughs]. . . . He says, "Excuse me"—because he was bare-chested, you know? on his stomach, because they were giving him a massage. And he says, "Excuse me, really, for this but it was the only free moment I had to say this." . . .*

AB: Mia madre è andata là per *Casanova*. . . . So che lui ha detto: "Che bella 'sta signora co' questa faccia simpatica, iiiii . . ." Allora, mia madre ha detto: "Be', ma se glie' piace io, glie' piacerà sicuramente mi fija!" E . . . lui ha detto: "Ma me la mandi subito!" Allora mia madre gli ha detto: "Sta a New York." Io ero appena arrivata da questo film . . . con Mazursky, che era amico di Fellini e Fellini m'ha aperto subito le porte. Poi, mi ricordo che lui m'ha guardato e fa: "Che occhi bellissimi, ma bellissimi! Tu sei Zémini. . . Sei la principessa turca!" . . . Per me, le cose più belle so' stata questa, e l'incontro con Anna Magnani a 14 anni. Quello lo sai, no?

*My mother went there for Casanova. . . . I know that he said, "What a beautiful lady, with that charming face, wow . . ." So my mother said, "Well, if ya think I'm pretty, you really otta see my daughter!" And . . . he said, "So send her to me right away!" So my mother said, "[But] she's in New York." I had just finished, this film . . . with Mazursky, who was Fellini's friend, and so Fellini right away, opened doors for me. Then, I remember that he looked at me and goes, "What beautiful eyes, beautiful! You are Zémini. . . . You're the Turkish princess!" . . . For me, the most wonderful things were this one, and my encounter with Anna Magnani when I was 14. You know that one, right?*

LDG: No, dimmi.

*No, tell me.*

### 8. Anna Magnani and a Thwarted Acting Career

AB: [Interruption due to spilled tea] Questa è l'altra cosa bella: Anna Magnani, quando io c'avevo 14 anni, stava facendo *La lupa*. [Long interruption] Che era? Nel '69, Anna Magnani stava rifacendo *La lupa* al Sistina [teatro] a Roma. Lei faceva il casting, perchè Anna Magnani lavorava *solo* con la gente che andava a genio a lei, e *a occhio*. Pensa te. Una donna incredibile. E la regia di Zeffirelli. Lei cercava una ragazzina sui 14 anni che potesse essere simile a lei, che doveva fare la parte di sua nipote—che non era una grossa parte. . . . E non trovava la ragazzina che gli andasse a genio. Mia sorella conosceva Franco Fontana (tramite la RAI, [che] Gabriella lavorava alla RAI) che era l'impresario di Sestina. . . .

[E'] soprattutto mia madre che le somiglia, . . . parla come lei . . . E allora, mi so' presentata *io*, che non me credevo proprio . . . Io avevo già fatto teatro per conto mio a scuola, però, sempre de nascosto. . . . Io mi presento vestita di bianco, coi *calzettone bianchi!* [laughs], con 'sti tre[cce] . . . e stavo seduta così. E poi ho sentito da lontano, la voce di *Anna Magnani* . . . *inconfondibile*, che diceva delle parolacce (che non te puoi immaginare) perchè non trovava parcheggio! [laughs] E allora ha insistito a questo. Poi, e questo se sentiva da fuori, che lei ce l'aveva co' Roma—che Roma stava già cambiando, no? Era diventata già inviv[ibile]. Che questo è stato nel '69. Poi è entrata lei, *indimenticabile*, tutta vestita [interruption due to technical problem], tutta vestita di viola! Sai che in Italia il viola in teatro porta sfortuna . . . nessuno lo dovrebbe portare.

[Interruption due to spilled tea] *This is the other wonderful thing: When I was 14, Anna Magnani was filming La lupa ['The She-Wolf']. [Long interruption] In, what was it? In '69, Anna Magnani was remaking La lupa at the Sistina [theater] in Rome. She was doing the casting, because Anna Magnani worked only with people she liked, and she chose them on sight. Imagine. An incredible woman. And Zeffirelli's direction. She was looking for a young girl of about 14 who might resemble her, and who was to play the part of her niece—which wasn't a big part. . . . And she couldn't find the right girl. My sister knew Franco Fontana (through the RAI—Gabriella was working at the RAI [Radio Audizioni Italiane, the national Italian broadcasting network]) who was the Sestina's impresario. . . .*

[It was] *really my mother who resembled her, . . . talks like her . . . And so, I went, I didn't think at all that I . . . I had already done theater on my own at school, but always on the sly. . . . I present myself dressed in white, with white knee socks! [laughs], with these braids . . . and I was seated there like that. And then I heard from a distance, the voice of Anna Magnani . . . unmistakable, and she was swearing (you can't imagine how) because she couldn't find parking! [laughs] And she insisted on this. Then, and this you could hear from outside, that she had had it with Rome—because Rome was already changing, you know? It had become unliv[eable]; this was '69. Then, in she came, unforgettable, all dressed [interruption due to technical problem], all dressed in purple! You know that in the theater in Italy purple brings bad luck . . . nobody should wear it.*

LDG: E lei lo sapeva questo?

*And she would have known this?*

AB: Come no?! Tutta vestita di viola con tutti questi seni così, con la camicia colorata così, tutta spettinata, con gli occhiali da sole. S'è levata gli occhiali, io stavo seduta così . . . e, era un vulcano, veramente. . . . E proprio così, fa: "Ao . . . ? Chi è 'sta regazzina? Ma questo è un *miracolo!* Questa è la regazzina che cercavo io, e tie, o!" E m'ha tirato il copione! E io *imbalsamata!* E so' rimasta così . . . Lei che fa: "Be', e che fai? Non te alzi? Non me saluti?" . . . E poi m'ha abbracciata. . . . E' stata una scena incredibile—mia madre s'è messa a piangere dalla felicità, e le *b a c i ò l e m a n i!* . . . [embarrassed]

*Of course! All dressed in purple with these breasts out to here, with this colored shirt, all disheveled, with sunglasses. She takes off her glasses, I was sitting there like this . . . and, she was a volcano, really . . . And just like that, she goes: "Hey . . . ! Who's this little girl? This is a miracle! This is the little girl I was looking for, and hey, take that!" And she threw the script at me! And there I was stiff as a board! I was stunned . . . And she goes: "Well, what are you doing? Aren't you going to get up? Aren't you going to say hello?" . . . And then she hugged me. . . . It was an amazing scene— my mother started to cry from joy, and she k i s s e d h e r h a n d s! . . . [embarrassed]*

LDG: Oh no!

AB: . . . La guardava mia madre, e ha visto la somiglianza, la somiglianza era spaventosa. . . . E lei ha detto: "O, me raccomando eh? Le prove fra tre giorni." . . . Le prove erano a Viterbo e dovevamo andare a Londra per essere presentati da *S i r L a w r e n c e O l i v i e r . . . ! . . .* Te rendi conto? . . . Siccome c'avevo 14 anni, . . . mio padre mi doveva firmare passaporto, permessi, ecc. Prima ha detto sì, e poi c'è stata 'sta cena con *i parenti invidiosi, iiiii . . .* Tutti contro, dicendo: che Anna Magnani era una donna corrotta, che era gay, che era lesbica, e che m'avrebbe sconvolto la vita. E mio padre ha usato questa cosa contro mia madre. . . . "No, non ti firmo nessun permesso! E se tua madre ci riesce lo stesso, io taglio gli alimenti . . ." Pensa! E lei ha cancellato la parte. Non l'ha dato a nessuno. Per cui, m'è rimasto questo copione *sacro* che c'ho ancora. E poi lì ho *giurato* che avrei fatto, non solo musica e teatro, ma avrei fatto *La lupa*, che ho fatto a New York, che c'ha avuto molto successo. Grazie a mio padre che m'ha detto *no!*

*. . . She was looking at my mother, and she saw the resemblance, the likeness was scary. . . . And she said: "Hey, I'm counting on you, OK? Screen test in three days." . . . They were to be held in Viterbo and we had to go to London to be presented to S i r L a w r e n c e O l i v i e r . . . ! . . . Can you imagine? . . . Because I was only 14, . . . my father had to sign my passport, release forms, etc. First he said yes, and then there was this dinner with the invidious relatives, ooohh . . . Everyone against [it], saying that Anna Magnani was a corrupt woman, that she was gay, she was lesbian, and that she would have turned my life upside down. And my father used this against my mother. . . . "No, I won't sign any release form for you! And if your mother succeeds just the same, I will cut off alimony . . ." Imagine! And she cancelled the part. She didn't give it to anyone. So, I kept this sacred script, which I still have. And there I swore that I would do, not only music and theater, but *La lupa*, which I did in New York, which was very successful. Thanks to my father who said no!*

LDG: Non capiscono mai che *questo* è l'effetto! . . . Poi dopo?

*They just never get it, that this is the outcome! . . . And then what?*

### 9. Alone in New York

AB: Però è stata dura perchè dopo quello c'è stato proprio quell'impatto tremendo con l'adolescenza, ecc., a New York. Ho deciso di non torna' indietro. . . . Per molto tempo so' stata senza scrivere, niente. [Ero] scioccata da questa decisione. Quando mia madre è tornata a Roma, ha detto: "Be', passami Sandra." Che mia madre ha detto: "No, Sandra è rimasta in America." E, per cui c'è stato proprio un periodo tremendo che non ci siamo mai sentiti. . . . Per cui so' stata tra il '71 e il '76-'77. . . . E' stato tutto molto strano. Poi lui, quando m'ha rivisto: "Ormai sei una donna, che te dico?" Io fumavo la pipa, . . . mi dipengevo la fronte. . . . Non ce so' mai costato un centesimo, nè io nè gli altri [fratelli]. . . . I was always on *my own*. . . . Quando m'ha accompagnato all'aeroporto, sai cosa m'ha dato: 10,000 lire! E poi, non perchè non c'aveva soldi . . . Per cui tutto questo contribuisce a farti . . .

*But it was hard because after that there was that really harsh collision with adolescence, etc., in New York. I decided not to go back. . . . For a long time, I didn't ever write [home], never. [I was] shocked by his decision. When my mother returned to Rome, he said: "So, let me speak to Sandra." And my mother replied: "No, Sandra stayed in America." And, because of this, there followed a horrible long time when we never spoke to each other. . . . So it was between '71 and '76-'77. . . . It was all very odd. But then, when he saw me again, [he said]: "Well, now you're a woman, what can I say to you?" I smoked a pipe, . . . I painted my forehead. . . . I never cost him a thin dime, neither I nor the others [siblings]. . . . I was always on my own. . . . When he took me to the airport, do you know what he gave me? 10,000 lire [i.e., a pittance]! And not because he didn't have money. . . . So, all of this contributes to making you . . .*

LDG: . . . a farti come sei? Ma allora hai avuto delle donne forti nella [vita]!

*. . . to making you what you are? So you really did have some strong women in [your life]!*

AB: E caspita!

*You bet!*

LDG: Chi altro?

*Who else?*

AB: Di donne? Be', Anna Magnani, mia madre, mia nonna tantissimo, ah . . . artisticamente? [pauses] Not too many like that. Per la musica me piaceva . . . da quando ero piccola. Ti dicevo che facevo 'ste cose, tipo cabaret. Poi a New York, quando

ho cominciato a fare teatro, tramite Luigi Ballerini, ho preso la parte principale di questa grossa . . . *Il cilindro*, e lì c'avevano inserito delle canzoni, e li ho conosciuto al Café Dante, John La Barbera. Allora eravamo io, John La Barbera, un mandolinista siciliano, e Luigi—che poi spingeva questo gruppo di artisti giovani. E poi ho cominciato a lavorare in un altro cabaret che adesso è famoso, ma si chiama Duplex. A quell'epoca era piccolino. E io inserivo sempre questo lato italiano che non conosceva nessuno. E poi nel '76, ho conosciuto John.

*Women, you mean? Well, Anna Magnani, my mother, my grandmother a lot, you mean . . . artistically? [pauses] Not too many like that. As for music, I liked . . . since I was a little girl. I told you that I did these things, such as cabaret. Then, in New York, when I started to do theater, thanks to Luigi Ballerini, I got the lead part for this big . . . Il cilindro, and there they had inserted some songs, and that's where I met John La Barbera, at Café Dante. It was me, John La Barbera, a Sicilian mandolin player, and Luigi—who moved this young group of artists forward. And then I started working in another cabaret, which is now famous, that's called the Duplex. It was small then. And I always managed to insert this Italian material, which no one knew. Then in '76, I met John.*

### 10. Return to Rome and the Discovery of Traditional Music

Nel '77 sono tornata a vivere a Roma, perchè è morto mio padre. E poi ho cominciato a sentire La Nuova Compagnia di Canto Popolare. Fino a quell'epoca, gli unici pezzi popolari che conoscevo, erano quelli che conosceva tutti, tipo: “O cardillo,” “Vitti na crozza,” alcune cose romane . . . Però, quando ho sentito De Simone e la Nuova Compagnia . . . *m'ha cambiato la vita!* . . . M'ha aperto. Ed è diventato un'addiction! . . .

*In '77 I returned to live in Rome, because my father had died. Then I started to listen to La Nuova Compagnia di Canto Popolare. Up to that point, the only folk pieces I knew were the same ones everyone knew, songs like: “O cardillo,” “Vitti na crozza,” some Roman pieces . . . But, when I started to listen to De Simone and the Nuova Compagnia . . . it changed my life! . . . Opened me up. And it became an addiction! . . .*

LDG: Perchè? Che cosa ha risvegliato?

*Why? What did it awaken in you?*

AB: Io penso che ha risvegliato delle cose che, magari consocevo tramite mio nonno, ecc., heritage di cui non mi ricordavo per niente in quell'epoca. E poi, credo tantissimo nella reincarnazione, cioè qualcosa di spirituale che ho già vissuto nel Sud—Napoli, Calabria, tutta la cosa della taranta . . . Poi tante cose io non le so . . . da dove veniamo [the family]. Però, quello che è successo [è] che c'avevo anche contatto con queste ragazze con cui andavo a scuola, al liceo, che erano le figlie di Alfonso di Nola. E una, la maggiore, Annalisa, lavorava con Giovanna Marini . . .

Nel frattempo, John [La Barbera: See this volume] stava facendo, il *Masaniello*, col Bread and Puppet a Firenze. Io so' andata a trovare lui e ho conosciuto

Alfio Antico, quello coi tamburi. Io, quando ho visto lui che suonava i tamburi, ho detto: *io devo fare questo!* . . . Dovevo capire come si suonava. . . .

Poi, quando ci siamo ritrovati tutti a New York, al Café Dante, co' John . . . che era, nell'estate del '79? abbiamo deciso che dovevamo *assolutamente* far 'sta musica là. Che poi era una cosa *assurda*. Ma chi ci darà *mai* lavoro? Chi la *conosce*? Però c'erano quelli del Bread and Puppet, che John c'aveva già lavorato, per cui si sono uniti a noi, musicisti molto bravi, tutti americani. E poi c'era Luigi che è partito in quarta. E ha detto: "Facciamolo qua al NYU e vediamo cosa succede."

*I think it awakened things that, perhaps I knew thanks to my grandfather, etc., heritage of which I didn't remember a thing at that time. And then, I really believe in reincarnation, that is, something spiritual that I had already lived in the South—Naples, Calabria, the whole thing with the tarantula. . . . But many things I don't know . . . about where we [the family] come from. But what happened [was] that I also got to know these girls with whom I went to school, high school, who were the daughters of Alfonso di Nola. And one of them, the oldest, Annalisa, worked with Giovanna Marini. . . .*

*In the meantime, John [La Barbera: See this volume] was doing Masaniello with the Bread and Puppet [Theater] in Florence. I went to visit him and met Alfio Antico, the one with frame drums. When I saw how he played the frame drums, I said: I have to do that! . . . I had to understand how to play. . . .*

*Then, when we all found ourselves in New York again at Café Dante, with John . . . What was it, the summer of '79? we decided that we absolutely had to do this music there. Which really was absurd. Who is ever going to hire us? Who even knows this music? But there were those of the Bread and Puppet, with whom John had already worked, so some really great musicians joined us, all of them American. And then there was Luigi who really took off in high gear. And he said: "Let's do it here at NYU and see what happens."*

## 11. John La Barbera, I Giullari, and New York University

LDG: Fare cosa a NYU? Gli spettacoli?

*Do what at NYU? Shows?*

AB: . . . Abbiamo cominciato a fare gli spettacoli. . . . C'avevamo un sacco di teatri, grandi teatri. E in più, c'ha dato modo di essere in residence all'Italian Dept. . . . C'ha dato l'ID card, che era una grande cosa. . . . La NYU library: it's *amazing*. C'hanno *tutto*, i testi di Kircher, di de Martino, *La taranta*. . . . Non c'era manco bisogno d'andare a Roma poi a far le ricerche per i testi [della] Commedia dell'Arte. La biblioteca Burkhardt, che era stupenda, che poi c'ha tutto quelle cose antiche, scritte in napoletano. Però di cose musicali, c'avevamo tutto alla NYU. Non c'avevamo nessun problema a fare [ricerche].

*. . . We started doing shows. . . . We had many theaters, big theaters. And what's more, he gave us the opportunity of being in residence at the Italian department. . . . He gave us an ID card, which was a great thing. . . . The library at NYU: it's amazing. They have everything, the texts of Kircher, of de Martino, La taranta. . . . We didn't even need to go*

*to Rome to do research on the Commedia dell'Arte texts. The Burkhardt Library, which was wonderful, has many of those early texts, written in Neapolitan. But as for musical materials, we had everything at NYU. We had no problems in doing [research].*

LDG: Hai cominciato a fare ricerca?

*You started doing research?*

AB: Ricerche sia di biblioteca che sul campo tutte le estati. Poi dal '80 in poi, tutte le estati, in Calabria, perchè poi in Calabria mi c'aveva introdotto un amico di Dario [Bollini, Alessandra's then husband]. . . . Poi . . . io e John ci siamo innamorati follemente, un amore musicale di quelli stravolgenti. . . . Vivevamo insieme in questa casa stupenda. . . . L'amore è importante in tutto questo perchè io penso che io e John dovevamo proprio stare insieme per fare questo figlio che era la compagnia dei Giullari. . . . E da lì è nata 'sta fusione musicale grandiosa. Io penso è rarissimo incontrare un binomio. Cioè, io per lui, proprio musicalmente: ci guardiamo e sappiamo esattamente quello che facciamo. It's *amazing!* Anche se adesso c'è questo periodo che ci dobbiamo dividere. Io sento che lui deve fare le sue cose e io le mie. How am I ever going to replace that? It's impossible. Poi, l'amore per la musica popolare è così . . . chi lo trova? E lui è proprio veramente superbravo. . . .

E questo è importante, che lui nel '77, si è unito a questo gruppo, Pupi e Fresedde, che stavano a Firenze—tutti pugliesi. Lì hanno cominciato tutto 'sto lavoro sulla pizzica, pizzica tarantata. Loro facevano delle ricerche incredibili, 'sti spettacoli rari, *stupendi*—un gruppo guarda, *uno più bravo dell'altro!* Forse, secondo me, anche più bravi della Nuova Compagnia, perchè erano più sanguigni. La Compagnia c'ha De Simone, però . . . . Tra l'altro, loro facevano i costumi, le maschere, i set—proprio bravi, bravi, bravi. E tra loro c'era questo bravissimo cantante, il più bravo cantante di musica popolare in assoluto, Giuseppe [Pino] de Vittorio, che poi è diventato parte di De Simone . . . il gruppo suo a Napoli. . . . Il genio della compagnia, che poi è venuto a cantare con noi anche a New York.

*Both library research and fieldwork every summer. Then from '80 onward, every summer, in Calabria, because a friend of Dario's [Bollini, Alessandra's then husband] . . . introduced me to Calabria. . . . Then . . . John and I fell madly in love, a musical love of the most transporting kind. . . . We lived together in this amazing house. . . . Love is important in all of this because I think that John and I had to stay together to create our child, that is, the Giullari company. . . . Whence this grand musical fusion was born. I think it is extremely rare to encounter such a match. That is, I for him, musically: we look at each other and we know exactly what we're doing. It's amazing! Even though now we are going through a phase when we must separate. I feel that he must do his things and I mine. How am I ever going to replace that? It's impossible. And then, this love for folk music is so . . . who can find that [again]? And he is really, super talented. . . .*

*And it is important that he, in '77, joined the group, Pupi e Fresedde, who were in Florence—all Pugliesi. That is where they began all this work on the pizzica, the pizzica tarantata. They did amazing research, rare, wonderful shows—a group that was, you know, one more talented than the next! Perhaps, in my opinion, in some ways even*

*better than the Nuova Compagnia. . . . Among other things, they also made costumes, masks, sets—really, really, really talented. And among them was this great singer, truly the best folksong singer ever, Giuseppe [Pino] de Vittorio, who later became a member of De Simone’s . . . group in Naples. . . . The genius of the company, who then came to sing with us in New York.*

## 12. *Tarantismo*: First Exposures

LDG: E lì c’è stato il primo exposure al tarantismo, a questa cultura . . .

*And there was your first exposure to tarantismo, to this culture . . .*

AB: Tramite loro, cioè tramite . . . John, quand’è tornato. C’era tutto questo materiale che aveva fatto tutto co’ loro e io [sucking sound] mi so’ buttato proprio dentro. E poi la prima cosa che abbiamo fatto, siamo andati in biblioteca e cominciammo a tira’ fuori testi di Kircher . . . poi c’era il testo di de Martino che però era out of print.

Nel ’82, ho conosciuto Glen Velez, in una dimostrazione in cui suonava il tamburo per strada, col Bread and Puppet. . . . Lui è venuto, m’ha corso appresso, e m’ha detto: “I’m Glen Velez, I want to study with you.” Io faccio: “*What?! You’re Glen Velez and you want to study with me? Why?*” Lui era già famoso, no? E da lì è nato ’sto rapporto con Glen Velez, . . . Lui è una persona incredibile. Insegnare a lui ho capito quello che facevo io. Lui è un mago.

E m’ha regalato ’sto libro. Lui m’ha detto: “I think I have something for you that I don’t think I can use.” I go: “*what?*” [and he answers:] “*La terra del rimorso.*” Che non si trovava!<sup>7</sup> Lui l’ha trovato nelle ricerche. Perché Glen è uno che fa ricerche da sempre, no? . . . Lui c’ha tutto, no . . . ? Però si è sentito che me lo doveva dare a me. E questo per me è la bibbia. Me lo so’ studiato e da lì è nata tutta la cosa sulla pizzica.

*Thanks to them, that is, thanks to . . . John, when he returned. There was all this material that he had performed with them and I [sucking sound] threw myself deeply into it. And then the first thing we did, we went to the library and started pulling out texts of Kircher . . . then there was this text by de Martino that was, however, out of print.*

*In ’82, I met Glen Velez, in a street performance where he played frame drum with the Bread and Puppet. . . . He came running after me, and he said: “I’m Glen Velez, I want to study with you.” I go, “*What?! You’re Glen Velez and you want to study with me? Why?*” He was already famous, you know? And that’s how my relationship with Glen Velez began. He’s a wizard.*

*And he gave me this book. He said: “I think I have something for you that I don’t think I can use.” I go, “*What?*” [and he answers:] “*La terra del rimorso,*” which you couldn’t find [anywhere]!\* He found it during his research. Because Glen is someone who has been doing research forever, you know? . . . He has everything, you know . . . ? But he felt he had to give this to me. This is my bible. I studied it and from there all the stuff on the pizzica was hatched.*

LDG: Dunque, per te questa musica ha un senso personale? Perché?

*[Therefore, for you this music has personal meaning? Why?]*

AB: Perché ho trovato, . . . secondo me, veramente una forma di musica danza terapia che c'ha un effetto particolare, penso su tutti, ma in me . . . A parte, secondo me, m'ha guarito da una cosa che c'avevo, una irregular bleeding. Questo te l'avevo detto, no? E poi penso che in effetti c'ho un lato di me che è tarantato, capisci quello che dico?

*Because I really found, . . . in my opinion, a form of music and dance therapy that has a specific effect, I think on everyone, but on me . . . Besides the fact, in my opinion, that it healed something I had, an irregular bleeding. Did I tell you about this? And then because I think there is a side of me that is, indeed, tarantato, do you understand what I'm saying?*

### 13. Rhythm Is the Cure: Calling Down the Spirits

LDG: Io voglio capire . . . Cosa vuole dire il tarantismo per te?

*I want to understand . . . What does tarantismo mean to you?*

AB: Per me? Per me è il morso del subconscio e penso questo ce l'abbiamo un po' tutti, soprattutto le donne. Per cui io, con tutto quello che mi porto dietro dell'infanzia, di sentirti bloccata, che tu puoi fare questo e non ci riesci, tutte le cose represses, le frustrazioni, padre, tutte 'ste cose . . . Secondo me, non c'è bisogno di vivere nel Salento. . . . Io ho vissuto comunque tutta questa repressione, questa continua lotta, però è stata una lotta, veramente una ragnatela, poi per sblocarla, . . . a New York. Ma anche lì, poi altre ragnatele, cose che ti porti sempre appresso. E mai mi sarei aspettata che tutto questo, non solo puoi guarire, ma puoi creare un'energia così bella e così positiva . . . proprio tramite la musica, la danza, il tamburello. Io penso che questa è la prima cosa che m'ha attratto del tamburello di Alfio Antico, senza rendermene conto, . . . d'uscire fuori da tutte le repressioni, le depressioni e attacchi, . . . le angosce, paure. Il tamburello, per me, c'ha veramente questo effetto.

*For me? For me it is the bite of the subconscious, and I think we all have this to a certain degree, especially women. So for me, with everything I bring with me from childhood, of feeling blocked, that I can do something and can't get to do it, all these repressed things, frustrations, father, all these things . . . In my opinion, you don't have to have been born in the Salento. . . . I too had lived this repressive reality, this continuous battle, but it was a battle, really a spider's web, to liberate [myself from it] . . . in New York. But there too, other spiders' webs, things you continue to carry with you. And I never would have expected that all this could, not only be cured, but you can create a wonderful and really positive energy . . . precisely through music, dance, and frame drum. I think this was the first thing that attracted me to Alfio Antico's frame drum, without my realizing it, . . . to get myself out of all this repression, depression, and attacks, . . . anxieties, fears. The frame drum really has this effect on me.*

LDG: Con tutte gli altri strumenti, tutte le altre musiche che hai sperimentato, perché proprio il tamburello?

*With all the other instruments, all the other sorts of music with which you are familiar, why specifically the frame drum?*

AB: Perché c'ha questo potere, un potere secondo me, molto . . . E' come la Sante-ria, il Condoblé. Secondo me, quando sto suonando, canto e ballo, soprattutto la pizzica, I am in contact (parlo l'inglese): I'm in contact with the spirit world . . .

*Because it has this power, a power, in my opinion, very . . . It's like Santeria, Condoblé. In my opinion, when I play, sing and dance, especially the pizzica, I am in contact (I'll speak English): I'm in contact with the spirit world . . .*

LDG: Tell me about that.

AB: And I *really* feel that the spirits are coming *down* through me—*ancestor* spir-its . . . Quello che tra gli Yoruba si chiama *Shang'O, Oshun* . . . Mi sembra di essere uno sciam[ano]. I'm a channel and all this energy is coming through me out to the people and then back.

Anche lì, infatti . . . la spiegazione: perchè non ti stanchi quando fai queste cose? Quando in realtà (tu ci sei stata) . . . fisicamente, uno dovrebbe cadere a pezzi. Ma poi questo mi succede anche quando sono sola a suonare nella cripta [of St. John the Divine] o a casa e c'ho proprio questi momenti tremendi d'angoscia e prendo un tamburello e mi faccio una pizzica e sto proprio *bene!* . . . I started to understand what that was when I heal myself—because I was really sick. . . . Questo, l'ho detto no? . . . Io c'ho avuto quest'operazione, no? nel '85, no '86 . . . E dopo quell'operazione mi si sono svegliate tante cose: la Madonna Nera. . . . Quello è un po' più lungo . . . Che era, nel '92? So' stata male per diversi mesi. C'ho avuto questi sbalzi, . . . pazzesco. C'avevo queste perdite di sangue. Allora, la mia dottoressa m'ha detto che dovevo tornare e che dovevo assolutamente fare biopsie, fare un'altra surgery, e stavamo facendo uno spettacolo per un fundraiser. Per cui, io stavo sotto molta pressione, stressata, soprattutto per questioni finanziarie. E chiudevo, ballando la pizzica. . . . Sto backstage, io ho detto: dopo 'sta danza, o ci resto . . . o mi passa. Proprio, ho pregato che se è vero che 'sta danza cura tante donne, mi deve assolutamente curare pure a me. E quella è stata la prima volta che ho sperimentato questa piccola transe. Perché poi c'era un suonatore, che tu non hai mai conosciuto, che è zingaro, Giuliano, che suonava il tamburello e l'organetto con noi, che è anche un santero, and a healer. E io ho sentito [claps hands] . . .

*And I really feel that the spirits are coming down through me—ancestor spirits . . . What the Yoruba call Shang'O, Oshun . . . I feel like a sha[man]. I'm a channel and all this energy is coming through me out to the people and then back.*

*And there too, in fact . . . the explanation: why don't you get tired when you do these things? When in reality (you've been there) . . . physically, you should fall to pieces. But this happens even when I'm playing alone in the crypt [of St. John the Divine] or at home and I really have these moments of agonizing anxiety and I pick up the frame drum and I play myself a pizzica and I really feel good! . . . I started to understand what that was when I heal myself—because I was really sick. . . . I've told you this, haven't*

*I? . . . I had this operation, you know? in '85, no '86 . . . And after that operation many things awakened in me: the Black Madonna. . . That's a little longer to tell . . . What was it, in '92? I was sick for several months. I had these fluctuations, . . . crazy. I had this loss of blood. So, my [woman] doctor told me that I had to return and that I absolutely had to have some biopsies done, have another surgery, and we were doing a show as a fundraiser. So, I was under a lot of pressure, stressed out, especially due to financial problems. And close by dancing the pizzica. . . . I was backstage, and I said: after this dance, I'm either going to croak . . . or I will be over it. I really prayed that if it's true that this dance cures many women, it has to absolutely cure me as well. And that was the first time that I experienced this minor trance. Because there was also this musician, whom you have never met, who is a Gypsy, Giuliano, who played the frame drum and the button accordion with us, who is also a Santero, and a healer. And I felt [claps hands] . . .*

LDG: . . . Zingaro e calabrese?

. . . Gypsy and Calabrian?

AB: Sì d'origine, sì. E abita a New York. He's amazing. . . . Lui mi stava trasmettendo 'sta cosa. *Ti giuro*, io ho ballato e so' andata al bagno: è *finita* nel momento che ho ballato. . . . *Instantly!* E poi ho chiamato la dottoressa; il giorno appresso . . . and I really thought: it's gone. E poi ho chiamato la dottoressa; gli ho detto: ". . . I'm going to cancel the surgery and I'll call you back if I feel . . ."

E un anno e mezzo fa, l'ho sperimentato con un'altra donna . . . che stava alla cattedrale. . . . "Look, D., I've done this for myself and it doesn't cost you any money. If you want to try, we could do it. We'd go into the crypt in the dark, you know, we'll light some candles. We're in sacred space . . ." [END OF AUDIOCASSETTE 1A] . . . Infatti, lei proprio non se lo dimenticherà mai, vestita di bianco. . . . E anche lei non crede in certe operazioni, secondo me, innaturali. And, that was it; she never went for surgery either. So, that was my only healing, *real* healing experience at that level: io e lei. Poi, ho cominciato queste classi che faccio quando sono a New York, ogni sabato con delle donne. Sono tutte italo-americane, *tutte* donne, quasi *tutte* si chiamano Maria, e sono tutte *mancine*. Ti rendi conto?! . . . O Maria, o Marlene, o Mary, ma è pazzesca 'sta cosa, Michela. E l'anno scorso quando io iniziai queste classi, io stavo malissimo. Cioè, c'ho avuto un attimo, proprio di depressione *totale*—per ragioni economiche, per ragioni di matrimonio—e non mi rendevo conto neanche io che durante queste classi, I was healing myself *with* them. E' iniziata come danza rituale, tammorriate, tarantelle . . . La pizzica, lo sapevo che l'avrei fatta per ultima perchè non puoi entrare subito in questo. . . . Quando abbiamo cominciato con la pizzica, lì è successo proprio delle cose grandiose.

E mi ricordo, un giorno, che abbiamo ballato per 28 *minuti* senza mai smettere! L'ultima volta abbiamo ballato per 35 minuti senza mai smettere. . . . Abbiamo fatto per due ore la pizzica. E tutte queste donne si so' lasciate andare. E' stata una cosa incredibile . . . e tutte con quella parte a terra, no? E poi, chi piangeva, ecc., e chi s'è proprio liberata. Una, piangendo, m'hai detto: "I've been waiting for this for *forty-one* years, and I am *forty-one!*" . . .

Questa classe è stata un'esperienza *magica!* E man mano ci siamo conosciute tutte meglio, è uscito fuori . . . Loro mi rispettano tantissimo, ecc., un po' come una

guru . . . però poi siamo tutte down to earth. E poi, ad un certo punto, m'ha detto: "Alessandra, you know, you have a lot of *power*. You *really* have a lot of power." I go: "Really?" "We all want you to know you've changed our *lives*." And I had *no* idea who was going through things with marriage, so many different things that are, you know, personal. I can't talk too much about them. And every one of them came out in a different way. . . .

*Yes, originally, yes. And he lives in New York. He's amazing. . . . He was transmitting this thing to me. I swear, I danced and then went to the bathroom: it ended the moment I danced. . . . Instantly! And then I called my doctor the day after . . . and I really thought: it's gone. And I called the doctor; I said to her: " . . . I'm going to cancel the surgery and I'll call you back if I feel . . ."*

*And a year and a half ago, I experienced this with another woman . . . who was at the cathedral. . . . "Look, D., I've done this for myself and it doesn't cost you any money. If you want to try, we could do it. We'd go into the crypt in the dark, you know, we'll light some candles. We're in sacred space . . ." [END OF AUDIOCASSETTE 1A] . . . In fact, she will never forget it, dressed in white. . . . She too does not believe in certain operations which, in my opinion, are unnatural. And, that was it; she never went for surgery either. So, that was my only healing, real healing experience at that level: she and I. Then, I started these classes that I do when I'm in New York, every Saturday, with women. They're all Italian American, all women, almost all of them named Mary, and they're all left-handed. Can you imagine that?!] . . . Either Maria, or Marlene, or Mary, it's really crazy, Michela. And last year, when I started these classes, I was really ill. That is, there was a moment there, that I suffered a total depression—for economic reasons, for marital reasons—and I didn't realize that during these classes, I was healing myself with them. It started as a ritual dance, tammorriatas and tarantellas . . . The pizzica, I knew, I would save for last because you can't immediately start in with that. . . . When we began with the pizzica, some really great things happened.*

*And I remember, one day, that we danced for 28 minutes without stopping! And the last time we danced for 35 minutes without ever stopping . . . We danced the pizzica for two hours. And all these women let themselves go. It was incredible . . . and all of them [did] the part on the ground, you know? And then, some cried, etc. and some were really freed. One woman, crying, said to me: "I've been waiting for this for forty-one years, and I am forty-one!" . . .*

*This class was a magical experience! And as we got to know each other better, it came out that . . . They respect me a lot, etc., a little like a guru, . . . but we are all down to earth. And then, at a certain point, she said, "Alessandra, you know, you have a lot of power. You really have a lot of power." I go, "Really?" "We all want you to know you've changed our *lives*." And I had *no* idea who was going through things with marriage, so many different things that are, you know, personal. I can't talk too much about them. And every one of them came out in a different way. . . .*

LDG: . . . Come ti spieghi il fatto che tutte queste donne erano tutte italiane?

*. . . How do you explain the fact that these women were all Italian?*

AB: Perché lì ci stava la ricerca . . . delle loro, vere radici.

*Because in play there was the search for their own, real roots.*

LDG: Erano tutte del Sud?

*Were they all from the South?*

AB: Sì, erano tutte del Sud . . . per cui, tutte quante si so' proprio sentite un risveglio primordiale, com'è successo a me. . . . Io credo tantissimo, proprio in quello che dice de Martino, che lo spiega benissimo, e non so' d'accordo invece con quelli con cui parlo del Salento. . . . Per niente, perchè non conoscono l'altra realtà. Per me, questo è il dramma della gente di quei luoghi, . . . che non è aperto a trasmettere la loro tradizione o ad accettare che gente da fuori possa, non *solo* capire la loro tradizione, ma interpretarla tranquillamente nello stesso modo.

*Yes, they were all from the South . . . so, all of them really felt a primordial awakening, as happened to me. . . . I really believe, precisely in what de Martino says, who explains it so well, and I do not agree instead, with those with whom I speak in the Salento. . . . Not at all, because they don't know this other reality. For me, this is the tragedy of the people in those places, . . . that they are not open to transmitting their tradition nor to accepting that people from outside cannot only understand their tradition but interpret it just as effectively, in the same way.*

#### 14. Puglia and Pizzica: Knives, Sex, and Women

LDG: . . . Tu cosa ti senti quando sei nella ronda a Torre Paduli?<sup>8</sup> Cioè, qual'è il tuo rapporto con i giovani non pugliesi . . . o pugliesi?

*. . . What do you feel when you are in a dance circle at Torre Paduli? That is, what is your relationship to the young people who are not Pugliesi . . . or Pugliesi?*

AB: . . . Questo ci tengo a raccontarlo: la prima volta che sono andata a Torre Paduli, era nell'estate del '84, e io sapevo sempre di questa festa, da quando ho cominciato questo gruppo nel '79. Però, non c'ero mai andata perchè era sempre fuori mano. Quell'estate m'ero data degli appuntamenti con quelli di Pupi e Fresedde, che non facevano più Pupi e Fresedde, e stavano tutti . . . Pino stava con De Simone, ecc.

Per cui, ho preso un treno *a vapore*, per le montagne della Calabria . . . (te puoi immaginare . . . da sola). . . . Passa per Sibari, e fa tutto il giro, arriva a Taranto. A Crispiano, so' stata a trovare quelli di Pupi e Fresedde—'sto paese *allucinante*, dove le donne [sucking sound] sono tutte chiuse, così. E ho cominciato a capire il tarantismo, anche se non era il Salento. Dico: qui c'è qualcosa che mi sfugge [con] queste donne. . . . Ho visto le donne calabresi: non sono così—per *niente*. E poi tutti mi *osservavano*, perchè io ero la *straniera* che viaggiava da *sola*. L'amica mia non mi ha potuto avere a casa sua perchè è brutto: lei con una donna sola. . . .

Poi abbiamo preso 'sta macchina e sono andati giù verso Lecce. Eravamo in tanti. Era di ferragosto: non c'era posto per dormire da nessuna parte. Abbiamo dormito tutti in macchina, lungo le spiagge, ecc. E tutto 'sto viaggio io mi so' resa conto di com'erano veramente *loro*, che io avevo conosciuto e frequentato a

Firenze, ma al loro paese, tutti diversi erano: molto chiusi, molto strani. Poi, siamo arrivati la notte sbagliata. Noi siamo arrivati la notte del 14, non il 15. Pioveva a dirotto, tipo adesso. Arriviamo a Ruffano, e questi avevano cambiato idea, e hanno detto: “noi torniamo a Crispiano, non rimaniamo un'altra notte.” Io dico: “Voi siete pazzi.” . . . Poi c'è stato un attimo . . . Io ho detto: “io resto!” E allora, loro mi hanno mollato alla stazione di Gallipoli alle sei del mattino di ferragosto, co' la pioggia. . . .

Comunque, è stata la cosa più bella che potevo fare, perchè alla stazione di Gallipoli ho fatto amicizia col capostazione che era uno giovane, e io gli ho detto: “io sto cercando di arrivare a Torre Paduli.” Questo è scoppiato a ridere . . . dice: “a piedi?!” Io non me rendevo conto di dov'era. Allora, lui m'ha detto: “Guarda, non ci sono mezzi di trasporto. Niente.” Dice: “però se tu m'aspetti a me, ti c'accompagno io, perchè mia sorella che è psichiatra, studiosa del fenomeno del tarantismo, c'ha una villa a Santa Maria di Leuca . . . tu puoi rimanere benissimo da noi e ti portiamo alla festa della pizzica.” Ha, ha! [we share a laugh]. Io che pensavo a loro! Però io so' stanca morta e questo m'ha aperto il bagagliaio e mi so' addormentata *sul tavolo*, chiusa nel bagagliaio. Poi: speriamo in bene. Se vedeva che era un gentiluomo. Un ragazzo giovane che magari . . . (c'aveva pure l'idea . . .), però gentile. Non era un cafone, assolutamente. Infatti, poi m'ha accompagnato, prima, ha detto: “Adesso passiamo prima per la casa dei miei”—ad una villa stupenda. Infatti, io penso: e questo sta a fare il capostazione? Va be'. Poi, m'ha portato alla casa della sorella. Gente meravigliosa.

E m'hanno portato alla pizzica [a Torre Paduli]—che era tutta un'altra cosa! Erano solo uomini. Non c'era *una donna*! Nè che suonava, nè che ballava. . . . Infatti, quando ne ho parlato co' Chiriatti<sup>9</sup>—era nel '84—lui m'ha detto: “Allora te lo ricordi com'era?” Stranissimo. Non era così illuminata, c'era meno bancarelle, era molto più buia. Io mi ricordo 'st'effetto, che eravamo tutti . . . stavamo un po' al buio, dietro a questi che suonavano, e neanche *una* femmina. E poi alla scherma erano *tutti* con queste facce, tutti proprio tagliati.

E a un certo punto, la sorella di questo m'ha detto: “Perchè non provi a suonare?” (Però, io avevo cominciato a suonare a casa.) M'ha detto: “Ma tu, suona tranquillamente.” . . . “Dai, vediamo che succede.” Perchè lei è una donna pure, di quelle interessanti . . . Io ho cominciato a suonare, e questi si so' guardati, m'hanno guardato a me, e *pa* [slaps her hand]! Hanno *smesso* di suonare e se ne so' andati da un'altra parte. Ed è stato proprio: ta! Un messaggio: you're *not* welcome . . . Sono stata proprio [gasping for air]. Quelle cose che leggi, poi, succedono, e dici, ma . . . E poi, hanno cominciato a ballare gli zingari, che hanno tirato fuori i coltelli, e quello m'ha *spaventato* . . .

. . . *I am really keen to tell this: the first time I went to Torre Paduli was in the summer of '84, and I had always known about this festival, since I had started with this group in '79. But I had never been there because it was out of the way. That summer [though] I had arranged various rendezvous with the guys from Pupi e Fresedde, who were no longer doing Pupi e Fresedde and who were all with . . . Pino was with De Simone, etc.*

*So, I took a train fuelled by steam, through the mountains of Calabria . . . (can you imagine) . . . alone) . . . Passed through Sibari, and made the entire circle, arriving at Taranto. In*

*Crispiano I went to visit the guys from Pupi e Fresedde—in this nightmare of a town, where the women [sucking sound] are all closed in. And I started to understand tarantismo, even though it was not the Salento. I tell myself: there's something here that eludes me, [with] these women. . . . I've seen the Calabrian women: they are not like that—at all. And too, everyone was watching me, because I was the foreigner traveling alone. My friend was not able to invite me into her house because it wasn't proper: she with a woman [traveling] alone. . . .*

*Then we took a car and went down toward Lecce. There were a lot of us. It was Ferragosto: there was nowhere to sleep. We all slept in cars, along the beach, etc. And during this entire trip I realized how they really were, those I had known and been with in Florence, but in their own towns, they [were] entirely different: very closed, very strange. Then, it turns out, we had arrived on the wrong night. We arrived the night of the 14th, not the 15th. It was raining hard, like now. We arrive in Ruffano, and these guys had changed their mind, and said, "We're going back to Crispiano; we're not staying another night." I go, "You guys are crazy." . . . There was a tense moment there . . . I said, "I'm staying!" And so they dumped me at the Gallipoli train station at 6:00 a.m. of Ferragosto, under the rain. . . .*

*In any case, it turned out to be the best thing I could have done, because at the Gallipoli station I made friends with the head of the station who was a young guy, and I told him, "I'm trying to get to Torre Paduli." He bursts out laughing . . . he says, "On foot?!" I hadn't realized where it was. So, he said to me, "Look, there are no means of transportation. None." He says, "But if you wait for me, I'll take you there, because my sister who is a psychiatrist, scholar of the tarantismo phenomenon, has a villa in Sant Maria di Leuca . . . you can easily stay there with us and we'll take you to the pizzica festival." Ha, ha! [we share a laugh]. And I who was worrying about them! But I'm dead tired and this guy opens the baggage claim area and I slept on the table, closed inside the baggage area. [And I'm thinking] though, let's hope for the best. One could see that he was a gentleman. Yes, a young guy and perhaps . . . (he may even have been thinking . . .), but nice. He was not a bumpkin, not at all. In fact, when he accompanied me, first, he said, "Let's first go by my parent's house"—to a magnificent villa. And I'm thinking: and he's working as head of the station? So be it. Then he took me to his sister's house. Wonderful people.*

*And they took me to the pizzica [to Torre Paduli]—that was something totally different! There were only men. Not one woman! Neither playing [drums], nor dancing. . . . In fact, when I spoke of this with Chiriatti\*—it was in '84—he said: "So, do you remember the way it was?" Very strange. It was not as well lit, there were fewer vendor's stalls, it was much darker. I remember this feeling, that we were all . . . we were all more or less in the dark, behind these guys who were playing, and not even one woman. And too, in the sword dance, they all had these really scarred up faces.*

*And at a certain point, this guy's sister said, "Why don't you try playing?" (I had [by this time] begun playing at home. She said, "Just play, go ahead." . . . "Go on, let's see what happens." Because she too was one of those interesting women . . . I started to play, and these guys looked at each other, they looked at me, and pa [slaps her hand]! They stopped playing and went somewhere else. And it was like: ta! The message: you're not welcome . . . I was like [gasping for air]. You read about such things, and then they happen, and you say: but . . . And then the Gypsies started to dance, and pulled out their knives, and that scared me . . .*

LDG: *Veri coltelli?*

Real knives?

AB: Sì. Io l'avevo già visto in Calabria. I prima anni, in Calabria, ballavano con i coltelli—risse da morire. I miei amici che dicevano: “*Non ballare, Alessandra. Scappa, scappa che ti vengono tutti adosso!*” [nervous laugh] E io, dentro le macchine così co' John.

*Yes. I had already seen it in Calabria. During those first years, in Calabria, they danced with knives—incredible fights. My friends who'd say, “Do not dance, Alessandra. Run, run because they're going to crash into you!” [nervous laugh] And I, closed inside our cars, with John.*

LDG: Dunque, era più danza della scherma che pizzica.

*So it was more sword dance than pizzica.*

AB: Sì, suonavano tutti il ritmo della pizzica col tamburello, ma di danza, io ho visto *solo* la scherma. Non ho visto nessuno ballare come ballano adesso. *Nessuno!*

*Yes, they all played the rhythm of the pizzica on the frame drum, but as for the dance, I saw only the sword dance. I saw no one dance the way they dance today. No one!*

LDG: Quand'è cambiato?

*When did it change?*

AB: Non so, perchè io poi non ci so' mai più tornata. Io ci so' tornata l'anno prima che ci tornasti co' te [hence, 1995] e ho trovato 'sta situazione completamente cambiata che, secondo me, è *meglio*. . . . What good is it to anyone that that stays there among men and nobody's allowed to participate? For what?

E poi, se c'è questo lato violento tra gli uomini, la partecipazione femminile è proprio bella per questo, perchè lo assottiglia. Diventa una cosa molto più bella d'energia. . . . L'hanno portato le ragazze. Perchè se no, erano proprio una cosa *macho* [with a clap]! . . . Quando ho visto al buio [makes sound of slashing knives], le lamme che facevano così . . . Poi è arrivata la polizia, ha circondato la ronda, e hanno bloccato tutto. . . .

*I don't know, because I never returned. I returned there the year before I went with you [hence, 1995], and I found the situation completely changed, that is, in my opinion, for the better. . . . What good is it to anyone that that stays there among men and nobody's allowed to participate? For what?*

*Further, if there is this violent side to men, female participation is wonderful for this reason, because it attenuates it [the violence]. It becomes a thing with more positive energy. . . . And it was the young women who brought that about. Otherwise, it was really a macho thing [with a clap]! . . . When I saw in the dark [makes sound of slashing knives], the blades that went like this . . . Then the police arrived, surrounded the dance circle, and stopped everything. . . .*

LDG: Sono rimasti alcuni di quelli . . . ?

*Have some of those . . . remained?*

### 15. “This Thing against Women”

AB: E come no! Infatti, li vedi: quello grosso, quelli che stavano sul video?<sup>10</sup> Mamma mia, quello *fa paura!* [Continuous interruption of the question being formulated.] Però quelli erano tutti carcerati . . . Io non so com’è successa questa transizione che man mano le ragazze che ballano, la gente da fuori che suona, perchè m’è sfuggito. Non ci so’ *mai* voluta ritornare, perchè m’ha messo talmente paura. . . . M’ha scioccato. Proprio non c’ho avuto, proprio nessun desiderio di tornarci. Poi stavo là [in Puglia] tutte l’estati.

In Calabria, ho visto cose simili però non ho *mai* sentito questa cosa contro le donne. . . . I calabresi sono molto più liberi sessualmente. . . . E ho sentito sempre le donne più aperte verso altre donne. Questo in Puglia ancora [non] lo sento. Le donne so’ proprio strane, sono. Tu non lo senti?

*Sure! In fact, you see them: the big one, those who were on the video?\* Mother help me, that guy is scary! [Continuous interruption of the question being formulated.] But those guys were all jailbirds . . . I don’t know how this transition happened in time—the girls who dance, the people from outside who play—because I wasn’t following it. I never wanted to return because I was so scared. . . . It shocked me. I had absolutely no desire to go back. And I was there [in Puglia] every summer.*

*In Calabria, I had seen similar things but I had never felt this thing against women. . . . The Calabrians are more sexually liberated. . . . And I’ve always felt the women to be more open toward other women. In Puglia, I don’t feel this yet. The women are just really strange. Don’t you feel it?*

LDG: Non sono abbastanza dentro . . . <sup>11</sup>

*I haven’t entered into [the milieu] enough [to know] . . . \**

AB: Non sento le donne aperte, assolutamente, per cui penso c’è proprio una cosa ancora . . . che a noi ci sfugge.

*I really don’t feel the women to be open, so I think there is something there that still . . . eludes us.*

LDG: Che senso può avere quello che chiamo il “neotarantismo” in Puglia e fuori?

*What meaning can, what I call “neotarantismo,” have within Puglia and without?*

AB: In Puglia, io non lo posso giudicare bene perchè non ci vivo . . .

*Within Puglia, I cannot judge because I don’t live there . . .*

LDG: Tu lo vedi?

*Do you see it?*

### 16. “They Live in a Spider’s Web”

AB: Però lo vedo. S’estate è successo una cosa molto strana che . . . m’ha fatto pensare a tutto questo. Quest’estate quando so’ rimasta a casa di questi qua del Bar del Menhir,<sup>12</sup> ho cominciato a sentire *tantissimo* tutto il fenomeno repressione, ragnatela, proprio in *quella* zona. . . . Io penso che è una zona *particolare*, geograficamente parlando, proprio così strana, arida. Il fatto che non riesci ad uscire dai paesi . . .

*But I do see it. This past summer a strange thing happened that . . . made me think about all this. This summer when I stayed in the house of the owners of Bar del Menhir,\* I really started feeling the entire repression, spider web phenomenon, right in that area. . . . I think it is a peculiar area, geographically speaking, really very strange, arid. The fact that you can’t seem to find your way out of towns . . .*

LDG: Abbiamo la stessa . . .

*We have the same . . .*

AB: . . . I paesi sono tutti ragnatele, tutti spersi. Io e Dario non ne potevamo più! Proprio: andiamo in Calabria! Macché! E’ pazzesco. . . .

*. . . The towns are all spider webs, all scattered. Dario and I couldn’t take it any more! I mean, really: Let’s go to Calabria! Nothing like it! It’s crazy. . . .*

LDG: Ti perdi facilmente.<sup>13</sup>

*One gets lost easily.\**

AB: E l’ho capito: questi *vivono* in una ragnatela che crea delle cose strane mentalmente. Tra l’altro, l’altra cosa che ho comincia’ a notare, che m’ha scioccato perchè era agosto: di *giorno*, le case *chiuse* nei paesi, colle finestre *chiuse*. . . . Là ho cominciato proprio a sentire l’oppressione mentale.

E poi ho sentito un’altra cosa strana, penso hai percepito anche te, che questi ragazzi giovani, molto *belli*, secondo me, molto *erotici*, co’ ’sti sguardi stupendi . . . Proprio c’hanno ’sta carica sessuale pazzesca. Non me so’ sentita safe. Io ho pensato subito: io qui fossi sola . . . . Io ho sentito: qui [non] c’era Dario, buona sera! . . . Ci dev’essere sicuramente un grosso problema tra loro e le loro ragazze. Che poi ho visto anche la storia di quell’altra, no?<sup>14</sup>

*And I’ve understood it: these people live in a spider’s web that creates certain strange things, mentally. And besides, the other thing I started to notice, that shocked me because*

*it was August: during day time hours, houses closed in town, with windows closed. . . . That's when I started really feeling the mental oppression.*

*And then I sensed another odd thing, I think you might have noticed it too, that these young boys, very good looking, in my opinion, very erotic, with these magnificent glances. . . . They have this really crazy sexual energy. I didn't feel safe. I immediately thought: If I were here alone . . . I felt: [if] Dario were[n't] here, good night! . . . There must surely be a big problem between them and their girlfriends. I also saw this in the story of that other [woman], no?\**

### 17. Women Have Lost Their Strength

AB: . . . C'ha sicuramente un senso [il neo-tarantismo] perchè la repressione c'è, l'oppressione c'è, e come si sfogano quando suonano e quando cantano e ballano, è come ci avessero orgasmi continui. . . . Poi, quanto le ragazze riescano a usare questo come liberazione non lo so, perchè io, da osservatrice, vedo che partecipano ragazze—belle. C'è una bella energia. Sono molto carine, molto sexy, però di ragazze che suonano il tamburello *forte*, come suono io, non ne ho visto manca una. Per cui, secondo me, c'è ancora questo gap, no? Ci sono, c'erano, le anziane che lo facevano—la madre di Luciano,<sup>15</sup> che ancora da' quelle botte sul tamburo, da sciamana, ma non c'è una nuova generazione di femmine che possono suonare il tamburello a quel livello perchè, secondo me, si sono civilizzate. Non ce la fanno fisicamente. . . . (C'hanno paura del sangue, e tutto il resto.)<sup>16</sup> Sono qui che smettono. Per cui, secondo me, lì io osservo che hanno perso la loro forza. Non riescono a ritrovarla, in qualche modo. Ma il giorno che la ritrovano *sul* tamburello, allora, secondo me, rinasce questo [indecipherable].

*. . . It [neo-tarantismo] must have some meaning because the repression is there, the oppression is there, and how they get off this energy when they play and when they sing and dance, it's as though they were having continuous orgasms. . . . But then, just how much the young women are able to use this as liberation, I don't know, because observing them, I see that young women—pretty—do participate. There is a positive energy. They are very pretty, very sexy, but young women who play the frame drum with force, as I do, I haven't seen even one. So, in my opinion, there's still this gap, you know? There are, there were, older women who did this—Luciano's mother,\* who still gives such blows to the frame drum, like a shaman, but there is no new generation of females who can play the frame drum at that level because, in my opinion, they've become gentrified. They can't handle it physically any more. . . . (They're afraid of the blood and all the rest.)\* It's there they stop. So, in my opinion, that's where I've observed they've lost their strength. They can't seem to, in some way, find it again. But the day they reclaim it on the frame drum, then, in my opinion, this [indecipherable] will be reborn.*

LDG: Tu dici che le giovani non partecipano al suonare, però io vedo molte giovani ballare . . .

*You say that the young women don't participate in playing, but I see many of them dance . . .*

AB: Sì, e quella è la loro espressione sessuale, secondo me, nel ballo, però *non* nel suonare il tamburello che, anticamente, era uno strumento soprattutto femminile.

Quelli che guarivano la tarantata, per la maggiore parte, erano donne. E lì, secondo me, c'è proprio questa perdita di forza *fisica*. Perchè ce ne vuole *tantissima* per suonare così per tante ore. E' forse proprio la loro sottomissione, cioè, . . . neanche ci provano. Per cui, accettano un ruolo femminile diverso, che non è quello della forza, capito?

*Yes, that's where they express their sexuality, in my opinion, in the dance, but not in playing the frame drum, which, in former times, was especially a female instrument. Those who healed women afflicted by the spider's bite, for the most part, were women. And that's where, in my opinion, there's really been this loss of physical strength. Because you need a lot of it to play like that for so many hours. It's likely due to their submission, that is, . . . they don't even try. So, they accept a different female role, which is not one that comes from strength, understand?*

LDG: Dunque si ripete un po' questa stessa situazione della . . .

*So, in some sense, there is a repetition of the same situation of the . . .*

AB: . . . *taranta!*

*. . . tarantula!*

LDG: . . . musicalmente. Cioè i musicisti sono uomini . . .

*. . . musically speaking. That is, the musicians are men . . .*

### 18. Percussion: Entering "A Real Male World"

AB: . . . e le donne ballano. Invece, quello che io trovo che è possibile in America, dove le donne sono un po' diverse [sarcastic chuckle] . . . proprio, capovolgimento. . . . Sento è la mia missione, che devo fare 'sta musica, soprattutto questa *danza*, e soprattutto il tamburello, per portarlo a l'uso primordiale . . . di modo che le donne ritrovano questa forza.

Infatti, se tu (tu non sei stata adesso con me in giro con questi che suonano percussioni, tutti batteristi) . . . , ma vedere gli uomini batteristi, grandi così *soffrire* perchè gli fa male il braccio . . . Non ce la fanno perchè fa male il dito, fa male il polso [gasping . . . ]. . . . E poi alcuni mi guardano, proprio con le lagrime all'occhio, me fanno: "Ma tu, come fai che sei piccola, bassa?" . . . Non è una vittoria contro il maschio, ma è un modo di essere allo stesso livello . . . essere rispettata, ammirata, trattata come sorella, [e] non come donna da rimorchiare. . . . Rimanono a bocca aperta, perchè so' entrata nel *real male world* that other women have a hard time getting in.

Ce ne sono altre, cioè a livello nazionale negli Stati Uniti, di donne che suonano percussioni a questo livello. Ce ne sono solo due: Sheila E. [Escovedo] che è una star che suona, che è cubana. . . . Quando vedi suonare lei, capisci: ecco—*that's what a woman should be!* [laughs] Ed è *sexy*. . . . E' proprio una bella do[onna]. E un'altra *stupenda* che è americana indiana Navajo, e si chiama Valerie Dee Naranjo . . . mallets, e marimbas. . . . She's amazing, and feminine, and beautiful.

*. . . and the women dance. Instead, what I find is possible in America, where women are a little different [sarcastic chuckle] . . . this real inversion. . . . I feel it is my mission, that I must play this music, especially this dance, and especially the frame drum, to return it to its ancient function . . . in order that women might find this strength once again.*

*In fact, if you (you haven't been with me on this tour with these guys who play percussion, all drummers) . . . , but to see these big male drummers suffer because their arm hurts . . . They can't make it because their finger hurts, their wrist hurts [gasping . . . ]. . . . And then some of them look at me, with real tears in their eyes, and they go, "But how can you, who are little, short, manage it?" . . . It's not a victory against males, but it's a way of being at the same level . . . of being respected, admired, treated like a sister, [and] not as a woman to be picked up. . . . They stand there with dropped jaw because I've entered into the real male world that other women have a hard time getting in.*

*There are others, that is, at a national level in the United States, of women who play percussion at this level. There are only two: Sheila E. [Escovedo] who is a star who plays; she's Cuban. . . . When you see her play, you understand: Here—that's what a woman should be! [laughs] And she's sexy. . . . She's really a beautiful wo[man]. And another one who's magnificent is the American Indian, Navajo, whose name is Valerie Dee Naranjo . . . mallets, and marimbas. . . . She's amazing, and feminine, and beautiful.*

### 19. I'm Not a Feminist<sup>17</sup>

LDG: . . . Tu non ti consideri femminista . . . Perché?

*. . . You don't consider yourself a feminist . . . Why not?*

AB: Perché c'è un lato del femminismo che non mi piace. . . . Com'è stato interpretato negli ultimi anni, è molto separatista. Per cui, non contribuisce a portare armonia tra maschio e femmina. . . . La separazione non aiuta a *niente*. . . . Io vedo che un maschio c'ha dei ruoli particolari e che la donna ha un'altro, che l'armonia va trovata proprio in questo senso. Ci credo proprio tantissimo. . . . The yin and yang. . . .

*That's [what] also the tambourine is based on. Fatto che in Italia c'è la tradizione: la donna suonava con la sinistra, il maschio con la destra; che c'è un modo di tenerlo che è femminile, e un modo di suonare che è maschile. Quando poi lo suoni insieme, that's when all this happens. Io penso che questa energia bisogna ritrovarla. Se può trovare attraverso la danza, il tamburo. . . . Però, certo che credo nell'eguaglianza, che poi c'abbiamo diritto alle stesse cose, *assolutamente!* Forse quello è il mio lato femminista. Però non credo che tu raggiungi l'eguaglianza *separandoti—assolutamente no!**

*Because there's a side to feminism that I don't like. . . . The way it's been interpreted in the last few years, is very separatist. So, it doesn't contribute to bringing harmony between male and female. . . . And in my opinion, the separation does not help at all. . . . I see that a male has specific roles and that women have another, that harmony is to be found precisely in that sense. I really believe in that. . . . The yin and yang. . . .*

That's [what] also the tambourine is based on. *The fact that in Italy there is the tradition: women play with the left hand, males with the right; there is a female way of holding it, and a male way of playing it. When you then play it together, that's when all this happens. I think we need to find this energy again. You can find it through the dance, the drum. . . . But then, of course, I do believe in equality, that we have the right to the same things, absolutely! Perhaps that's my feminist side. But I don't believe you attain equality through separation—absolutely not!*

## 20. New Age Nonsense

AB: . . . Layne Redmond che ha fatto questo libro che si chiama, *When The Drummers Were Women* [Redmond 1997], . . . fa tutta una ricerca molto accurata su queste cose antiche: le donne che suonavano il tamburo nell'Egitto, nella Sumeria, ecc., ecc. La ricerca è fatta bene però molto New Age, e ti fa pensare che tutte le donne, vestite di bianco, e di veli [dreamy voice], danzavano incandescenti [melifluous voice], aahh. . . . That ain't *true*, honey [laughs]! . . . C'avevano sacrifici, c'avevano le orgie, tutto un lato molto più violento com'è anche *ancora*. Quando tu stai in una festa della pizzica, e questi che te vengono appresso così, they're continuing these Dionysus rites, i riti dionisiaci. Ti può succedere *di tutto!* . . . It's *not pure—at all*. Per cui, lei c'ha questa interpretazione: era tutto bello, erano tutte femmine, le femmine suonavano, tutti andavano d'accordo, . . . tutti carini, la Madreterra, era tutto felice . . . Io a questo non ci credo *per niente*, anche perchè non so' poi convinta che le donne erano tutte più armoniose. . . . No! Chi te l'ha detto? Chi te l'ha detto che le donne non possono esse' più violente, o non c'hanno problemi. . . .

The good thing about what she does is: she found a way to introduce it to women who are *non*musicians, who find an identity through that. So, that's very valuable. While the style we play is very difficult and a lot of musicians *can't* do it. It's really difficult and it takes a lot of strength. Però il limite su quello che fa lei è che non è riuscita ad entrare in a *male's* world. So, that's where I have a problem: you're a feminist, you're doing something only for women (*mainly* feminists), introducing them to something that they like. Yet, *none* of them could ever jam or play in a male world with musicians, drummers, [at] a business level. So what good is it? It's being separate, it's not being equal. . . .

. . . *Layne Redmond, who wrote this book called When The Drummers Were Women* (Redmond 1997), . . . *conducted this very thorough research on these ancient things: women who played the frame drum in Egypt, in Sumeria, etc., etc. The research is well done but very New Age, and it makes you think that all these women, dressed in white, and with veils [dreamy voice], danced incandescently [mellifluous voice], aahh. . . . That ain't true, honey [laughs]! . . . They had sacrifices, they had orgies, an entire side which was much more violent, as it still is. When you are in a pizzica festival, and these people come after you like that, they're continuing these Dionysus rites. Anything can*

*happen to you! It's not pure—at all. So, she has this interpretation: it was all wonderful, they were all women, the women played, everyone got along, . . . they were all pretty, Mother Earth, everything was hunky-dory . . . I don't believe this at all, also because I'm not convinced that women were all more harmonious. . . . No! Who said so? Who says that women can't be more violent, or that they don't have problems. . . .*

The good thing about what she does is: she found a way to introduce it to women who are *non*musicians, who find an identity through that. So, that's very valuable. While the style we play is very difficult and a lot of musicians *can't* do it. It's really difficult and it takes a lot of strength. *But the limit of what she does is that she has not been able to enter a male's world.* So, that's where I have a problem: you're a feminist, you're doing something only for women (*mainly* feminists), introducing them to something that they like. Yet, *none* of them could ever jam or play in a male world with musicians, drummers, [at] a business level. So what good is it? It's being separate, it's not being equal. . . .

LDG: Con i New Agers, vai d'accordo?

*Do you get along with New Agers?*

AB: C'è un rapporto *strano* [laughs].

*We have a strange relationship* [laughs].

LDG: Non sono loro anche uno dei tuoi pubblici?

*Aren't they too, one of your audiences?*

AB: Non tanto. A New York non molto, mentre qui sì. . . . A New York, il pubblico nostro è quello che va all'Opera, italo-americani, ma gente dell'università, proprio molto colto. . . . Qua, penso de sì, perchè qui c'è questa New Age spirituality, molto attratta dalle cose che faccio io. Per questo, infatti, è interessante. Voglio vedere come svilupperà, qua.

*Not really. Not much in New York, but here yes. . . . In New York, our audience is the same one that goes to the Opera, Italian Americans, but university types, really very cultured. . . . Here, I think yes, because here we have this New Age spirituality, very attracted by the things I do. In fact, it's interesting for this reason. I want to see how it develops here.*

LDG: Tu sei all'inizio, allora, di questa cosa?

*So, you're just starting this out* [here]?

AB: . . . In California?

LDG: Con i New Agers?

*With New Agers?*

AB: . . . Quando è uscita la New Age, sono entrata molto dentro. M'è piaciuta tantissimo, una parte della filosofia—il ritorno alla Grande Madre, [e] anche all'aspetto musicale. C'erano dei musicisti grandiosi che hanno fatto delle cose bellissime. Però poi ho cominciato a capire la parte *commerciale*,<sup>18</sup> e alla fine l'ho trovato abbastanza *boring* come movimento. C'ha delle cose valide, e delle cose che, secondo me, sono noiose . . .

*. . . When [the] New Age [movement] began, I was really into it. I liked it a lot, a part of its philosophy—the return to the Great Mother [and] also its musical side. There were some great musicians who did some beautiful things. But then I started to understand its commercial side,\* and in the final analysis I found it rather boring as a movement. It has some worthwhile things, and others, instead, that I consider, boring . . .*

LDG: Tipo?

*Such as?*

AB: Be' . . . sono cose ripetitive—relaxation, you know? Se vuoi andare a dormire, c'ha un senso, però . . .

*Well . . . they are repetitive things—relaxation, you know? If you want to sleep, it's got its merits, but . . .*

LDG: [laughs]

AB: Non mi dà energia, e poi non mi piace il lato commerciale del New Age, che tanta gente usa. . . . E poi nell'antico Egitto facevano così [mimicking in a small voice], they chanted, they drummed. . . . That's the *American* way of . . . washing them out to make them accessible to the public that is *very white* and *very afraid* to deal with spirits and with really heavy stuff. . . . It involves, you know, a lot of sacrifice, a lot of pain. . . . The New Age stuff *doesn't* and *never* will. You know, they're afraid of those things.

*It doesn't energize me, and further, I don't like New Age's commercial side, that many play into. . . . And then in ancient Egypt, they did this [mimicking in a small voice], they chanted, they drummed. . . . That's the American way of . . . washing them out to make them accessible to the public that is very white and very afraid to deal with spirits and with really heavy stuff. . . . It involves, you know, a lot of sacrifice, a lot of pain. . . . The New Age stuff doesn't and never will. You know, they're afraid of those things.*

## 21. World Musical Fusions: We Are All One

LDG: Tu hai parlato del tarantismo [che] quando suoni e danzi è come se fosse un'esperienza yoruba, o qualcosa del genere. Dunque, tu conosci abbastanza queste tradizioni. Che rapporto hai con queste? Come le usi? Le usi? Tu hai rapporti con indiani . . .

*You spoke about tarantismo [that] when you play and dance it's like a Yoruba experience, or something similar. Therefore, you know plenty [about] these other traditions. How do you relate to them? How do you use them? Do you use them? Do you have relationships with Native Americans . . . ?*

AB: . . . Sì, a New York, frequento e lavoro con indiani americani, con nigeriani, giamaicani, santeri.

*. . . Yes, in New York, I know and work with Native Americans, with Nigerians, Jamaicans, Santeros.*

LDG: Com'è successo tutto questo?

*How did all this come about?*

AB: Perché siamo tutti *simili*. It's the *same*! We're so similar, it's amazing.

*Because we are all alike. It's the same! We're so similar, it's amazing.*

LDG: Similar in what way?

AB: . . . Intanto, le nostre culture si avvicinano tantissimo: proprio il modo di vivere, no? Il modo di vedere la famiglia, tribale, il clan, la generosità di fondo, di fare queste grosse cene, di invitare. Io questo l'ho sperimentato cogli'indiani, proprio come se fosse a casa mia. . . . Come se stessi in Calabria. Uguale. Con i nigeriani, uguale. Quando fanno la festa, questo cucina per una settimana, come fai te, no? E nessuno entra in cucina. Poi arrivano tutti, e tutti si mettono a suonare, e tutti poi si salutano. . . . Ognuno poi c'ha il suo santo protettore. . . .

Per cui, penso che New York è *veramente* il centro del mondo per chi cerca delle cose spirituali, pratiche, perchè sta tutto là, e vicino. 'Ste cose stanno anche qua; non dico che qui no . . . . Sono disponibile, so' aperta a tutti questi channels, a tutte queste culture *ricchissime*—in più, *vere*. La gente, queste cose, *non le fa* perchè ci devono guadagnare, ma proprio *per niente*. Anzi, ma questa è propria l'ultima priorità che c'hanno, e . . . sono *bravissimi*—*bravissimi*, co' delle voci che sono *strabiglianti*. . . . What they do is really from the *heart*. And it has a *healing power*. . . .

*. . . To begin with, our cultures are very close: the very way of life, you know? The way of considering family, tribal, the clan, of fundamental generosity, of having these big dinners, of hospitality. I've experienced this with Indians, really as though I were in my own home. . . . As though I were in Calabria. The same. With Nigerians, the same. When they have a festive gathering, they cook for a week, like you do, you know? And no one comes into the kitchen. Then everyone arrives, and everyone starts playing [instruments], and everyone greets everyone else. . . . Each one too has his own patron saint. . . .*

*So, I think New York really is the center of the world for someone who is looking for spirituality, practices, because it's all there, and close to hand. Such things are here too; I'm not saying that here there aren't. . . . I'm receptive, I'm open to all these channels, to all these very rich cultures—and what's more, true [cultures]. People do these things, not*

*because they have something to gain from it, not at all. On the contrary, this is the very last consideration they have, and . . . they are really talented—very talented, with amazing voices. . . . What they do is really from the heart. And it has a healing power. . . .*

## 22. “I’ve Always Felt Part Indian”

AB: And it’s *similar* to ours in many ways. The dances, for example: la pizzica, . . . la danza delle donne—the shawl dance: almost the same; men’s fancy dance: almost the same. The round dance è quasi uguale al Montemaranesè,<sup>19</sup> con un altro ritmo. . . .

Come sai, ho sempre pensato di essere in parte indiana. C’ho sempre questo mito degli indiani.<sup>20</sup> Ho sempre *sognato* di fare delle cose cogli indiani. Nel ’92, c’ho avuto quest’idea, siccome tutti volevano che io facessi questi spettacoli in onore di Cristoforo Colombo [she groans]. Ecco, io ho deciso di fare il contario, di fare uno spettacolo, non solo contro Cristoforo Colombo, ma onorando gli indiani. Allora, a Lincoln Center . . . ho proposto questo show . . . e la producer m’ha detto: “I will commission it if you do the world premier.” [laughs] I was really excited. . . . We didn’t have any idea *where* I was going to find the Indians or what I was going to do.

E poi sono andata dall’American Indian Community House. . . . Questi mi guardavano: ma questa chi è; che vo’? . . . Erano un po’ scettici, no? Perché proprio tu che sei italiana vuoi fare delle cose co’ noi? Poi, invece, ho conosciuto il direttore di questa compagnia che si chiama Thunderbird (American Indian Dancers), che è Hopi. E’ . . . una persona *eccezionale* che ha capito subito that I was *real* and I wasn’t trying to *fool* them. Ed è nata ’sta collaborazione stupenda.

Abbiamo creato uno show che diceva la storia loro e la nostra *strana* di goofy Colombo, vestito da Pulcinella, ecc. E i personaggi principali erano Coyote who meets Pulcinella and [he] shows [the] other the Italian dances, and [Coyote shows] their dances, and then finding the similarities: . . . the worship for Mother Earth, which in our case is the Black Madonna. . . .

And it’s *similar* to ours in many ways. The dances, for example: *the pizzica, . . . the women’s dance*—the shawl dance: almost the same; men’s fancy dance: almost the same. The round dance *is almost like the Montemaranesè\** [but] *with another rhythm. . . .*

*As you know, I’ve always felt part Indian. I’ve always had this myth of the Indian.\* I’ve always dreamed of doing things with Indians. In ’92, I had this idea, since everyone wanted me to do these performances in honor of Christopher Columbus* [she groans]. *So, I decided to do the opposite, to do a show not only against Christopher Columbus but in honor of Indians. So, at the Lincoln Center . . . I proposed this show . . . to the producer and she said: “I will commission it if you do the world premier.”* [laughs] I was really excited. . . . We didn’t have any idea *where* I was going to find the Indians or what I was going to do.

*And then I went to the American Indian Community House. . . . They looked at me: “Who’s she? What does she want?” . . . They were a little skeptical, you know? Why do you who are Italian want to do things with us? But then, I met the director of the company whose name is Thunderbird (American Indian Dancers), who is Hopi. He is . . . an exceptional person who immediately understood that I was real and I wasn’t trying to fool them. And so this wonderful collaboration was born.*

*We created a show that told their story and our strange story of goofy Columbus, dressed like Pulcinella, etc. And the principle characters were Coyote who meets Pulcinella and [he] shows [the] other the Italian dances, and [Coyote shows] their dances, and then finding the similarities: . . . the worship for Mother Earth, which in our case is the Black Madonna. . . .*

LDG: Che effetto ha avuto sulla comunità, sulle due comunità? . . .

*What effect did this have on the community, on the two communities? . . .*

AB: . . . Bellissimo. A Lincoln Center è stato un pubblico soprattutto americano [di] 3,500 persone [snorts]! Morivamo dal nervosismo [high pitched voice]. . . . Poi abbiamo continuato a fare questo show per un paio d'anni e ce l'hanno preso molte comunità italo-americane [with disbelief]! *That's* where I really think I made an impact because I was able to bring that to the Italian Americans who had *no* idea what it was, but they were thrilled by it. And there I found [that] there's a lot of Italian Americans who are Leftist, who . . . are really into these things. . . .<sup>21</sup>

*. . . Beautiful. At Lincoln Center it was mostly an American audience [of] 3,500 [snorts]! We were dying from nerves [high pitched voice]. . . . And we continued to do this show for a couple of years and many Italian American [with disbelief] communities asked for it! That's* where I really think I made an impact because I was able to bring that to the Italian Americans who had *no* idea what it was, but they were thrilled by it. And there I found [that] there's a lot of Italian Americans who are Leftist, who . . . are really into these things. . . .\*

### 23. Italian Americans: A Love–Hate Relationship

LDG: Dimmi un po' di questo tuo rapporto da italiana con la comunità italo-americana.

*Tell me something about your relationship as an Italian with the Italian American community.*

AB: Oh, huh, huh, huh . . . il rapporto di *odio e amore!* Quando abbiamo iniziato con il gruppo, eravamo convinti, io e John . . . che avremo portato questa cultura antica, popolare . . . a tutti questi immigranti che l'avevano persa. E poi l'impatto è stato allucinante perchè *nessuno* s'identificava con questa musica. . . . C'avevano preso per arabi, iraniani—tutto—zingari *sempre*. Ma non essendo "O sole mio," "Malafemmina" . . . A Little Italy c'hanno cacciato e ci volevano spaccare gli strumenti. Pensa te! . . . Però man mano . . . la nostra compagnia, I Giullari, arrivava in questi teatri, soprattutto d'università. . . . Abbiamo fatto pure delle cose nelle chiese dove c'erano gli immigranti, come Brooklyn. . . . [END OF AUDIO CASSETTE 1B]

*Oh, huh, huh, huh, A love-hate relationship! When we started out with the company, we were convinced, John and I . . . that we were bringing this old, folk culture . . . to all these immigrants who had lost it. And then the impact was mind-boggling because no one identified with this music. . . . They took us for Arabs, Iranians—everything—always Gypsies. But since it was not “O sole mio,” “Malafemmina” . . . In Little Italy they kicked us out and they wanted to smash our instruments. Imagine that! . . . But then, little by little . . . our company, I Giullari, came to these theaters, mostly at universities. . . . We also did some things in churches where there were immigrants, such as Brooklyn. . . . [END OF AUDIO CASSETTE 1B]*

LDG: Dicevi allora della comunità italo-americana, il rapporto di odio-amore . . .

*You were talking about the Italian American community, the love-hate relationship . . .*

AB: . . . All’inizio, quando andavamo in questi posti, soprattutto nelle chiese di Brooklyn and Queens, era interessante scoprire gli immigranti, [del]l’immigrazione recente. . . . Erano soprattutto calabresi. . . . Somehow, non lo so perchè, i napoletani, siciliani, un po’ si distaccano dalla musica. I calabresi proprio c’hanno la tarantella *nel sangue* [laughs], è una cosa tremenda. Nfatti, sono quelli, di solito, che ci sponsorizzano di più.

*. . . At the beginning, when we went to these places, especially in the churches of Brooklyn and Queens, it was interesting to discover immigrants, [of] the recent immigration. . . . They were mostly Calabrians. . . . Somehow, I don’t know why, Neapolitans, Sicilians, distance themselves somewhat from the music. The Calabrians [instead] really have the tarantella in the blood [laughs], it’s an awesome thing. In fact, it is they, usually, who sponsor us the most.*

LDG: Calabresi. E i siciliani, invece?

*Calabrians. And Sicilians, instead?*

AB: Di meno. . . . Entrano subito a far parte di . . . questi gruppi italo-americani che fanno musica pop: “Il ballo del qua qua” [laughs]. Per cui, quando noi abbiamo cominciato a far parte di questi *dinner dance*, l’impatto per me è stato *uno shock*. . . . Venendo dall’Italia, ma chi l’ha mai viste!? . . . *I matrimoni!* . . . Non mi rendevo proprio conto della cultura che c’era, perchè, per tutti gli anni che so’ stata a New York, io facevo parte di un ambiente artista new yorkese, per cui, non frequentavo gli italo-americani. . . .

Uno, perchè non mi ci identifico per niente; secondo per il fatto del *razzismo strabigliante* contro i negri e tutto il resto. . . . Io veniva da una famiglia di comunisti. . . . Mio padre è sempre stato a favore dei neri, degli africani, indiani. . . . Poi frequentavo . . . gente, non solo colta, ma . . . di sinistra, ma proprio con un altro approccio verso queste cose sociali. . . . E non solo. Mi so’ chiest[a], pure con John: ma a noi c’interessa fare spettacoli per *questa* gente? Cioè, do I feel a feedback? No! E siccome fare questo tipo di spettacoli di musica e teatro popolare e danza non è

*pure* entertainment, . . . è un rituale, . . . ha bisogno delle energie dal pubblico, della gente che ti apprezza, che ti capisce, che non ti chiede: “Mamma,”<sup>22</sup> e “Sole mio,” ogni cinque minuti. . . .

La transizione è avvenuta automatica perchè dal momento che abbiamo preso dei teatri più grandi al NYU per gli spettacoli, c’hanno fatto delle recensioni subito sul *New York Times*. E’ scattato un altro pubblico, . . . gente di tante razze diverse [che] veniva ai nostri show. Sono quelli che amano l’Italia, l’arte, l’opera, colti, universitari. . . . Però . . . quelli [italo-americani] dall’inizio, che hanno firmato la mailing list, continueranno a ricevere sempre nostre informazioni. . . . M’ha fatto molto piacere, quando abbiamo fatto il debutto alla Stanley Hall nel ’96. . . . (C’erano mille persone.) . . . Alla fine, molti di questi italo-americani . . . ancora ci seguono. E questo è bellissimo. Per cui c’è gente che viene ai nostri spettacoli da quando io ho iniziato nel ’79. Per cui, chi è rimasto (che saranno forse il 40% della mailing, che mo’ so’ 7,000?), è la gente che sicuramente, sul quale c’ho avuto un impatto, che è stata educata da noi.

Poi soprattutto a Natale, quando facciamo la *Cantata dei Pastori*, questi gruppi di famiglia italiana vengono *sempre*. Questo è bellissimo. . . . Vengono i loro figli, i bambini, . . . vogliono ballare con me. . . . Per cui, quella missione, in effetti, . . . la continuo. Però, in realtà, non vado tanto nelle loro comunità. . . . La nostra compagnia, fa tra workshops e performances, [of] about 100–140 shows a year, maybe 20 percent of those are in the Italian American communities, not even.

*Less. . . . They immediately get into . . . these Italian American groups that play pop music: “Il ballo del qua qua” [laughs]. So, when we started to take part in these dinner dances, it made quite an impact on me, a real shock. . . . Coming from Italy, who had ever heard of them [dinner dances]!? . . . The weddings! . . . I just hadn’t taken into account what this culture was, because, during all the years that I was in New York, I was part of a New York artist’s milieu, so I didn’t frequent Italian Americans. . . .*

*First, because I did not identify with it at all; second because of the blatant racism against Blacks and all the rest. . . . I came from a family of Communists. . . . My father was always on the side of Blacks, of Africans, Indians. . . . Further, I frequented . . . people, not only cultivated, but . . . of the Left, really with another approach to these social realities. . . . And furthermore, I asked myself, John did too: do we really want to do shows for these people? That is, do I feel a feedback? No! And since doing this sort of show, of folk music and theater and dance is not pure entertainment, . . . it’s a ritual, . . . it requires energy from the audience, from people who appreciate you, who understand you, who do not ask for: “Mamma,”\* and “Sole mio,” every five minutes. . . .*

*The transition happened automatically because from the moment we took the bigger theaters at NYU for shows, they immediately reviewed us in the New York Times. That’s when a new audience kicked in, . . . people of many diverse races [who] came to our shows. It was those who love Italy, art, opera, cultured, university educated. . . . But . . . those [Italian Americans] who [attended] from the beginning, who had signed the mailing list, will always continue to receive our information. . . . I was really pleased, when we debuted at Stanley Hall in ’96. . . . (There were a thousand people.) . . . So, many of these Italian Americans, after all . . . still attend our shows. And this is wonderful. So, there are people who have been coming to our shows from the beginning in ’79. So, there has remained (maybe 40 percent of the mailing list, that now has 7,000?), people upon whom I have certainly had an impact, who have been educated by us.*

*Furthermore, especially at Christmas, when we do the Cantata of the Shepherds, these Italian family groups always come. This is wonderful. . . . Their children come, . . . they want to dance with me. . . . Therefore, that mission, indeed, . . . continues. But in fact, I do not go into their communities much. . . . Our company [does], between workshops and performances . . . about 100–140 shows a year, maybe 20 percent of those are in the Italian American communities, not even.*

LDG: E tra i più giovani però, in quelle comunità? . . .

*But among the younger people, in those communities? . . .*

#### 24. “The Kids Are Wild about It”

AB: I bambini impazziscano. 'Fatti, quello che io vedo con il lavoro, che m'interessa tantissimo, è lavorare con i bambini, non solo perchè so' bravissimi . . . Te lo giuro che so' più bravi degli adulti, ma *molto*. . . . Imparano *subito* delle cose difficilissime. . . . M'ha fatto capire che, se tutto va bene, questa compagnia non finirà quando io so' vecchia. . . . Io penso 'sta compagnia non finisce. Potrebbe diventare, come [per] tante altre comunità, cosa di New York: scuole, come i Thunderbirds, e tante altre, che so' ebraiche, portoricane, africane. Per cui, se riesco a trasmettere . . . veramente so' riuscita proprio a completare uno dei miei goals. Poi se ci sono altre bambine che diventeranno come me, Alessandra, sarò *felicissima!* . . . Quelle che si mettono i fiori [nei capelli], si vestono come me . . .

*The kids are wild about it. In fact, what I am seeing with this work, which interests me a lot, is working with children, not only because they are really good . . . I swear that they are better than the adults, by a long shot. . . . They learn [even] difficult things in no time at all. . . . It has helped me understand that, if all goes well, this company will not end when I am old. . . . I think this company will not end. It could become, as [it is for] other communities, a New York thing: schools, like the Thunderbirds, and many others that are Jewish, Puerto Rican, African. So, if I succeed in going forth . . . I will really have accomplished one of my goals. And, then, if there are other girls that become like me, Alessandra, I'll be thrilled! . . . Those who wear flowers [in their hair], that dress like me . . . .*

#### 25. Dressing Up

LDG: Di' un po' del tuo vestire. Sei sempre stata così particolare? . . . <sup>23</sup>

*Tell me something about the way you dress. Have you always been so unique? . . . \**

AB: Mia madre ti potrà dire questo: il mio *hobby*, il mio *gioco* preferito, era quello di aprire gli armadi, tirar tutto fuori (che non era solo mio ma degli altri), e mi vestivo continuamente. Mi cambiavo sempre davanti allo specchio: scarpe di mia madre, vestiti di mia sorella. . . . Mia sorella mi picchiava. Chiudeva tutto a chiave e trovavo il modo per aprir' armadi ugualmente. Io mi trasformavo *sempre* davanti

allo specchio. Creavo delle storie, ballavo e cantavo. . . . Cantavo *sempre*. Andavo nelle gite, io che cantavo e facevo cantare tutti nell'autobus.

*My mother can tell you this: my hobby, my preferred game, was to open the wardrobes, pull everything out (stuff that wasn't only mine but belonged to others), and I continuously dressed up. I always changed in front of the mirror: my mother's shoes, my sister's dresses. . . . My sister would hit me. She'd lock everything up, and I would find the way to open the wardrobes just the same. I would always transform myself in front of the mirror. I'd invent stories, I'd dance and sing. . . . I always sang. When I went on field trips, I would sing and would get everyone else on the bus to sing.*

LDG: Ma questo modo di . . .

*But this style of . . .*

AB: . . . E' sempre stato stravagante! . . . La generazione mia era una generazione un po' hippie. . . . Mi dipingevo la fronte, fumavo la pipa, mettevo tutte 'ste cose strane addosso. . . . Mi dovevo dipingere la fronte, per cui, ero un po' indiana, un po' indiana dell'India, un po' indiana americana. E tutti dicevano che era il terzo occhio. Io mo', manco lo sapevo che era il terzo occhio! . . .

*It's always been flamboyant! . . . My generation was a somewhat hippie generation. . . . I'd paint my forehead, I smoked a pipe, I'd put on all these strange things. . . . I got it in my head that I should start painting my forehead, so I was a little bit Indian, a little Indian from India, a little American Indian. And everyone said it was the third eye. Well I really didn't even know that it was the third eye! . . .*

## 26. The Black Madonna: The Great Mother

LDG: Ma tu hai imparato un po' nozioni di religiosità, di spiritualità . . . Tu hai una religione particolare che segui?

*You learned some notions of religiosity, of spirituality . . . Do you have any particular religion that you follow?*

AB: Sì, penso di sì. Questa è una grossa parte della mia vita.

*Yes, I think so. This is a big part of my life.*

LDG: . . . della Madonna Nera, tu sei devota? Di' un po'.

*. . . You are a devotee of the Madonna Nera, right? Tell me about it.*

AB: Ma questa diventa lunga . . . Vediamo. Come possiamo spiegare? OK. Quando ho iniziato le ricerche di tradizioni popolari per caso—e adesso [capisco] che non

è un caso assolutamente—finivo sempre in queste feste popolari nelle chiese, e la maggior parte di queste madonne erano tutte nere. Questo m’ha incuriosito subito, e quello che m’incuriosiva è che nessuno dava una spiegazione che avesse senso. Perché . . . il prete diceva che era il fumo delle candele. E poi molti dicevano che era turca, bizantina, ecc. . . .

Quello che poi è successo nella mia vita personale è stata questa malattia, e questa operazione. Quando me so’ risvegliata da questa anestesia, ho vissuto forse la mia prima esperienza mistica, dove me so’ sentita ad un livello spirituale molto elevato, in contatto con lo spirito della gente nella recovery room. And I understood exactly what was going on: like somebody was dying, and I feel their *pain*, and I felt this really intense[ly], like I was really *there*—in them. It was like an out-of-body experience. And I was *fine*. I wasn’t bleeding. I wasn’t sick. I didn’t feel any pain. . . . The doctors were kind of shocked that I was so well. And they were saying: “This is kind of a miracle here . . .” My mother was there. I was fine. They sent me home the next morning. . . . And my friend who’s a priest in Santeria, [a] Gypsy, was doing a lot of praying for me. . . .

I know I’ve always had these powers, these psychic things, but I wasn’t aware of what this healing . . . and the Earth connected, was. I had no idea. Waking up from that was an amazing—proprio, *awakening*. Questo lo dico in inglese perchè mi rimane più facile, non so per quale ragione. And then, I know a lot of people who went through that experience of awakening after their surgery. (Mo’ ripasso all’italiano, non lo so, va be’ . . .) . . .

Poi, come convalescenza, all’inizio del ’87, so’ venuta qua in California dalla mia sorella, perchè avevo bisogno di un periodo per stare calma. Non dovevo fare troppi sforzi, ecc., allora ho deciso di venire qua in California. E mia sorella c’ha un amico che c’ha un aereo privato e siamo andati a Santa Barbara in aereo. E lì c’ho avuto la seconda mystical experience. We were flying over the ocean here in California and all of a sudden . . . I started really seeing the Earth *breathing* with . . . a lot of grief, and the ocean singing, and it was all *so real*. I *really* know they were telling me: we’re suffering; we’re in pain; we’re dying . . . And all of this was like [sucking sound] was complet . . . [groping for words]. My body was shivering, I was crying [gasps], I was totally freaked out because I could [slaps] touch it. It was so real, but I couldn’t express it. And I was sitting in the back of this plane, like: what is happening to me? . . . Feeling the people’s thing . . . as if they were telling [me]: we’re dying, help me, pray. . . . It took me a long time to tell my sister. . . . Then I started to study [esoteric material] [and] I realized something awakened. . . .

I realized: I’ve got to go back to the south of Italy. . . . That was the year I was opening up *La lupa*. Somebody from the Italian American community of Casandrino in Trenton, New Jersey, commissioned me to do a show about *their* madonna, la Madonna di Casandrino. They call [her] “Zingarella.” So, they commissioned me to do this, and for *that* I had to go back to their town and do the research. And she was a Black Madonna, and I said: I have to do *something* about the Black Madonna, I don’t know *what*. . . . So that to do it, again with Dario who needed healing, and he couldn’t come with me for a while, so I took off by myself.

[I] went to places like Seminara . . . in search of the Black Madonna, and finding out what it really was. And then I started getting books . . . this great book called, *The [Cult of the] Black Virgin* [Begg 1996], then all these goddess books that came out, you know: Gimbutas, and all these other[s], that go back to the ancestral Earth Mother. . . . I bought a million and one books, and [read] *most* of them in English. One that is a really incredible text, was written by Roberto De Simone, *Il segno di Virgilio*. De Simone is the only one, I think, who was really *aware* of certain things but doesn't really bring it to everybody [Long break: Alessandra is chilled and wants a sweater, something warm—I offer pasta e ceci.]

*But this is going to take some time [to explain] . . . Let's see. How can I explain? OK. When I began research on folk traditions, by chance—and now [I understand] that it was absolutely not a coincidence—I'd always end up during these folk festivals in the churches, the majority of whose madonnas were all black. This made me immediately curious, and the thing that was curious was that no one gave an explanation that made any sense. Because . . . the priest said that it was [due to] candle smoke. And many said that she was Turkish, Byzantine, etc. . . .*

*Then, what happened in my personal life, was this illness, this operation. When I awakened from the anesthesia, I had what perhaps was my first mystical experience, where I felt to be on a very elevated spiritual plane, in contact with the spirit of the people in the recovery room. And I understood exactly what was going on: like somebody was dying, and I feel their pain, and I felt this really intensely, like I was really *there*—in them. It was like an out-of-body experience. And I was *fine*. I wasn't bleeding. I wasn't sick. I didn't feel any pain. . . . The doctors were kind of shocked that I was so well. And they were saying, "This is kind of a miracle here . . ." My mother was there. I was fine. They sent me home the next morning . . . And my friend who's a priest in Santeria, [a] Gypsy, was doing a lot of praying for me. . . .*

*I know I've always had these powers, these psychic things, but I wasn't aware of what this healing . . . and the Earth connected, was. I had no idea. Waking up from that was an amazing—just, *awakening*. (This I'm going to say in English because it's easier for me, I don't know why.) And then, I know a lot of people who went through that experience of awakening after their surgery. (Now I'm going to go back to Italian, I'm not sure why, oh well . . .) . . .*

*Then, as a way of convalescing, at the beginning of '87, I came here to California to my sister's, because I needed a period of rest. I wasn't supposed to exert myself too much, etc., so I decided to come here to California. And my sister has a friend with a private plane, and we went to Santa Barbara in the airplane. And that's where I had my second mystical experience. We were flying over the ocean here in California and all of a sudden . . . I started really seeing the Earth *breathing* with . . . a lot of grief, and the ocean singing, and it was all *so real*. I *really* know they were telling me: we're suffering; we're in pain; we're dying . . . And all of this was like [sucking sound] was complete . . . [groping for words]. My body was shivering, I was crying [gasps], I was totally freaked out because I could [slaps] touch it. It was so real, but I couldn't express it. And I was sitting in the back of this plane, like: what is happening to me? . . . Feeling the people's thing . . . as if they were telling [me]: we're dying, help me, pray. . . . It took me a long time to tell my sister. . . . Then I started to study [esoteric material] [and] I realized something awakened. . . .*

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[I] went to places like Seminara and all these places, in search of the Black Madonna, and finding out what it really was. And then I started getting books, . . . this great book called, *The [Cult of the] Black Virgin* [Begg 1996], then all these goddess books that came out, you know, Gimbutas, and all these others, that go back to the ancestral Earth Mother. . . . I bought a million and one books, and [read] *most* of them in English. One that is a really incredible text, was written by Roberto De Simone, *Il segno di Virgilio*. De Simone is the only one, I think, who was really *aware* of certain things but doesn’t really bring it to everybody [Long break: Alessandra is chilled and wants a sweater, something warm—I offer pasta e ceci.]

AB: Allora . . . la Madonna Nera. (Ma questo è un libro!) . . . La cosa più bella è stata, andando in questi luoghi . . . mi so’ trovata in situazioni *molto* spirituali che non avevo *mai, mai* sentito in chiesa a Roma, in giro, mai. Per cui, queste feste, proprio, super *non cristiane* . . . completamente pagane, col tamburo; o le danze, con l’erotismo, ecc., le processioni, i canti delle donne, per me, era tutta una cosa molto sconosciuta che *mai* mi sarei aspettata di trovare accanto a una chiesa. E la cosa più incredibile [è] che sono, questi posti sono, dei luoghi miracolosi *davvero*. . . . Accidenti! ’Sti miracoli succedono davvero . . . E’ successo a me; è successo a Dario; è successo ad altra gente che conosco. E la cosa *affascinante* poi della Madonna Nera era che . . . c’ha un potere di guarigione anche su persone che hanno grossi problemi sociali, problemi di droghe, di alcolismo. . . .

Poi, l’opera che abbiamo scritto si chiama: *Il viaggio della Madonna Nera* che abbraccia tante cose. Allora uno: il potere spirituale di questa figura della madre nera—che non è la mamma di Cristo—*assolutamente*. Il potere miracoloso dei luoghi sacri dove questi posti sono . . . sempre accanto all’acqua, nelle grotte, in montagne sacre, fiumi, e gli alberi ([per] tradizione, le querce). E questi posti [sono] antichissimi, proprio, timeless. Poi queste cose le scoprivo nelle ricerche archeologiche, trovando testi da un’altra parte—che la chiesa non ti da *mai*. . . . Questo libro [di] De Simone . . . è incredibile. . . . Il culto mariano e così importante nelle feste popolari, perchè so’ tutti devoti alla madonna, la grande Madreterra. Nel Sud d’Italia poi non ne parliamo! . . . Gesù è una figura proprio *secondaria*. . . . E lì poi si so’ uniti: questo mio risveglio spirituale . . . [e] la Madreterra che sta morendo ecologicamente. . . .

E ho cominciato a capire questa missione era questo: il risveglio di culti antichissimi—che poi ho scoperto stanno in tutto il mondo, non è solo nel Sud dell’Italia—legato a questi riti antichi di Cibele, Iside, Afrodite. . . . Tanti nomi c’hanno, ma so’ sempre [quelle]. Astarte, Inanna: so’ tutti questi riti dedicati alla dea femminile come terra madre generatrice, vergine, scura. . . . La terra, più [è] scura più è fertile. Infatti, come mai la vergine di Dusseldorf (c’ha trenta mila anni), la Madreterra, bella grossa . . . Ephesina, Iside—nere—[sono] tutte legate . . . al colore della terra?

Poi ha tutto l'altro aspetto nostro femminile, che è la luna, la parte scura della luna, quella che non vediamo mai. E anche la luna c'ha questo potere, healing power, the cycles of the moon—which is a feminine cycle. Ed è tutto molto esoterico. . . . And I really *believe* that we are the children of the womb of the Earth. . . . I believe . . . in creation myths, . . . the marriage of the Sun and the Earth. . . . Then I started to study . . . [Rudolf] Steiner and Madame Blavatsky, that explain our esoteric spiritual evolution and how the planets were one, . . . that we are obviously connected to the womb of the Earth, . . . that we change according to the *Earth's* change—and that's exactly what's happening right now!

So the Black Madonna figure . . . now looks like the mother of Jesus. It's *so* alive now, it's so *contemporary*, for whatever [reason]. How come these sacred places are *still* there? . . . Nature, I really believe [it] has the power to heal us and destroy us. . . . We're destroying it. We're going toward [this] [snaps fingers] very fast . . . But if we could believe that [connectedness of creativity] again . . . the Gaia theory. The Earth *is* an intelligent being, *does* breathe, *does* think, and *will* eliminate us, because she will survive. But we're not [going to survive unless we] change. . . .

All that work has brought me to write this show . . . to [a]waken people to something that was ancient, that is popular in the south of Italy. . . . If we could [only] go back to those times, . . . we might have a chance to survive. . . .

*Let's see . . . the Black Madonna. (But this [is going to turn out] to be a book!) . . . The best thing was that, going to these places . . . I found myself in very spiritual situations that I had never, ever felt in church in Rome, or while traveling, never. So, these festivals, really non-Christian . . . completely pagan, with drum; or with the dances, the eroticism, etc., the processions, the women's songs, for me, was all unknown territory that I would never have expected to find next to a church. And the most incredible thing [is] that they are, these places are, truly miraculous sites. . . . Damn! These miracles really happen . . . It happened to me; it happened to Dario; it happened to other people I know. And the fascinating thing about the Black Madonna was that . . . she has the power to heal even people with serious social problems, drug problems, alcoholism. . . .*

*And, the Opera that we wrote [about it] was called: Il viaggio della Madonna Nera ['The Voyage of the Black Madonna'] that embraces many things. One: the spiritual power of this figure of the Black Madonna—who is not the mother of Christ—absolutely not. The miraculous power of these sacred sites . . . are always next to water, in caves, on sacred mountains, rivers, and trees ([according to] tradition, oaks). And these places [are] ancient, really timeless. I discovered these things through archaeological research, finding texts in completely disconnected places—that the church never gives to you. . . . This book [by] De Simone . . . is incredible. . . . The Marian cult is so important in folk festivals, because they are all devoted to the Madonna, the great Mother Earth. And let's not even talk about the South—. . . . Jesus is a decidedly secondary figure. . . . And there they were somewhat fused: my spiritual awakening . . . [and] Mother Earth who is ecologically dying. . . .*

*And I started to understand this mission was this: the reawakening of ancient cults—that I later discovered exist throughout the world. Not just in the south of Italy—linked to these ancient rites of the Sibyl, Isis, Aphrodite. . . . Many names they have, but they are always [the same]. Astarte, Inanna: they are all these rites dedicated to the Goddess as the generatrix, Mother Earth, virgin, dark. . . . The Earth, the more [it is] dark, the more fertile it is. In fact, how come the virgin of Dusseldorf (who is thirty thousand years*

old), the Mother Earth, nicely rounded . . . Ephesina, Isis—black—[are] all linked . . . to the color of the Earth?

Then there is the other side of our feminine nature, that is, the moon, the dark side of the moon, the side we never see. And the moon too has this power, healing power, the cycles of the moon—which is a feminine cycle. And it's all very esoteric. . . . And I really believe that we are the children of the womb of the Earth. . . . I believe . . . in creation myths, . . . the marriage of the Sun and the Earth. . . . Then I started to study [Rudolf] Steiner and Madame Blavatsky, that explain our esoteric spiritual evolution and how the planets were one, . . . that we are obviously connected to the womb of the Earth, . . . that we change according to the Earth's change—and that's exactly what's happening right now!

So the Black Madonna figure . . . now looks like the mother of Jesus. It's so alive now, it's so *contemporary*, for whatever [reason]. How come these sacred places are still there? . . . Nature, I really believe [it] has the power to heal us and destroy us. . . . We're destroying it. We're going toward [this] [snaps fingers] very fast . . . But if we could believe that [connectedness of creativity] again . . . the Gaia theory. The Earth is an intelligent being, *does* breathe, *does* think, and *will* eliminate us, because she will survive. But we're not [going to survive unless we] change. . . .

All that work has brought me to write this show . . . to [a]waken people to something that was ancient, that is: popular in the south of Italy. . . . If we could [only] go back to those times, . . . we might have a chance to survive. . . .

LDG: So you have combined, in your own thoughts, southern Italian rituals with these other non-Italian . . .

AB: . . . Well, it's not true that they're not Italian! Because they *were* there. . . . It was part of our Greek and Roman background.

## 27. Southern Reincarnations: Naples, Calabria

LDG: Tu ti senti molto legata al Sud.

*You feel very tied to the South.*

AB: *Tantissimo*. . . . Dove mi sento più legata è la zona di Napoli e la Calabria. E io penso che proprio là—lì c'entra molto, secondo me, la reincarnazione (in cui credo tantissimo), dove penso ho vissuto delle altre vite: una a Napoli. . . . In Calabria molto più antica . . . che ha a che fa' con l'epoca della Sibilla. . . . A Napoli invece è più recente, può essere Rinascimento o inizio del Seicento.

A Napoli c'ho proprio avuto delle esperienze . . . assurde. Stavo con delle amiche mie in macchina e ho visto proprio *cambiare tutto*. Di fronte ai miei occhi me so' vista: carozzelle, gente vestita in un altro modo [claps to accentuate each phrase]. I had this flashback in time, twice, and I told my friend: "Stop! Stop the car. I'm freaking out!" [laughs]. Andando alle processioni, ah lì . . . sento, in questi luoghi di antichi culti, c'è un potere che è atavico. . . . Ho vissuto una serie di esperienze con Dario, da sola, apparizioni, ecc., che sono talmente reali, che so? come questo tavolo. . . .

In più poi, stando accanto ai contadini del Sud, ho scoperto proprio questa Gaia. . . . Loro la *sanno*, la *continuano* penso. Questa la sai anche te: [ma] in

Calabria, quando andavo in casa di quella Nicolina: di notte mi so' svegliata e c'era suo padre che stava parlando con la terra, e io stavo di dietro alla persiana a guardare, e me so' detto: "Ma questo che sta' a fa'?" Poi, stava lì che piantava . . . e parlava, ci faceva tutte 'ste cantilene. Poi chiedo a 'sta Nicolina (che era quella che m'ha insegnato tutte 'ste cose sul malocchio . . .), e lei m'ha detto: "Certo perchè a quell'ora, alle cinque del mattino la terra *respira*, e lui parlava con la fagiola. Perchè lui, parlando con la terra, la fagiola, poi vedi, come cresce bene la fagiola."

*Very much. . . . Where I feel especially linked is to the area of Naples and Calabria. And I think that right in those places—they have much to do, in my opinion, with reincarnation (in which I firmly believe), where I think I have lived past lives: one in Naples. . . . The one in Calabria was much more ancient . . . and it has to do with the times of the Sibyl. . . . In Naples instead, it is a more recent one, perhaps the Renaissance or the beginning of the 17th C.*

*In Naples I actually had the strangest experiences. . . . I was with some women friends in a car and I actually saw everything transformed, before my eyes I saw: carriages, people dressed in another style [claps to accentuate each phrase]. I had this flashback in time, twice, and I told my friend: "Stop! Stop the car. I'm freaking out!" [laughs] While going to processions, well there . . . I feel, in these places of ancient cults, that there is an atavistic force. . . . I had a series of experiences with Dario, alone, apparitions, etc., that were so real, you know? [as real] as this table. . . .*

*Furthermore, being with peasants in the South, I really discovered this Gaia. . . . They know it, they continue it, I think. I think you too know this [belief]: [but], in Calabria, when I'd go to that Nicolina's house: at night I woke up and there was her father talking with the Earth, and I was behind the shutter watching, and I said to myself: "What is this guy doing?" He was there planting . . . and talking, with all these singsongs. Then I ask this Nicolina (who was the one who taught me all these things about the evil eye . . .), and she said: "Of course, because at that hour, at five in the morning, the Earth breathes, and he was speaking with the bean plant. Because in talking with the Earth, the bean plant, you'll see how well the bean plant grows."*

LDG: Questa cosa che respira, non l'ho mai sentita!

*I've never heard this thing about [the Earth] breathing!*

AB: . . . *Il viaggio della Madonna Nera* . . . che ho finito nel '91, c'ho messo quattro anni. Poi John ha fatto le musiche prendendo spunto dal libro di De Simone, *Il segno di Virgilio*. E' un viaggio di iniziazione di Virgilio che era un iniziato di Cibele, e c'aveva questo tempio sacro (dove c'è adesso Monte Vergine), e c'aveva . . . com'è descritto proprio accuratamente nel libro di De Simone: c'erano i luoghi sacri dove c'era il culto delle erbe magiche. Poi c'era il culto di Attis, ecc. . . . quello che fanno adesso i femminieri<sup>24</sup> lì, . . . le tammorriate di Monte Vergine. [Sono] proprio una continuazione diretta degli antichi riti di Cibele in quella zona. Io ho preso spunto da questo. . . . Virgilio che va nel Underworld e incontra la Sibilla Cumana [e che] attraverso questo viaggio, gli fa incontrare tutte le sette dee, perchè nella tradizione sono sette madonne . . .

... 'The Voyage of the Black Madonna' ... which I finished in '91, I spent four years [working on it]. Then John wrote the music, taking his cue from *De Simone's* book, *Il segno di Virgilio*. It's a voyage of the initiation of Virgil, who was an initiate of the Sibyl, who had this sacred temple (where today we have Monte Vergine), and had ... just as it's described, very accurately, in *De Simone's* book: there were sacred places where there was the cult of magic herbs. And there was also the cult of Attis, etc. ... like what the *femminieri*\* do there today, ... the *tammorriate* of Monte Vergine. [They are] really a direct continuation of the ancient rites of the Sibyl in that area. I took my cue from this. ... Virgil, who goes into the Underworld and meets the Cumaean Sibyl [and who] through this voyage, has him meet all the seven goddesses, because in tradition they are seven madonnas ...

LDG: ... Le "Sette Sorelle"

... The "Seven Sisters"

AB: ... Le Sette Sorelle, che la più brutta è l'ultima. La più bella è nera: Mamma Schiavona. E da questo viaggio incontra sette dee, dalle quali io poi ho tirato fuori ogni madonna che ho *pensato* fosse la più simile del posto (che poi so' quasi tutte uguali, però): Hecate, la Madonna dell'Arco—che è la madonna che punisce, ecc. Iside, la prima, io l'ho identificata molto con la Madonna di Tindari (che è quella proprio antichissima che sembra che viene dall'Etiopia), ... e poi c'è Diana Ephesina. ...

... The Seven Sisters, and the last is the ugliest. The most beautiful is black: Mamma Schiavona. And during this voyage he meets the seven goddesses, from which I then pull out each of the madonnas who I thought might be the most similar belonging to that place (who are however, almost all the same): Hecate, the Madonna dell'Arco—who is the punishing Madonna, etc. Isis, the first one, [whom] I identified closely with the Madonna of Tindari (who is really the most ancient [and] who, it seems, comes from Ethiopia), ... then there is Diana Ephesina. ...

## 28. Current Musical Inclinations and World Music

LDG: Dunque, [di] tutto il tuo repertorio di musica popolare, ti senti più coinvolta in quale parte del repertorio? ...

Therefore, [of] your entire repertoire of folk music, with which part of the repertoire do you feel particularly engaged? ...

AB: In questo periodo, mi sento molto coinvolta da tutti i canti antichi. C'è secondo me, dei canti che sono canti religiosi, canti di lavoro—soprattutto delle donne, qualche canto d'amore, ballata, e le ninne nanne, ... di rifare tutti questi, arrangiarli, seguiti dalla parte rituale e ritmica ... dei canti sul tamburo. ...

Right now, I feel really engaged by all these older songs. [These] are, in my opinion, songs which are religious chants, work songs—especially of women, some love songs,

*ballads, and lullabies, . . . to redo these, arrange them, and accompany them with the ritual and rhythmic parts . . . with songs on the frame drum. . . .*

LDG: Tu sei molto dentro la World Music.

*You are very into World Music.*

AB: Yes, absolutely.

LDG: Tu vedi il tuo posto . . .

*You see your place . . .*

AB: . . . In the World Music, absolutely. Perché poi m'interessa . . . *fondere* la nostra tradizione con quella del resto del mondo . . . perchè non ha *più* senso, secondo me, mantenere queste cose separate. . . . Credo tantissimo a questo messaggio spirituale: healing attraverso la musica e il ritmo. . . . We are all *one*—at a certain level. . . . And we need to really communicate it that way.

*. . . In the World Music, absolutely. Because I'm interested after all . . . in fusing our tradition with that of the rest of the world . . . because it no longer makes any sense, in my opinion, to keep these things separate. . . . I really believe in this spiritual message: healing through music and rhythm. We are all one—at a certain level. . . . And we need to really communicate it that way.*

LDG: Tu hai interesse che la tradizione italiana bisogna adattarla per poterla poi . . .

*Are you interested in the need to adapt the Italian tradition in order to then . . .*

AB: . . . interessante 'sta cosa . . .

*. . . that's interesting, yes . . .*

LDG: . . . Cerchi di cambiarla?

*. . . Are you trying to change it?*

AB: . . . Secondo me, l'abbiamo già cambiata. La differenza tra quello che facciamo noi e quello che fanno in Italia è *grossa*. Noi faremo sempre il nostro repertorio. Finchè ce la chiedono, la musica popolare è fatta, seguendo lo stile della tradizione, ecc. Però, ormai io e John e altri, siamo arrivati ad un livello dove quello c'interessa di meno. Secondo me, è proprio il *mondo* che sta andando verso questo. Why World Music? Because we *need* that. We really need to come together. E tutto questo lavoro della Madonna Nera e poi di questa World Music, m'ha portato ad essere Artist-in-Residence in questo spazio meraviglioso sacro, la cattedrale di St. John the Divine.

... In my opinion, we have already changed it. The difference between what we do and what they do in Italy is huge. We will always perform our repertoire. As long as they ask for it, traditional music is there, following the traditional style, etc. But, by now, John and I, and others, have arrived at a level where that interests us less. In my opinion, it is actually the world that is going in this direction. Why World Music? Because we need that. We really need to come together. And all this work of the Black Madonna and with this World Music have brought me to being made Artist-in-Residence in this marvelous sacred place, the Cathedral of St. John the Divine.

## 29. Artists-in-Residence at St. John the Divine Cathedral, New York

AB: . . . E' considerato uno degli spazi più importanti del mondo di spettacoli, no? . . . [Hanno un] grosso pubblico, che so' migliaia di gente che ci va. . . . Infatti, di tante compagnie che stanno a New York, siamo in cinque. La cosa più importante però è quella spirituale, perchè questo Dean Morton, James Parks Morton—grande! Grande tutto: santo, guru, padre spirituale—è tutto! E poi [è] pratico. . . . Ventisei anni fa ha creato questo Artist-in-Residence program, riportando la cattedrale medioevale a quello che era negli antichi tempi: era anche teatro. . . . Torniamo all'epoca in cui il teatro si faceva in chiesa, che portava la gente in chiesa, che non ce va più in chiesa. Là ci viene 300 a messa. Da 300 so' diventati 3,000! . . . Con un repertorio che abbia un *sensò* religioso spirituale, che non è nel senso convenzionale cristiano, *assolutamente!* Questa è la cosa interessante, perchè lui ha scelto degli artisti . . . . Paul Winter. Prima è un grande sciamano che con questa musica che lui ha fatto col sassofono, ecc. ha cominciato a creare tutti i sound della natura: i lupi, di tutte le razze in estinzione, le balene, l'oceano. . . . [END OF AUDIOCASSETTE 2A] . . . La prima ragione per cui andavamo a St. John the Divine, era perchè quando c'era la messa di mezzanotte, c'era lui che suonava. *Mai* mi sarei aspettata di stare allo stesso posto suo, ma l'ho *sempre* sognato. Ho sempre sognato: *questo* è il posto mio. Io devo fare questo. Non so perchè. . . .

E Paul Winter poi ha creato, insieme a altri, questa grande messa, che si chiama *The Earth Mass*, che fanno tutti gli anni, per San Francesco d'Assisi, che si chiama *the Blessing of the Animals*. Per cui, 5,000 persone vengono in questa grande messa cogli animali ad essere benedetti! I bambini, tutti i piccoletti [cooing, baby voice]. . . . Noi apriamo, filiamo, facciamo la parata coi pupazzi, coll'angelo sui trampoli; e finiamo tutti suonando, io e il gruppo, in onore della Madre, della grande dea del mare, della tradizione Yoruba, seguendo la processione. . . .

They did an amazing thing . . . last year, quando sta per finire la messa. . . . Paul Winter annuncia: "And now please be silent for the silent procession." Si aprono le porte che c'è alla cattedrale, e entra l'elefante e tutti [sucking sound]: ti giuro . . . vedesse, così pacifico: bum. Entra. Poi tutti zitti. . . . Entra l'elefante; poi arrivano tutti gli altri animali . . . il lama, il condor, tutti questi coi serpenti. E devono tutti fare, tutti, un cerchio intorno all'altare. Vengono tutti benedetti e poi riescono tutti in processione. . . . Stupenda. . . . Poi c'è il Winter Solstice che è bellissimo, . . . che fino a poco tempo fa, è la produzione più bella che abbia visto, in assoluto, che pure questa è dedicata alla notte più lunga dell'anno, [con] la rinascita del sole, il simbolo della luce—cioè, il significato antico del Natale.

. . . It is considered one of the most important places in the world of performance, you know? . . . [They have] a huge audience, thousands of people go. . . In fact, of all the many companies there are in New York, we are in five. The most important thing however, is the spiritual side, because this Dean Morton, James Parks Morton—a great man! Great in every way: saint, guru, spiritual father—he’s everything! And he’s also practical. . . . Twenty-six years ago he created this Artist-in-Residence program, taking [it] back to the Medieval cathedral, to what it was in previous times: it was theater too. . . . We return to an epoch when theater took place in church, which brought people into church, because they no longer go to church. There [though] 300 people attend Mass. They’ve gone from 300 to 3,000! . . . With a repertoire that makes religious spiritual sense, which is not to say conventional Christian sense, absolutely not! This is the interesting thing about it, because he has chosen artists. . . . Paul Winter. First of all, he is a great shaman with this music that he plays on the saxophone, etc. He has begun to create all the sounds of nature: wolves, of all the species at risk of extinction, whales, the ocean. . . . [END OF AUDIOCASSETTE 2A] . . . The reason we started going to St. John the Divine, was because when there was a midnight Mass, he played. I never expected to be in his same place [one day], but I always dreamed it. I had always fantasized: this is my place. I must do this. I don’t know why. . .

And Paul Winter created, together with others, this Great Mass, that is called The Earth Mass, that they have every year, for St. Francis of Assisi’s day, which is called the Blessing of the Animals . . . where 5,000 people come to this Great Mass with their animals to have them blessed! The children, all the little ones [cooing, baby voice]. . . . We open, process, and have a parade with puppets, with an angel on stilts; and we all finish by playing, I and the group, in honor of the Mother, of the great goddess of the sea from the Yoruba tradition, following the procession. . . .

They did an amazing thing . . . last year, when the Mass is about to end. . . . Paul Winter announces: “And now please be silent for the silent procession.” The doors of the Cathedral open, the elephant enters and everyone [sucking sound]: I swear . . . if you saw it, so peaceful: bum. He enters. Everyone is silent. . . . The elephant enters; then all the other animals enter . . . the llama, condor, all these people with serpents. And everyone, all, must form a circle around the altar. They are all blessed, and then all exit again in procession. . . . Stupendous. . . . Then there is the Winter Solstice, which is beautiful, . . . which, up to a little while ago, was the most beautiful production I have ever seen, ever, and this one too is dedicated to the longest night of the year, [with] the sun’s rebirth, the symbol of light—that is, the ancient meaning of Christmas.

LDG: “Jesce sole”?<sup>25</sup>

AB: Sai come la fanno loro, “Jesce sole”? Tu non ti puoi immaginare che cos’è! . . . A un certo punto tu guardi in alto della cattedrale e ci stanno tutte ‘ste luci che fanno creare la notte, le stelle . . . Poi, a un certo punto [sound imitating instrument] un gong gigantesco, e uno che lo suona . . . viene trasportato in alto fin’alla cima della cattedrale . . . illuminato, che sembra il sole. It gives you the shakes. It’s the most amazing . . . mystical. And all it is: it’s a giant gong. . . . Noi invece facciamo la *Cantata dei Pastori* che è questa annuale celebrazione del Natale— però un adattamento mio . . . [su] testi del PERRUCCI . . . [con] scene che sono molto buffe. E poi facciamo lo *Stabat Mater* che ho [scritto] per la cattedrale. Per cui questa, in base a tanti sogni che ho fatto—che c’hanno anche a che fare con Gesù, la croce, la sofferenza degli indigeni che muoiono per liberare la terra, col sangue

che viene assorbita dalla terra. . . . Quindi, è stato il momento che stavo in Chiapas, e m'ha un po' scioccato, e ho creata questa Medieval Passion Play basato sulla lauda spirituale di Jacopone da Todì, *Donna de' Paradiso*. Poi, unendo[la] allo *Stabat Mater [Dolorosa]*—è sempre suo il latino—ed ad altri testi, altre laude Medievali, e John . . . le ha musicate. . . . E' un viaggio di sofferenza. (Mentre la Madonna Nera è un viaggio d'iniziazione.) . . . E noi lo facciamo, facendo tutte le stazioni della croce. . . .

Per cui, ho usato l'architettura della cattedrale . . . apposto per queste scene, per cui non è nessun "a caso," quella che viene dal deserto, di Gesù, . . . poi c'è the AIDS altar, dove lui viene. Lì viene battuto, legato, e la mamma cerca di difenderlo, e scopre che ormai non c'è più niente da fare. . . . E' legato alla croce, che è una croce dedicata a tutti, come si dice? . . . the firemen that died in New York. . . . C'è un impatto sulla gente pazzesco. Anche perchè noi facciamo molto reale, e sembra veramente che viene picchiato, frustato. In effetti, gli attori si fanno male, chi sceglie di fare Gesù. E poi gli diamo 'sta croce . . . che è un albero. E lui se lo porta, se lo trascina per tutta la cattedrale—che è lunghissima. . . . E poi c'è tutto il pianto della madre col figlio . . . col scritto di Jacopone da Todì. . . . E' estrapolato *difficile*. E la nostra [opera] più complicata. . . . Tutto deve spostarsi: i musicisti, gli strumenti, gli spartiti. . . . Quando io ho deciso di farla, m'hanno preso tutti per pazza. Dice: "Questo è impossibile. Non ci riusciremo mai a spostare. Il pubblico non accetterà mai di stare in piedi [all that time]. Perchè il pubblico deve stare in piedi?" Perchè è una *processione!* [laughs] . . . Quando c'è tanta gente . . . andiamo più lenti: un'ora e venti. . . . E quando fanno il funerale di Gesù morto, usando l'accannata (che t'ho detto fanno nella processione in Sicilia),<sup>26</sup> poi lì attaccano tutti i lamenti di alcuni siciliani, alcuni scritti da John, la ninna nanna che fa la madonna. . . . E poi cominciamo a fare la flagellazione. . . . Il pubblico è sconvolto[to] da tutto questo.

*Do you know how they perform "Jesce sole"? You can't imagine what it becomes! . . . At a certain point, you look up in the Cathedral and there are all these lights that re-create the night [sky], the stars . . . Then, at a certain point [sound imitating instrument] a gigantic gong, and the one who strikes it . . . is lifted up high to the apex of the Cathedral . . . illuminated, and it looks like the sun. It gives you the shakes. It's the most amazing experience . . . mystical. And all it is: it's a giant gong. . . . We instead do the Cantata dei Pastori [Cantata of the Shepherds], which is this annual celebration of Christmas—with my adaptation though [based on] the texts of Puccini . . . [with] scenes that are very comical. Then we do Stabat Mater, which I [wrote] for the Cathedral. This one, based on many dreams I had—which also have to do with Jesus, the cross, the suffering of indigenous people who die to free the land, with blood that is absorbed into the Earth. . . . So, it was when I was in Chiapas, and it shocked me somewhat, and I created this Medieval Passion Play based on the spiritual lauda of Jacopone da Todì, "Donna de' Paradiso" [Heavenly Lady]. Then, joining [it] to Stabat Mater [Dolorosa]—the Latin is still his—and to other texts, other Medieval laudas, and John . . . wrote music for it. . . . It is a voyage of suffering. (While the Black Madonna is a voyage of initiation.) . . . And we do it, stopping at all the stations of the cross. . . .*

*So, I used the Cathedral's architecture . . . precisely for these scenes, so there are no coincidences [about this], the one that comes from the desert, Jesus, . . . then there's the AIDS altar, where he comes. There he is beaten, bound, and his mother tries to defend him*

*and discovers that, alas, there is nothing more to be done. . . . He is tied to the cross, which is a cross dedicated to all the, how do you say? . . . the firemen that died in New York. . . . The impact on the people is profound. Also because we make everything very realistic, and it really seems like he is being beaten, whipped. In fact, the actors, the one who chooses to play the part of Jesus, gets hurt. And then we give him this cross . . . which is a tree. And he carries it, dragging it through the entire Cathedral—which is very long. . . . And then there is the entire lament of the mother for her son . . . with the text of Jacopone da Todi. . . . It's extremely difficult. It is our most complex [opera]. . . . Everything must move: musicians, instruments, sheet music. . . . When I decided to do it, they thought I was crazy. They said: "This is impossible. We will never be able to move around. The audience will never accept standing [all that time]. Why does the audience have to stand?" Because it's a procession! [laughs] . . . When there's a lot of people . . . we go more slowly: an hour and twenty minutes. . . . And when they do the funeral for Jesus who is dead, using l'accannata (which I told you they do in the procession in Sicily),\* then there begin all the laments of some Sicilians, some written by John, the lullaby that the Madonna sings. . . . And then we begin the flagellation. . . . The audience is convulsed by all this.*

LDG: Dunque tu senti molto la Madonna Nera, però hai sentito pure . . .

*Therefore, you feel a lot for the Black Madonna, but you have also been moved by . . .*

AB: . . . La madre . . . di Cristo. Però di Cristo come figura storica, come iniziato, come iniziato con poteri divini; ma come comunque [come] figura ribelle, figura politica. . . . Tipo, può esse' . . . il Che Guevara, o potrebbe essere Marcos in Chiapas. Io lo vedo così . . . , però con dei healing powers. Ma non sottomesso. . . . E' più forte della madre, e pure delle donne intorno. E poi, è un viaggio collettivo di sofferenza, che però finisce colla rinascita. Per cui, il ritorno della pace, la luce. . . . [E'] bellissimo: lui [Cristo] quando canto "Jesce sole," esce dal cristallo. E poi finiamo co' questa bella tarantella, con tutte le bambine vestite da angelo che ballano. E portiamo il pubblico a festeggiare la Pasqua . . .

*. . . The mother . . . of Christ. Yes, but Christ as a historical figure, as an initiate, as one who has been initiated into divine power; in any case [as] a rebellious figure, a political figure. . . . For example, he could be . . . , Che Guevara, or he could be Marcos in Chiapas. That's how I see him . . . , but with healing powers. But not submissive. . . . He is stronger than his mother, and also [stronger] than the women around him. Further, it is a voyage of collective suffering, which however, ends with a rebirth. So, peace, light, return. . . . [It's] beautiful: he [Christ], when I sing "Jesce sole," comes out of the crystal. And then we finish with this wonderful tarantella, with all the little girls dressed like angels who dance. And we take the audience out to celebrate Easter . . .*

### 30. "Mediterranean Volcano" and "Black Madonna"

LDG: A te, t'hanno chiamato il "Vulcano mediterraneo." Qualcuno poi t'ha chiamato la "Madonna Nera" . . .

*They've called you the "Mediterranean Volcano." Someone else called you the "Black Madonna" . . .*

AB: [laughs] . . . *Anche!* Dean Morton mi presenta come: “This, *she is*, the Black Madonna!” Invece quelli delle percussioni mi chiamano il Vulcano.

[laughs] . . . Yeah, that too! *Dean Morton introduces me like this:* “This, *she is*, the Black Madonna!” *Instead, those from the percussion [world] call me the Volcano.*

LDG: Tu come t’identifichi?

*How do you identify yourself?*

AB: Tutt’e due [laughs]: tanto Vulcano *ma* però, Madreterra—più di così—[con] la lava . . . . De ’sto Vulcano devo stare attenta perchè mi può mette’ nei guai . . . Però, . . . di usare quest’eruzioni vulcaniche, a mio vantaggio, con le percussioni . . . . In genere, questo fatto che c’ho tutta ’sta [passione] . . . coinvolgo le persone in modo particolare. Mi crea molti squilibri nella vita. I really have to find that inner peace, somehow, somewhere. Take it easy and don’t erupt continuously, you know.

*Both [laughs]: very much Volcano but also, Mother Earth—more than this—[with] the lava . . . I’ve got to be careful of this Volcano thing, though, because it can get me into trouble . . . But, . . . to use these volcanic eruptions to my advantage, with percussion . . . In general, the fact that I have all this [passion] . . . involves people in a particular way. It creates a lot of destabilization [‘unbalances’] in my life. I really have to find that inner peace, somehow, somewhere. Take it easy and don’t erupt continuously, you know.*

LDG: But you seem to manage it. You’re always on the edge.

AB: More or less. I don’t know how long I [can] stay on the edge. . . . [break]

### 31. Priestly Callings

AB: Una delle cose che mi sta . . . succedendo con questi sogni strani che faccio sempre, con Dean Morton—che è la figura più importante, secondo me, nella mia vita, in assoluto . . . [per] migliaia di persone. Lui ha cambiato la vita a tanta gente. . . . Mi sento questa chiamata, questa missione, che c’ha a che fare proprio colla religione (che però non è quella convenzionale), per cui, non è che posso dire Episcopale. . . . Però . . . siccome ci sono delle donne che sono preti—e so’ stupende, io le conosco—e poi fanno le messe . . . donne meravigliose, scrittrici; una era direttrice teatrale (una che è vescovo). She’s a theater director! Io là sento che è un posto importante per le donne, perchè veramente . . . quando tu vedi una donna che dice la messa [laughs] . . .

*One of the things that is . . . happening to me with these strange dreams that I always have with Dean Morton—who is the absolute most important figure, in my life, I feel . . . [and is for] thousands of people. He has changed the life of so many people. . . . I feel this calling, this mission, which really has a lot to do with religion (but it is not the conventional sort), so, I can’t say it’s Episcopalian. . . . But . . . since there are women priests—and they are magnificent, I know them—and they preside over Mass . . . wonderful*

women, writers—one was a theater director (the one who is a bishop). She's a theater director! I feel that it is an important place for women because, really . . . when you see a woman saying Mass [laughs] . . .

LDG: . . . E' tutta un'altra cosa!

*It's an entirely different thing [isn't it?]*!

AB: E' un'altra cosa! E' meraviglioso. E ho comincia' a pensare proprio di farmi . . .

*It's a different thing! It's marvelous. And I started to really think about becoming . . .*

LDG: [A] priestess!

AB: . . . priestess. Quando [I']ho detto a Jim Morton, e lui fa: "Alessandra, I knew this was coming. I always knew you were going to ask me this question." . . . "I would like to become a priest somehow." And he wasn't in shock or surprised *a bit!* Because I always knew: when he look[ed] at me from the very beginning, and Dario pure lo dicevo sempre: that he [Morton] was thinking about something, like he does with other people. I'm not [the only] one, to a few thousands that follow his mission. What is his mission? It's a global mission of peace, [to] unite the people, it's [an] interfaith Temple of Understanding to bring all religions together and to work with kids in the Bronx and all these places, and train them, and awaken their spirituality, and then the Gaia Institute for the Environment, and all that.

. . . priestess. *When I told Jim Morton, he goes:* "Alessandra, I knew this was coming. I always knew you were going to ask me this question." . . . "I would like to become a priest somehow." And he wasn't in shock or surprised *a bit!* Because I always knew: when he look[ed] at me from the very beginning, and *Dario too always said this:* that he [Morton] was thinking about something, like he does with other people. I'm not [the only] one, to a few thousands that follow his mission. What is his mission? It's a global mission of peace, [to] unite the people, it's [an] interfaith Temple of Understanding to bring all religions together and to work with kids in the Bronx and all these places, and train them, and awaken their spirituality, and then the Gaia Institute for the Environment, and all that.

LDG: Lui è quello che ha . . . ?

*Is he the one who . . . ?*

AB: He's the founder of that, him and scientists. . . . So all these people are part of this mission and I *know* that I'm part of his mission. OK, now we did the *Black Madonna* and the *Stabat Mater*, and the Christmas show, but there's something *more*. I want to find *how* I can make these (healing music, dance, percussion, tarantella) part of something that is *definitely* important in the society *now*. . . . I did volunteer work at Mount Sinai. It was a beginning. . . . But there must be *another* [place] where it is bigger. . . .

LDG: Riprendere i riti antichi e iniziare le bambine . . . [slowly, deliberately, suggestively]<sup>27</sup>

*Reclaim the ancient rites and initiate little girls . . . [slowly, deliberately, suggestively]\**

AB: [She connects with the suggestion] That's beautiful! . . . Be', un po' però è vero che sono tutte bambine quelle che vengono, completamente incantate. They're enchanted. . . . E' quello un modo forse d'entrare sacerdotessa! . . . E qui vedo che . . . una di queste missioni sta diventando [il] West Coast. . . . Before I never thought I could, but there's a lot of people here open to receive this. . . . It's going to be different than New York. Non è the Cathedral. . . .

[She connects with the suggestion] That's beautiful! . . . *Well, to a certain extent, it's true that it's all little girls who come, [and who are] completely enchanted. They're enchanted. . . . Maybe that's a way to become a priestess! . . . And here I see that . . . one of these missions is becoming [the] West Coast. . . . Before I never thought I could, but there's a lot of people here open to receive this. . . . It's going to be different than New York. It's not the Cathedral. . . .*

LDG: . . . Come mai in una chiesa Episcopale?

*. . . How come in an Episcopal church?*

AB: Perché sono liberi. Perché è la chiesa più aperta che c'è. . . . Le donne sono preti. I preti so' sposati. So' attori. So' tutto. Cioè, è veramente . . . I think that's the way every church should have been.<sup>28</sup>

*Because they're free. Because it's the most open church there is. . . . Women are priests. Priests marry. They're actors. They're everything. I mean, really . . . I think that's the way every church should have been.\**

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## Notes

1. Approximately twenty hours of transcription (stretched on Sound Forge between 150 and 175 percent), nine hours of transcription correction (relistening to the tape for clarification), twenty-five hours of editing and formatting, fifteen hours of translation, about thirty hours of reediting and condensing, and several more in tinkering of various sorts (e.g., spell-checking, fact-checking, etc.) went into transforming a 2 hour and 36 minute oral interview into this written oral history. I wish to thank David Martinelli of the UCLA Ethnomusicology Laboratory for his invaluable technical support, and John Vallier and later Phoebe Nelson, archivists, for their work on behalf of the Italian Oral History Institute and the Luisa Del Giudice–Edward F. Tuttle Italian Music Collections in the UCLA Ethnomusicology Archive. The original recording of this oral history, in its entirety, may be found in this archive. I also thank Teresa Fiore and Edvige Giunta, both friends of Alessandra, for reading the original transcription and for their editorial advice.
2. I opted for this formatting style, that is, introduction of section headers, for an interview of this length, to facilitate consultation. A running log, normally cued to recording times, ideally accompanies any archived interview.

3. I Giullari di Piazza and the Alan Lomax Archive both received Italian Oral History Institute (IOHI) Awards at the Istituto Italiano di Cultura in Los Angeles on Saturday, November 5, 2005, as part of the closing banquet of the American Italian Historical Association (AIHA)'s annual meeting. Only three recipients have received such an award over the years. The third was made to Roberto Catalano and Enzo Fina of Musicàntica at the closing reception of the Italian Oral History Institute on November 12, 2006. See La Barbera, Catalano, and Fina contributions in this volume.
4. Further information can be found at <http://www.alessandrabelloni.com>. Belloni has published a musical memoir herself in *Rhythm Is the Cure: Southern Italian Tambourine*, in 2007, together with a CD, *Daughter of the Drum*. This volume does not include material from these publications, and pre-dates them.
5. That is, I am currently examining the various intersections of ethnography with spirituality and the varieties of listening in an essay titled "Ethnography as Spiritual Practice." This work was presented at the October 2007 joint meeting of the American Folklore Society/Folklore Studies Association of Canada; in Quebec at the June 2008 meeting of the Société Internationale d'Ethnologie et Folklore (SIEF), in Derry, Northern Ireland; and at the November 2008 AIHA meeting in New Haven. A short version of this essay is forthcoming as "Ethnography and Spiritual Direction: Varieties of Listening" (Del Giudice 2009).
6. Alessandra's father, Eugenio Belloni, was born December 24, 1909, and died March 24, 1977. Her mother, Elvira Rossetti, was born September 4, 1917, and passed away on February 24, 2007. And although deleted, this edited oral history opens with the question of Alessandra's birthdate, which is July 24, 1954.
7. Today several Italian editions exist, beyond the original 1961 edition (based on research in the Salento conducted in 1959), as does a recently (2005) published English translation by Dorothy Zinn.
8. On the the Festa di San Rocco at Torre Paduli, see Del Giudice 2005, 217–72.
9. On Luigi Chiriatti, Salentine scholar and folk musician, see Del Giudice 2005, as well as a review of his writings in Del Giudice 1999.
10. I am not certain to which video Alessandra alludes, but I believe the dancer to whom she is referring is also pictured in Del Giudice 2005, 232–33 (Figures 15 and 16).
11. Years after this interview, I did in fact, make observations on the relationship *between* the sexes in Puglia. See Del Giudice 2000, 2003.
12. For a photo of Nonna Stella Catamo, once musician to *tarantate*, playing the frame drum at this informal gathering at the Bar del Menhir, owned by her son, Luciano, see Del Giudice 2005, 252 (Figure 26).
13. On the historic background of this "labyrinthine spider's web of roads," see Del Giudice 2003a.
14. Alessandra is referring to a young woman who had developed a peculiar singing voice after having been forbidden by her parents from performing this music publicly (described in Del Giudice 2005, 254).
15. See note 12.
16. Playing the rough-headed Pugliese frame drum vigorously for extended periods of time frequently draws blood from the hand playing it. A drum is considered properly "initiated" once it has a musician's blood on it.
17. Differences of opinion between interviewer and interviewee inevitably arise in oral research. Allowing the interviewee maximum leeway for the expression of his or her point of view and opinion, while nonetheless acknowledging discomfort or disagreement, is a delicate matter. Holding this tension is part of the challenge. As is reviewing an interview at a distance and wishing one had asked a different sort of question. For

example, while Alessandra believed that the majority of feminists were unfeminine (gay) women, I—with the benefit of hindsight—might have further discussed the fact that gayness is not a choice, that “separatism” may not be intentional but rather a result of imposed (or protective) exclusion, that feminists (gay and other) come in all shapes, sizes, and political flavors. But then again, *pentimenti* inevitably occur on both sides of the interviewer–interviewee equation! And oral histories are not debates!

18. Some may find this an odd statement, given that Alessandra too makes a living from her music, workshops, and concerts, and from the sale of her signature Remo drums. However, the polemic regarding compensation for “services” of a spiritual or healing nature may be a traditional one, as I encountered it, for instance, in the case of Italian traditional healers. See Del Giudice 2001, 49–50.
19. On the tarantella of Montemarano, I cite only a few of many available CDs: Nuova Compagnia di Canto Popolare (NCCP) 1975, or Gala 1999.
20. This admiration for Amerindians among Italians of Alessandra’s generation was (and still is) widely shared. It may have longer roots in what is generally referred to as the “Myth of the Noble Savage.”
21. We note here the predominantly (and still widely diffused) stereotype of the politically conservative, uneducated, and bigoted Italian American. Cf. note 17.
22. This song, a paen to motherhood (or a son’s ode to *mammismo*, as the case may be), and an Italian classic, was written by C. A. Bixio and B. Cherubini in 1940 and has been sung by Beniamino Gigli, Claudio Villa, Luciano Tajoli, Nunzio Gallo—and many others since.
23. Alessandra goes on to talk about her identification with my daughter, Giulia Tuttle, an admiring seven-year-old at the time of this interview who showed many similar tendencies. Giulia performed with Alessandra twice: in *Stabat Mater* (UCLA Armand Hammer Museum in March, 1998), a public program in conjunction with the exhibition *St. Joseph’s Day Tables and Feeding the Poor in Los Angeles*, curated by Luisa Del Giudice and Virginia Buscemi Carlson; and later at a joint concert of I Giullari di Piazza and Aramirè: Compagnia di Musica Salentina (Schoenberg Hall, UCLA, October 19, 2000), during the *Performing Ecstasies: Music, Dance and Ritual* festival. Professional animosities between the two ensembles during this joint concert, proved a watershed for me (festival curator), and initiated a long period of my estrangement from both ensembles, only much later resolved.
24. “Femminieri” (var. “femminielli”) are gay men, predominantly of the Neapolitan urban underclasses. They perform a “*tombola cantata*” (a sung version of Italian “bingo”), wherein the numbers are recited or sung in rhyme. Annually, on February 2, they go on a pilgrimage to Montevergine (the monastery and sanctuary outside Avellino), which ends with various *tammurriate*. I thank Augusto Ferraiuolo for this gloss.
25. For an example of this chant, see I Giullari di Piazza 1995.
26. *L’accannata* refers, according to Alessandra, to the steps taken during the first part of the procession, to the rhythm of rolling drums.
27. I had organized in 1995, together with David Carpenter (also a parent of girls), a parent–daughter program for “between age” (nine- to twelve-year-old) girls, titled “A Girl’s Journey,” facilitated by depth psychologist Willow Young (now on faculty at Jungian, Pacifica Graduate Institute in Santa Barbara). It was to such years in a girl’s life that I was referring here, the age when girls generally become absorbed by predominantly girl-unfriendly, teen media culture (e.g., impossible standards of beauty, etc), and when girls’ self-esteem normally takes a deep plunge. It was this growing awareness, fueled by an increasing number of popular publications on the topic (e.g., Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*, and the 1991 poll of

nine- to fifteen-year-old girls, conducted by the American Association of University Women, *Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America*), that convinced many of us of the urgency of the situation for our daughters. Of course, such publications ushered in an entire girls-movement—and eventually (predictably)—a backlash. Programs to enhance self-esteem and retrieve women's knowledge, such as those offered in Alessandra's workshops—and extended to girls—therefore seemed important.

28. The transcription here ends somewhat abruptly because the interview, which had at this point lasted for hours, trailed on disjointedly as our thoughts became less coherent due to fatigue. The oral interview continues with descriptions of Alessandra's future projects and various polemics of a professional nature (see note 23). These seemed to me mere dribbles after a deep quaffing and hence warranted a closing of the water spigot. Such are the dictates of written media, it seems, where convention requires a more coherent narrative structure—as opposed to oral media, where open-ended conversation is better tolerated. The matter of publisher's word counts dictated the rest.

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Page numbers in italics refer to figures and tables; page numbers in bold type refer to major entries. With few exceptions, this index does not include personal names or titles of works that appear in the chapter bibliographies.

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