



New
Anthropologies
of Europe
Volume 7

Edited by **Paolo Heywood**

New Anthropologies of Italy

Politics, History and Culture



NEW ANTHROPOLOGIES OF ITALY

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Edited by Paolo Heywood

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INTRODUCTION

Back to the Future

Paolo Heywood



rites of return

This volume is intended to punctuate a shift in both the scale and the form of anthropological contributions to the study of Italy. It brings together some of the world's leading ethnographers of the region in order to showcase an array of diverse domains in contemporary Italy, as well as to demonstrate the contribution an ethnographic perspective on Italy can bring to a wider comparative anthropology of social and political life. Anthropologists working in Italy are at the forefront of scholarship on a number of the topics surveyed here, including migration, far-right populism, organized crime and heritage, and this is the first volume to bring this exciting new research together.

There has of course been an anthropology of Italy for a long time. Yet for almost as long as there has been an anthropology of Italy some have lamented that there has not been enough of it. Giving thanks for his election to an Honorary Fellowship of the Royal Anthropological Institute in 1917, for example, Sicilian anthropologist Vincenzo Giuffrida-Ruggeri (1918) wrote a short 'sketch of the anthropology of Italy' for the institute's journal, the *JRAI*. It begins as a survey of an even older work in Italian, from 1888, the first such overview of the anthropology of Italy. 'The least developed part' of this work, Giuffrida-Ruggeri complains, 'is that on present-day anthropology, entitled "The Modern Italians"' (ibid.: 80).

When I began my own doctoral research on Italy nearly a hundred years later, I felt myself to be in a slightly different position to that of many in my cohort. Friends and colleagues working in Africa, South Asia, East Asia,

Amazonia and Mongolia had a seemingly vast catalogue of ethnographic literature to draw on, as well as the wisdom of a number of regionally specialist staff. At the same time, of course, my fieldwork destination was practically next door, and I had known it since birth. This somewhat contradictory sense of disquiet is the familiar dilemma of many a (European) anthropologist of Europe, and indeed I benefitted greatly from discussion of it with Europeanists in my department and beyond. Still, such conversations were usually about the shared methodological and epistemological problems of anthropology in Europe, rather than about, say, Italian religious rituals, the labour market in Tuscany and Umbria, northern Italian dialects or the present state of the mafia.

A student beginning their studies in the anthropology of Italy today, just a decade or so on, would hopefully have the feeling of a much larger pool of literature to dive into, and on a much wider array of topics. The last ten or fifteen years have seen an explosion of ethnographic work coming out of Italy. To take one anecdotal indicator, the American Anthropological Association's meeting programme for 2019 contains well over double the number of papers devoted to Italy than did the programme for 2002. Much, though by no means all, of this work has been driven by the authors contributing to this volume, including a wider renaissance of the anthropology of the Mediterranean (e.g. Ben-Yehoyada 2017; Ben-Yehoyada and Silverstein 2022; Ben-Yehoyada, Cabot and Silverstein 2020). The Anthropology of Italy Network, created by the late Anthony Galt and today curated by contributor Antonio Sorge, would give a newcomer to the field a wealth of contacts with like-minded scholars, as well as a lengthy list of bibliographic references.

Part of the reason for this shift lies in broader disciplinary developments over the last three decades. In lots of ways Italy has long existed – like Greece, as Michael Herzfeld (1987) has famously shown – as a sort of internal other within Europe, a place for anthropologists at the margins of 'home' and 'the field'. This helps to explain both the (very much only comparative) scarcity of classic work on the country, and the fact that what work there was sometimes gave the impression of focusing on 'problems', 'customs' or 'complexes' that resembled the sorts of social and cultural phenomena anthropologists found elsewhere in the Middle East, North Africa and the Mediterranean (and of course beyond). As the distinction between 'places anthropologists come from' and 'places anthropologists go' has gradually dissolved, newer generations of ethnographers have ventured into the same sorts of places in Italy that they had been to in Greece, France, Germany, the UK, the US and elsewhere, not in search of internal others but for the answers to crucial and pressing global political questions. Those generations of ethnographers have now trained their own cohorts of students, and so there has emerged a large

network of anthropologists for whom Italy's status in relation to the rest of Europe is another interesting question to ask, rather than an epistemological obstacle to ethnographic research.

That is the simple story of disciplinary development. This simple story is of course complicated by the fact that there has long been an anthropology *in* Italy, as well as an anthropology *of* Italy, and anthropology in Italy has historically followed a rather different trajectory to that of Anglo-American sociocultural anthropology. Furthermore, the concept of 'culture', the traditional framing analytic for ethnographic studies, has of course its own lengthy and complex history in Italy itself, as both classic and contemporary anthropological work has shown (e.g. Herzfeld 2009; Silverman 1975). Perhaps above all though, and as we will see throughout this introduction, much of the new work in the anthropology of Italy actually builds on classic scholarship on, for example, notions of political community, identity, crime and the mafia, authority and power, and religion, to name just a few.

So the idea for the present volume emerged from a strong sense that Giuffrida-Ruggeri's lament for the lack of an anthropology of modern Italy no longer reflects reality; that there is now, in other words, a new anthropology of Italy, a large, growing and vibrant field, a fact to which I hope the chapters in this book attest. At the same time, though, as long ago as 1917 there was an anthropology of Italy to complain about, and anthropologists, Italian and non-Italian, have long been producing a plethora of rich and varied contributions to both Italianist scholarship and anthropology.

There are many senses, then, in which this volume constitutes an example of what Andrew Shryock (2020) has referred to with regard to the Mediterranean more broadly as a 'rite of return' to an anthropology of Italy that has actually always been vibrant and dynamic. Shryock's response to those who might worry either that in such a return there would be nothing distinctively 'Mediterranean' about an anthropology of the Mediterranean, or that if there were it would return us to the bad old days of orientaling our internal others, is worth quoting in full given its relevance to the project at issue here:

[Spaces like the Mediterranean] cannot be dismissed as a kind of 'savage slot' (Trouillot 1991). They are of interest precisely because they do not fit easily in that slot and thus have immense critical potential when deployed against the imperializing modernity of the global north (and the forms of domination that come with it) and against anthropology's deep history of exoticism (and the bad analytical habits that come with it). (Shryock 2020: 151)

So this volume does not take an 'Italy', old or new, for granted; it is a study in part of what we might – somewhat improbably – call 'practical Italianism', to paraphrase Michael Herzfeld (2005), an examination of how a range of

senses of *Italianità* emerge, are contested and collapse, and what they do to our understandings of broader social and political formations.

In the remainder of this introduction, I will attempt the task of tracing just a few of the links we might draw between classic anthropological scholarship on Italy and that contained in this volume. This is partly so that readers may gain some appreciation of the wider disciplinary and intellectual context from which the work herein emerges and within which it remains situated. But it is also so that readers do not take from talk of a ‘new’ anthropology of Italy the idea that novelty in scholarship must involve discarding everything that is ‘old’ (an impression sometimes given by talk of ‘new kinship studies’, for instance).

What follows is anything but an exhaustive excursus into connections between current and classic work on Italy, and clearly, given limitations of space, it could bear no resemblance to a broader survey of the anthropology of Italy in its entirety (for other attempts see Alliegro 2010; Clemente et al. 1985; Dei 2023; Filippucci 1996; Grottanelli 1977; Palumbo 2021; Saunders 1984; Viazzo 2017).

Indeed, there is a very great deal of work – older and newer – that I cannot dwell on in as much detail as I would wish, and other potential genealogies not traced here: for example, anthropological work in Italy has long focused on food (e.g. Black 2012; Cavanaugh and Shankar 2014; Cavanaugh 2016; Counihan 1999, 2021; Siniscalchi 2013, 2023) and, more recently, on fashion (e.g. Krause 2018; Yanagisako and Rofel 2019), and regrettably I lack the space to engage at length with these literatures here. Nor do I have the space to discuss sexuality, the subject of my own earlier work (Heywood 2015a, 2015b, 2018a, 2018b). This volume itself is of course only a sample of the range of scholarship currently ongoing in Italy.

But I hope the work I discuss below dispels any impression that the only topics of interest to classic Italianist ethnography were honour and shame complexes or the ‘problem’ of southern economic development. I hope also that it will give some indication at least of the richness of the scholarship upon which anthropologists of Italy today are building.

PRACTICAL ITALIANISM

It might seem odd to speak of a ‘practical Italianism’ in the sense of Herzfeld’s (2005) ‘practical Mediterraneanism’, a pragmatic category of identity invoked for particular performative functions rather than an actually existing entity; ‘Italy’, after all, does have an existence as a nation state that ‘the Mediterranean’ does not, along with associated trappings, and it was not Italy’s existence that was put into question by famous anthropological critiques

of Mediterraneanist literature, just as it was not Spain's or Greece's, but the idea, among others, that together they formed something more than themselves (a 'culture area', e.g. Gilmore 1982). Yet the problem scales: what it means to be Italian has been posed as a question since the earliest anthropological writing on the subject, and it persists as an underlying theme in many of the contributions to this volume. The history of special interest in this question helps to explain the distinct path that anthropology in Italy has taken, leading it to an unusual early focus on what we might anachronistically call 'anthropology at home'; as Italian anthropologist Tullio Tentori has put it, 'There are few anthropologies . . . that have dedicated such great attention and intellectual energy to the study of the cultures and social fabric within the national borders' (Tentori 1983: 180, cited in Saunders 1984: 449; and see also Palumbo 2021).

For example, both the first Italian anthropological society (which included Cesare Lombroso among its members) and the first professorial chair in anthropology in Italy were established with Italian unification in 1870. Both were focused on physical anthropology (as was Giuffrida-Ruggeri) but also in particular on 'the ancient and modern peoples of Italy' (Grottanelli 1977: 594) with the clear project of establishing a 'scientific' basis for distinguishing a particular Italian 'race' or *ethnos*. Already by this point, though, and foreshadowing a theme of later anthropological work, the issue of who qualified for membership in this group was central to the 'Southern Question', with Lombroso and others in the newly established society arguing that southerners constituted a different (and inferior) population (Cimino and Foschi 2014), a point explored at length, alongside the 'Southern Question' more broadly, by later anthropological and historical scholarship (e.g. Schneider 1998). Later, in the Fascist period, this version of the anthropological project in Italy would also go on to be weaponized in the service of Mussolini's African colonial projects and of his internal racial policies towards Jews and others (see Saunders 1984: 451, and e.g. Piccioni 2022), and racial understandings of belonging in Italy persist today, as several of the contributions to this volume demonstrate (see Mahmud, Tuckett and Peano, this volume).

Another means by which the early anthropology of and in Italy was engaged in the business of practical Italianism was folklore studies. In advance of the Risorgimento the collation of popular tales and poetry from across the country served to establish a sense of shared culture (Grottanelli 1977: 596; Filippucci 1996: 59). This branch of the discipline too, though, soon began to concentrate on the south, partly on the basis that it was there that a 'purer', more authentic version of popular culture could be found, one less tainted by modernity (Clemente et al. 1985: 97). In fact, one of the first prominent Italian folklorist ethnographers, Lamberto Loria, had actually travelled around the Trobriand Islands long before Malinowski, but decided

that the variety and diversity of ‘culture’ in Italy was such that his time was better spent doing an early – and heavily exoticized – version of ‘anthropology at home’ (Grottanelli 1977: 595). Like physical anthropology in Italy, folklore studies also sought to put itself at the service of government, with Loria declaring that ethnography could be an instrument of both ‘Internal and Colonial Policy’ (ibid.: 596). Later Fascist folklorists would find in folklore studies evidence for the benefits of a ‘return to tradition’ (Filippucci 1996: 60; and see Cammelli, this volume; Dei 2023: 160), and Fascism would see the very diversity of Italian popular culture as the basis of claims for a national capacity for versatility (as Herzfeld 1987: 30 notes). A number of contributors to this volume address contemporary objectifications of ‘traditional culture’ in Italy, whether in service of new forms of practical Italianism or of more local ends (see Course, Palumbo, Pizza and Sorge, this volume), and later in this introduction I discuss the work of Ernesto De Martino on this question and his ongoing influence.

The question of ‘traditional culture’ in Italy and its implications for what it means to be Italian has of course not been of interest only to Italians. In the post-war period American government aid to Italy through the Marshall Plan and other programmes was substantial and aimed at a development agenda designed to keep Western states – especially Italy, with Western Europe’s largest communist party – out of the orbit of the USSR. The question of what exactly was hindering such ‘development’ in the Italian south provided the first spur to work of foreign (largely American) ethnographers in Italy in the 1950s, and it was for the most part ‘culture’ that gave them their answer.

Working almost exclusively in the south, scholars such as Frederick Friedmann (e.g. 1960), Donald Pitkin (e.g. 1959), Leonard Moss (e.g. Moss and Thompson 1959), Joseph Lopreato (e.g. 1967), Anne Talcott Parsons (e.g. 1969), Frank Cancian (e.g. 1961) and Edward Banfield (e.g. 1958) found a sort of ‘impractical Italianism’, versions of culture that, to their broadly functionalist mindset, inhibited socio-economic progress. Friedmann’s (1953, 1960) depiction of what he called *la miseria*, and Banfield’s (1958) ‘amoral familism’, both in Basilicata, were intended as diagnoses of how certain cultural traits and attitudes – such as a generalized ‘resignation’ or ‘despair’, an unhealthy attachment to honour or a short-sighted and narrow focus on the nuclear family – were barriers to ‘modernization’ in the south (see Solveti 2022 for a thorough survey).

This work was influential outside of Italy in the post-war period, but the response of the Italian left and intellectuals was almost immediately hostile (see Ferragina 2009; Solveti 2022: 9), particularly to Banfield (who conceded in his book’s preface that he only ever learned at best ‘rudimentary’ Italian – Banfield 1958: 10; see also Palumbo 2021 for wider critical reflections on the relation between anglophone and italophone scholarship on

Italy, as a well as a response from commentators including other contributors to this volume). Though an echo of Banfield's 'amoral familism' hypothesis can be found in Robert Putnam's (1993) well-known later work on civic traditions in Italy, anglophone anthropologists also soon found much to critique in the functionalist and developmental approach that Banfield and other early Italianists took (e.g. Cancian 1961; Miller 1974; Silverman 1968). Yet in many ways their focus on the family and on the relation of culture to understandings of public life set the agenda for Anglo-American scholarship in Italy for some time (Filippucci 1996: 54), even as the explicit question of what, if anything, made Italy or Italians distinct fell by the wayside as much more granular and complex questions emerged.

A great many contributions to this volume show how this question continues to be posed, or how particular answers to it continue to be assumed, in various domains of Italian social and political life. Part I (and see Ben-Yehoyada 2017; Grotti and Brightman 2021; Krause and Bresson 2020; Mahmud 2014; Tuckett 2018; Peano, this volume) showcases the ways in which Italy's status at the forefront of global political struggles around migration puts issues of race, ethnicity and belonging at the centre of public discourse and everyday life, in ways that both imbricate and challenge dominant contemporary ideas about what it means to be Italian. The populist nationalism that is the focus of Part II is of course often built around its own heavily racialized and ethnicized answers to that question, and Part IV explores the ways in which art, heritage and other objectified forms of culture play a number of roles in such arguments, including in ways that tie back into debates over race and migration (see Course, this volume). And in Part V the history of regionality and its relation to language complicates, among other things, the picture of two Italies, north and south, that underpinned much of this earlier scholarship (see Blim, this volume).

A PEOPLE WITH HISTORY

The idea, introduced above, that studying Italian popular tradition was simply a way to unearth or recover an equivalent of the 'archaic' or timeless cultures anthropologists took themselves to be studying elsewhere in the world was complicated by the influence of Gramsci's views on the subject, which were published in his prison notebooks in Italy in 1948–51. Gramsci saw popular culture in Italy as linked to historically specific political struggles, with folklore thus emerging as a form of embryonic class consciousness, both a mystification of fundamentally economic and political struggles and an instrument of expression within those struggles (cf. Dei 2018; 2023: 165). Gramsci's views, as well as those of the other towering Italian intellectual

figure of the early twentieth century, Benedetto Croce, were a significant influence on Ernesto De Martino (see Clemente et al. 1985: 211; Saunders 1993; Solvetti 2022), in many ways the founding father of the sociocultural tradition of anthropology in Italy.

“Returning” to De Martino’s work is in some respects an unlikely endeavour as – though largely unknown outside of Italy during his lifetime – he in many ways anticipates a number of anthropological themes that would only later emerge in the broader discipline: popular culture as a means of resistance; illness as a culturally coherent response to material socio-economic conditions; and the ways in which what he often called ‘magic’ or magical thinking challenges our own conceptions of reality (see e.g. De Martino 1941, 1948, 1959, 1961). Perhaps his most significant contribution, though, was to bring a historical perspective to bear on Italianist ethnography, inspired in particular by Crocean historical idealism. At the same time as his American colleagues in Italy – whom he largely ignored and who largely ignored him (Solvetti 2022: 2) – were producing the functionalist and largely synchronic and ahistorical analyses of the south discussed above, and forty years before, say, *Time and the Other* (Fabian 1983), or *Europe and the People without History* (Wolf 1982), De Martino was writing of the plight of the Apulian peasantry as akin to that of ‘primitives’, both reduced to a ‘forgotten ahistorical humanity’, with whom an ethnographer must try to ‘be together in the same history’ (cited in Saunders 1993: 879).

In a career spanning nearly four decades and a substantial number of monographs, De Martino sought to produce a ‘religious history of the south’ by examining a range of beliefs and practices marginal to official Catholicism – such as the ‘evil eye’, ritualized funeral weeping and, most famously, *tarantismo* – through archival and field-based research. Inspired by Gramsci and Croce he saw such practices as the products of specific histories, cultural responses to conditions of material poverty and to dominant or ‘official’ beliefs and practices. His best-known account is *The Land of Remorse*, a report of the work he and a team of associated researchers carried out on the phenomenon of *tarantismo*, wherein an individual is afflicted (often by extreme agitation) following the (real or imagined) bite of a tarantula and can only be cured through ritualized music and dance. De Martino (1961) accounted for this as a symbolic response to a range of personal and social circumstances, especially those surrounding the regulation of sexuality in the rural south, while also historicizing it by showing how orthodox explanations and treatments of tarantism tended to oscillate between cultural and medical forms.

While De Martino tended to focus his historicization on the cultural dimensions of peasant life, some of his successors, such as Luigi Lombardi Satriani, were more interested in the history of the ways in which cultural

forms born from agrarian and rural socio-economic contexts survived and transformed in urban ones. Writing in the 1970s, Lombardi Satriani (1979), for example, described the use of ‘peasant themes’ in student protests in Rome and Naples, as well as pointing out that enormous amounts of out-migration from the south was carrying such themes to immigrant centres across Europe. Indeed in some ways it is striking, as Antonio Sorge points out, that despite huge contemporary interest in migration to Italy, comparatively little in the anthropology of the country has focused on the millions of Italians who left Italy over the last century and a half (pers. comm., though see Signorelli 1977).

Other successors to De Martino would continue to complexify the historical dimensions of folklore and ‘folk’ culture in an Italy increasingly riven by class conflict and ideological struggle. A. M. Cirese, while continuing to insist on the importance of historicizing Italian popular culture, saw its connections to particular social and cultural strata as more important than its origins (see e.g. Cirese 1978). As Filippucci (1996: 64) notes, Vittorio Lanternari’s work is an excellent illustration of this point, as it describes the appropriation of so-called ‘archaic’ peasant cultural forms by the urban bourgeoisie, among others (e.g. Lanternari 1976; and see also Saunders 1984: 459), in a manner echoed by later scholarship on heritage in Italy, including some in this volume that actually returns to the topics and places first examined by De Martino (see Pizza, this volume).

History, then, due in no small part to the twin and interrelated influence of the towering figures of Croce and Gramsci in Italian intellectual life, has long played a significant role in Italian anthropology (see also Palumbo 2021). While early anglophone anthropology in Italy may have been dominated by a largely ahistorical functionalism of the Banfield variety, it too soon began to take a more diachronic approach, though remaining for the most part focused on the rural south and on the relationship between kinship, political economy, and cultural values.

Banfield’s ahistoricism was subject to a number of anglophone as well as Italian critiques, with authors such as Silverman and Cancian pointing out that the cultural attitudes he claimed to have identified in the south of Italy were more likely to be consequences, not causes, of economic deprivation (Cancian 1961; Silverman 1968). This critique was given ethnographic and historical substantiation by John Davis’s work in Pisticci, Basilicata, on the relationship between land tenure, inheritance regulation and family structure (Davis 1969, 1975; and see Brogger 1971; Belmonte 1979). Davis (1969) also described the importance of honour (*onore*) as a value in Pisticci, but again situated it in historical perspective by examining the role it played in the distribution of material resources through successive generations, a point that would shortly after be echoed and significantly expanded on in a

landmark work by two of our contributors, Jane and Peter Schneider, which I discuss later in this introduction.

By the 1980s the place of history in the ethnography of Italy was firmly established. Indeed, the wider emergence of a concern for history in anthropology more broadly around this time was perhaps in part due to the emergence of interdisciplinary trends coming out of the work of Italian scholars, such as the *microstoria* of Carlo Ginzburg and others (see Ginzburg 1976). In one of the first anglophone ethnographies to focus on the north, George Saunders (1979) took a historical approach to understanding changing patterns of family organization as a consequence of industrialization in Piedmont, and, appropriately, Saunders would go on to be instrumental in bringing the work of De Martino to a wider anglophone audience (Saunders 1984, 1993; and see Zinn 2015). Donald Pitkin, who had been one of the first generation of American anthropologists to study Italy, and whose work had always exhibited a historical bent (e.g. Pitkin 1959), produced both a masterly historical account of and a documentary film based around the lives of a single family in a hilltop village in the province of Latina, and discussed the ways in which the economic development that his fellow pioneering Italianists prescribed for the south had impacted on family organization and aspiration (Pitkin 1985; and see Galt 1991). Also treating issues of economic transformation, but, like Saunders, in the north, Douglas Holmes (1989) described the emergent hybrid category of the ‘worker-peasant’, and the ways in which the increasing ‘rationalization’ of daily life was gradually destroying the popular folk ideologies with which this section began, leading to a process of Weberian ‘cultural disenchantment’.

In many ways Holmes’s work anticipates what would soon become a central feature of both anglophone and italoophone anthropological scholarship in Italy, namely contested ethnographic understandings of history, tradition and heritage, a theme reflected in core contributions to this volume (see especially Heywood, Pizza and Palumbo, this volume).

In an early example of this work Paola Filippucci (1997) describes the strategic uses of the past in a town in Veneto as a nostalgically moralized counterpoint to perceptions of problems in the present, a political football in struggles between people and institutions, and a source of economic value. Filippucci draws partly for her arguments from Michael Herzfeld’s (1991) work on the place of the past Crete and Greece, and of course Herzfeld himself would go on to produce a masterly ethnography of how past and present cohabited in Rome at the turn of the millennium (Herzfeld 2009; and see Guano 2017; Palumbo 2004). *Evicted from Eternity* treats the *rione* of Monti, long subject to gentrification and subsequently also to ‘heritagization’ by local, national and international authorities concerned to preserve and instrumentalize Italian ‘culture’. Here Herzfeld also resurrects

ethnographic interest in the notion of *civiltà*, the subject of earlier work by Sydel Silverman, described below, through which local understandings of ‘civility’ combine a moralized view of ‘high culture’ with an ethic of personalized relationships rooted in “traditionalizing (and sometimes underworld) interests” (Herzfeld 2015: 13; and see also Pipyrou 2016), raising issues of political authority to which I return in the section below.

The contributions to this volume are suffused with a concern for history and the past, as is a great deal of ordinary Italian life. This might be the ‘folkloric’ past with which early Italophone anthropology concerned itself, now often monetized and commercialized, as we see in Giovanni Pizza’s return to De Martino’s original field site (Pizza, this volume); or ‘heritage’ as decided upon but not determined by UNESCO, as Berardino Palumbo (see e.g. 1998, 2003, 2010, this volume) has long been cataloguing; but it is also the past of disputed histories of the Fascist regime, as I describe in my own chapter (Heywood, this volume), or of even more recent tragedies such as the Morandi Bridge collapse on which Emanuela Guano’s chapter is focused (Guano, this volume).

CULTURES OF AUTHORITY

The nature of authority and power is another striking theme of literature in the anthropology of Italy, as well as of a range of contributions to this volume. As noted above, questions of political structure and organization pre-occupied a number of early anglophone anthropologists concerned about issues of development in the south, and the work of Italian scholars such as De Martino and others was rooted in a Gramscian understanding of the place of culture in wider political struggles.

There was significant interest in class and status conflict on the part of Italian sociocultural anthropologists after De Martino, who by this point had emerged as a group distinct from both the ethnological and the folklorist tradition, partly under the influence of the Americans who had come to southern Italy (see Clemente et al. 1985: 264; Filippucci 1996: 64; Saunders 1984: 454). Tullio Tentori, for instance, worked with Frederick Friedmann in the *sassi* of Matera before going on to study gender, class consciousness and political attitudes in urban northern Italy (see e.g. Tentori 1970a, 1970b), while Amalia Signorelli was first a student of De Martino’s, before working on the aspirations of returned migrants (Signorelli 1977) and cultures of clientelism in Calabria, noting the ways in which local people objectify such a ‘culture’ or ‘mentality’ as a problem, rather than connecting it to underlying political and economic injustice (Signorelli 1983; see also Gribaudi 1987).

The relationship between culture, clientelism and political authority pre-occupied many of those we might think of as the second wave of anglophone ethnographers in Italy, sometimes in the form of an interest in the mafia, though they were not alone in this interest: as the Schneiders note in this volume, one of the earliest and best-known folklorists of Sicily, Giuseppe Pitrè, wrote of the mafia as heroic remainders of an earlier age and of their code of *omertà* as akin to one of chivalry (Pitrè 1889; see also Puccio-Den 2021: 45; Greene 2012: 304 n. 10; Triolo 1993; and see Schneiders, this volume). Though in part perhaps reacting against northern orientalist portrayals of Sicily as rife with endemic criminality, Pitrè himself was also enmeshed in the island's networks of patronage and clientelism, as Nancy Triolo (1993) makes clear.

In Anton Blok's classic historico-ethnographic study of mafia in western Sicily, we find mafiosi playing the role of middlemen and power-brokers between absentee landlords and a weak state on the one hand and rural landless peasants on the other, emerging historically as muscle and overseers for the former and extortive protectors for the latter (Blok 1974; and see 2001). Meanwhile Sydel Silverman (1975), working in the same period but in an Umbrian hill town, finds the notion of *civiltà* and associated qualities to be an expression of the historical value placed on the ability of certain local classes to act as mediators between rural peasants and urban elites, and local people and state officials. Both Blok and Silverman anticipated the disappearance of the need for their respective forms of mediation as the gap between rural and urban Italian worlds narrowed and the state's reach increased; present-day work in Italy, including much in this volume, demonstrates its apparent persistence (and see e.g. Zinn 2019).

Two of our contributors, Jane and Peter Schneider, were carrying out fieldwork in Sicily at the same time as Blok (and as Davis in Pisticci) and their work – as historically thorough in its approach as Blok's – returns us to the theme of honour, first raised above (Schneider and Schneider 1976; and see Davis 1969; Giovannini 1981; Goddard 1987; Schneider 1971). In *Culture and Political Economy in Western Sicily* they identify honour as a cultural code – among other such codes – employed by broker classes and entrepreneurs without state protection (like the mafia) who rely largely on extensive social networks for their success, and who emerge as a historically and culturally rational response to centuries of status as a peripheral colony of successive empires. This work – and nearly a half-century of subsequent scholarship (see e.g. Schneider and Schneider 2003; Schneider 2018) – is notable for the ways in which it shows the mafia to be a symptom, not a cause, of politico-economic conditions in Sicily, and makes particularly clear the Mafia's place in wider global networks, an argument that takes to task both culturalist accounts old and new (Banfield 1958; see also Putnam 1993).

as well as those that refuse culturalism but take a more narrowly focused view on the role or absence of the state (e.g. Gambetta 1993).

As in the Schneiders' focus in their chapter herein, other work on the mafia in Sicily (and other criminal organizations) has explored ideas around *omertà*, codes of silence and other forms of communicative action (e.g. Jacquemet 1996; di Bella 2008), with Deborah Puccio-Den (2021; and see 2013) arguing that recent crackdowns on the part of the state against the mafia constitute a sort of ontological shift, in which the logic of *omertà* – a vision of shared and collective responsibility underpinned by silence – is confronted by the modern state's need to individualize responsibility and obligate confessional speech. She sees the mafia as the political equivalent of witchcraft, a local alternative to global universalist understandings of accountability and justice. Meanwhile, across the Tyrrhenian Sea, Jason Pine's exploration of *neomelodica* musicians and their ambiguous relationships with the Camorra finds the latter to be a similarly spectral, indeterminate and amorphous phenomenon, casting an affective and atmospheric pall over the city regardless of where and when it is actually present (Pine 2012; and see also Pipyrrou 2016 on the 'Ndrangheta in Calabria, and Sorge 2015a on legacies of Sardinian banditry).

In addition to the Schneiders' chapter on *omertà* we are also fortunate to have contributions from two other prominent contemporary ethnographers of the mafia (and anti-mafia) in Italy: Naor Ben-Yehoyada (and see Ben-Yehoyada 2018), whose earlier work (e.g. 2017) on migration and transnational networks in and through Sicily set the tone for burgeoning conversations around the regionality of the Mediterranean, and Theodoros Rakopoulos, who has published extensively on his research with agricultural cooperatives based on land confiscated from the mafia (e.g. Rakopoulos 2014, 2017a, 2017b, 2018, 2020); both focus on the discursive logics of the Sicilian anti-mafia in the various forms it takes, building in part on themes developed in the Schneiders' (2003) later work.

Not all work on power and authority in Italy has focused on the mafia, of course, with the themes of brokerage and mediation returning in Pratt's work on local politics in Tuscany and the ways in which *comune*, province and region emerge as distinct scales of governance (Pratt 1986; and see also Blim, this volume). The value of 'locality' in Italy is a broader theme here, explored also by Filippucci (1997) and in John Cole and Eric Wolf's (1974) classic ethnography of culture, ethnicity and locality in the Tyrol, and it is a theme that would return in darker form in later work by Douglas Holmes (see below) and also in Jaro Stacul's study of village life in Trentino (Stacul 2004; and see also Sorge 2015b).

David Kertzer, who has gone on to write highly successful historical and biographical studies (e.g. Kertzer 2014, 2018, 2022), wrote his first book on

the interplay of religion and politics in the city of Bologna (Kertzer 1980), focusing in particular on the ways in which much of the structure and ritual of the local communist party mirrored that of the Church, with ordinary people making more or less pragmatic rather than ideological choices between the two (and see Heywood 2015c). That religious forms and idioms remain important modes of political expression in Italy is testified to by Magnus Course's chapter in this volume, which explores a similar imbrication of the political and the religious in art and migrant activism in present-day Naples (and see Palumbo 2004).

Meanwhile, however, by the turn of the millennium Italian politics had moved dramatically beyond the traditional rivalry of communist PCI and Catholic Christian Democracy, and so had scholarship on the subject. In a book that now looks in many ways very prescient indeed, Douglas Holmes (2000) returned to Friuli and northern Italy – along with other European sites – to examine the growth of what he referred to as 'integralism': a set of ideas common to a number of European political movements of the time (including what was then called the Lega Nord), originating in romantic and counter-enlightenment notions of cultural and ethnic particularity and a fervent belief in the need to safeguard traditional ways of life from an advancing European federalism, as well as from the same globalizing economic logics that largely destroyed the dwindling peasant economy Holmes described in his first ethnography (Holmes 1989; and see also Cavanaugh 2009, this volume on language). *Integral Europe* was a groundbreaking ethnographic exposition of the growth of a then still nascent European far right that put Italy at the centre of work on the topic, and recent years have seen Holmes (see e.g. 2016, 2019) return to these themes, as national Italian politics lurches further and further to the right, alongside a growing body of work by anglophone and italophone scholars including contributor Maddalena Gretel Cammelli and myself (see e.g. Gretel Cammelli 2015, 2017, 2018; Heywood 2022, 2023, 2024; Loperfido 2014; Pasieka 2022). Part II of this book focuses squarely on contemporary manifestations of populism in Italy, from Giorgia Meloni's media strategies to the activism of Forza Nuova and CasaPound, and many of the chapters pursue the question of how these contemporary movements draw on ideas from the same historical genealogy Holmes outlined.

Finally, there has also long been a rich seam of literature on gender in Italy, one that made significant and substantive contributions to the anthropology of gender more widely (see especially Counihan 1985; Giovannini 1981; Goddard 1987, 1996; Krause 2001, 2005, 2007, 2009; Krause and Marchesi 2007; Yanagisako 2002); Yanagisako's recent contributions in particular (e.g. Yanagisako 2002, 2018; Yanagisako and Rofel 2019) have famously linked questions of gender in Italy – and beyond – with wider issues of kinship,

as well as with race and migration (in a manner that dovetails with Krause's contribution here), and also with political economy. Indeed, both her work and Michael Blim's (e.g. Blim 1990, this volume) make evident the distinctiveness of Italian political economy more broadly, and their insights – as well as other earlier work on ethics and economics (e.g. Pardo 1996) – have carried forward in more recent influential scholarship on the neoliberal turn in Italian governance and its effects on everyday life in a range of spheres (see e.g. Guano 2011; Molé Liston 2008, 2010, 2012, 2013; Muehlebach 2011, 2012).

THE CHAPTERS

The book is divided into five parts, though the divisions are of course intended to be heuristic rather than to signal sharp breaks, and several chapters touch on the theme of more than one part (for example, Peano's connects populism and migration, and my own deals with both populism and heritage).

Part I of this volume showcases some of the world-leading work on migration to emerge from recent scholarship on a country that is at the heart of a Europe-wide crisis. In our opening chapter, Lilith Mahmud interrogates the performance of incompetence on the part of Italian authorities as they cope with EU migration rules that put the country in an absurd situation, showing that the victims of the arbitrariness that ensues from such performances are often refugees of colour. Anna Tuckett describes similarly racialized understandings of citizenship and identity in Italy, which, when coupled with exclusionary bureaucratic processes, present formidable obstacles to migrants' sense of belonging, even as 1.5 and second-generation arrivals actively challenge such norms. Vanessa Grotti and Marc Brightman explore the ways in which the symbolic themes of death and a subsequent return to life are invoked by migrant survivors in Sicilian reception centres, but also by socially marginal locals and those looking to regenerate a region at the periphery of the state and suffering from long-term structural neglect. Finally, Elizabeth Krause shows how an emergent biopolitical regime of inspection and regulation imposed on Chinese workers in Tuscany allowed the state to displace some classic anxieties about Italian labour and determined its refusal to see anti-inspection protests as legitimate political discourse.

Authors in Part II examine the status of far-right populism in Italy, writing during the year in which elections saw the victory of an avowedly post-Fascist political party for the first time in the country's post-war history. In my contribution I explore the ways in which 'forgetting Fascism' emerges as an ethical and political imperative in the small town of Predappio, the

birthplace and burial site of Benito Mussolini, and one of Italy's premier neo-Fascist tourist destinations. Far from being a passive or accidental process, I show how the urban landscape of the town has been actively shaped to encourage such forgetting, in the face of its visitors who insist on celebrating the memory of Predappio's most infamous son. Maddalena Gretel Cammelli describes a prime example of a group who cherish the memory of historical Fascism and draw directly on it for models of political action, namely CasaPound, an association and political party that makes use of 'mediatic squadristism', a form of politics that links new technologies and communicative forms back to historically rooted understandings of Fascist violence. In her chapter Irene Peano also examines connections between old and new forms of Fascism as she shows how the plain of the Tavoliere delle Puglie is haunted both by Fascist ruins and by Fascist visions of reclamation and redemption, visions that play out in and are mobilized by attempts on the part of the contemporary far right to set locals against migrants and refugees. Widening the thematic lens in this part's concluding chapter, Noelle Molé Liston explores the ways in which 'fake news' has recently become a topic of overwhelming concern in Italian politics, despite the long entrenchment of political instrumentalization of the media in the country, in ways that have actually made the simple and explicit communicative strategies of populists like Meloni more appealing to a public exhausted by the need to constantly scrutinize the media it imbibes.

In Part III we turn to the mafia and the anti-mafia, and the complex inter-relationship between the two in the public sphere. Drawing on decades of ethnographic and historical research, Jane and Peter Schneider chart changing practices and understandings of *omertà*, the mafia code of silence, and the ways in which it has been challenged by but has also evolved in response to the Italian state's increasing determination to subvert it. In the next chapter Theodoros Rakopoulos examines the often contradictory and conflicting ways in which 'the mafia' is given form in the anti-mafia public sphere, itself often subject to contestation and conflict, whether through institutional competition, gossip and rumour, or simply unscripted and unexpected events. Similarly, in the last chapter of this part, Naor Ben-Yehoyada shows how journalists covering (or attempting to cover) mafia-related events often deal in the grey area between facts and accusations that are sayable because they are criminal and a matter of legal record and those that are not sayable – at least not in explicit language – because they are not (yet) legally describable, even though they are knowable both to writers and their readership.

Part IV brings us to the topic of heritage, broadly defined, long an area of concern for Italianist scholarship. Emanuela Guano's initial chapter takes us to Genoa and an attempt on the part of the state to deploy a form of aesthetic governance through sanctioned street art in the wake of the Morandi

Bridge collapse in order to undermine political opposition born of neglect of the local community both before and after the disaster. In Magnus Course's chapter we move to Naples, where a variety of artists and activists draw on religious iconography in their engagements in debates over migration by depicting migrants as saints (who were also, of course, often migrants themselves); Course shows how the place of religion in Italian public space, art and heritage leaves it available to co-optation in a number of different ways and to a range of ends. Antonio Sorge brings us to the Sicilian interior, a region Italians have been leaving in large numbers since the nineteenth century, an outflux that correlates with the degradation and decay of a number of small towns and villages where significant proportions of property stand unused and abandoned; in response the *comune* of Mussomeli has begun selling houses for €1, commoditizing a feeling of place and locality for expatriates seeking to escape the anonymity of American or European city life. Returning to De Martino's original field site, Giovanni Pizza explores some of the ways in which *tarantismo* – once sanctioned by the church and seen to epitomize an orientalized image of the south – has also become commoditized, gradually absorbed into Italy's growing heritage industry, though not always, as he shows, without contestation or comment. Finally, Berardino Palumbo surveys a prolific career of anthropological research in Militello in Val di Catania, tracing the ways in which for some time it seemed to resist (or be uninterested in) the processes of patrimonialization that come with the UNESCO World Heritage listing it has possessed since 2002, only in recent years for it too to succumb to depopulation and economic decline and thus feel the need to appeal to an outside audience as 'the most beautiful village in Sicily'.

The last part of the book treats issues of language and regionality. Michael Blim dismantles the idea of an Italy divided neatly into north and south, showing how the central north successfully positioned itself after the Second World War as a unique and thriving economic powerhouse of small and medium businesses, even as this branding obscured growing problems that today result in a political shift rightwards as the region competes with the south while refusing to identify with it. Meanwhile Jillian Cavanaugh examines three particular moments in the recent history of the dialect of Bergamo (Bergamasco), showing how linguistic ideologies behind dialect politics encode chronotopic understandings of time and place, scaling various forms of connection, whether to ancestors, folk history or a separatist vision of the north.

Michael Herzfeld caps the volume by drawing out of some of its synoptic themes, focusing in particular on the ways in which it brings to light certain culturally intimate aspects of *Italianità* in its various guises, and highlighting the fact that *cultura* itself is a term replete with meaning and significance in

Italian. As anthropology as a discipline seeks to rid itself of ‘the distorting lens of an essentially colonial epistemology’ (Herzfeld, this volume), it has much to learn, he argues, from both Italian anthropology and the anthropology of Italy.

PLURAL FUTURES

The chapters included here are certainly not meant to represent an exhaustive catalogue of contemporary anthropological work on Italy, which, happily, continues to grow apace. What they do give is a sample of the kind of ethnographic and theoretical scholarship ongoing today that puts Italy at the heart of a number of vital global debates for anthropology and beyond.

Migration is a critical contemporary issue in a great many contexts across the world, but the central Mediterranean that divides North Africa and Italy represents one of the most well-travelled and most dangerous routes. Recent work on the subject has sought to locate migration in the Mediterranean in a broader historical context of racism and colonialism (e.g. Proglia et al. 2021), in a manner that chimes with some of the contributions here and with the wider resurrection of interest in the Mediterranean as a region (e.g. Ben-Yehoyada 2017). Such a focus also centres Italy and its specific colonial histories (see e.g. Ben-Ghiat and Fuller 2005), as well as the experience of migrants in a country that, as several chapters herein make clear, racializes citizenship and belonging to such a significant extent. Understanding the cultural and historical dynamics underpinning the Italian context, as well as the ways in which they are changing in response to social and political challenges, should make a substantial contribution to how anthropologists and other scholars think about and imagine the topics of race, ethnicity, identity and nationhood.

One response to a perceived crisis of migration in Italy has been the steady electoral growth of the populist right in the country over the last two decades, with the election of Giorgia Meloni as Prime Minister the most recent milestone. Yet a resurgent far right is obviously far from being a peculiarly Italian phenomenon, and here again scholars of populism and nationalism across the world will find much of interest in the contemporary anthropology of Italy, not least because of the country’s singular historical relationship with Fascism.

Less perhaps need be said to explain the interest of the anthropology of Italy when it comes to scholarship on organized crime, or on issues of heritage and history, to both of which it has long been making key contributions, some of which I have discussed above. As the chapters herein demonstrate,

such contributions continue to develop understanding on these issues both within and beyond anthropology.

Italianists have long demonstrated an appropriately catholic appreciation of insights deriving from ethnographic work from around the world – from Africa, for instance, and from Asia – and as I have noted here Italian anthropology has historically been significantly influenced by both American and British contributions, despite the fact that attempts to make this relationship more reciprocal (e.g. Saunders 1984) have not met with much success. As I hope this introduction shows, there has always been a very great deal for anthropologists to learn from the study of Italy – and that is only more true today, as the contributions to this volume showcase.

Of course, there are a great many other directions in which the anthropology of Italy is growing and developing. This book is called ‘New Anthropologies of Italy’, rather than ‘*The New Anthropology of Italy*’, because it is of course not intended to be the final and definitive word on the subject. One of the marks of a successful genre of anthropological writing is internal variety and debate, and it is my hope that this book both stimulates and informs those new to and familiar with the subject, while also generating more new anthropologies of Italy to come.

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PART I

MIGRATION



CHAPTER 1

PERFORMING INCOMPETENCE

Race and Migration in Italy

Lilith Mahmud



INTRODUCTION

There is a joke we tell in European Studies. It goes something like this:

In Heaven, lovers are French, cooks are Italian, dancers are Spanish, bankers are Swiss, the police are British and everything is run by Germans.

In Hell, lovers are German, cooks are British, dancers are Swiss, bankers are Spanish, the police are French and everything is run by Italians.

There are different versions of the same joke in circulation. Sometimes cooks in Heaven are French, and sometimes Germans become the police from Hell. Sometimes there are mechanics instead of dancers. But across all different versions, the punchline always stays the same: *in Hell everything is run by Italians*.

The stereotype of Italians' incompetence, corruption and inefficiency dates back to racist and Orientalist portrayals of the *bel paese* in northern European accounts (Schneider 1998). Despite being a founding member of what is now the EU, and an early adopter of the euro common currency, Italy continues to occupy a precarious position in European political and financial arrangements. In a union of nominal equals, Italy has long struggled to gain traction for its national interests against the will of wealthier member states, such as Germany, France and, until Brexit, the United Kingdom.

One of the policy areas where tensions have been most pronounced between Italy and the rest of Western Europe is foreign migration. Given its geographic position on the Mediterranean, Italy is one of the first ports of

entry into the EU for thousands of migrants and refugees every year. Since the 1990s, hundreds of thousands have landed on Italian soil after boarding ships in Libya, Tunisia or other parts of North Africa. For most of those who land on its shores, however, Italy is not the final destination. Northern Europe, and especially countries such as Germany, Sweden, Norway and the United Kingdom, which are reputed to offer the most welcoming and generous resources for refugees, have typically been the intended destination.

EU regulations, however, do not allow refugees a legal pathway to continue their northbound journeys after arriving in Italy. According to the Dublin Regulation, a treaty that controls asylum policies across Europe (including those of both EU member states and non-EU signatories, such as Switzerland and Norway), asylum petitions may only be processed by a refugee's first country of entry into Europe. Geographically, that first country of entry could only be one of a handful of southern and eastern European nations that have external EU borders, including, of course, Italy. For context, Germany has no external European borders, and the only way to approach Norway without touching European soil first would be from the north.¹ Geography and common sense notwithstanding, the Dublin Regulation provides that any refugee apprehended in a European country other than their first port of entry must be sent back for processing to that first country.

In this chapter, I focus on Italy's (mis)management of the Mediterranean refugee crisis and, specifically, on its skirting of the Dublin Regulation through ongoing and systemic practices of incompetence. From routinely neglecting to fingerprint migrants to forgetting to lock the doors of detention centres, Italian authorities for many years failed to comply with EU migration law. Facilitating the escape of refugees so that they could cross the border (illegally) into Northern European nations, Italy at once defied the unfavourable terms of the Dublin Regulation and got rid of unwanted migrants, all the while appearing to do so out of incompetence rather than political will.

Italy's performance of incompetence in matters of migration could be read as a 'weapon of the weak' in James Scott's (1985) sense of the term, wielded by an underdog state against the political will of some of the wealthiest nations in the world. It is irreverent, admittedly humorous and perfectly in character with Italian national self-stereotypes of cunningness and rule-breaking. In fact, in some languages there is even a term for those small, non-confrontational acts of insubordination that slowly but surely undermine a system of production: they are referred to as an 'Italian strike'. Unlike a formal strike, which carries considerable risks of retaliation, tactics of incompetence such as dragging one's feet at work, slowing down productivity or misunderstanding assignments are enshrouded in a veil of plausible deniability. Similarly, incompetence provided an alibi for Italy's systemic

failure to uphold the Dublin Regulation. But if it was any kind of resistance, perhaps even the weapon of a weak state against European superpowers, Italy's incompetence in handling the refugee crisis was also harmful. Those it harmed most were refugees from the Global South, the vulnerable populations whom European and human rights law claim to protect.

I read Italian incompetence in the bureaucracy of migration as a performative act with morally questionable outcomes. It is a performance in the sense that it is feigned or fictive, at least according to reports by both journalists and refugees alike, which convincingly suggest a wilful defiance on the part of state authorities. But it is also performative in the sense that it created new ways of being and acting. When migrants were intentionally left off the rosters of juridical recognition, disappeared by state bureaucracies without paper trails or fingerprints, their internationally protected status as rights-bearing asylum seekers turned into that of *clandestini* – undocumented migrants crossing borders illegally. Being made undocumented by state-sanctioned incompetence was both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, undocumented refugees could live in the 'shadows' (Chavez 1992) and gain an otherwise impossible freedom of movement to travel out of Italy to the more desirable countries of Northern Europe. On the other hand, the enormous human and financial costs of that freedom were borne by refugees themselves, rather than by the liberal democratic countries on whose soil they were promised safety, as shown by the broader literature on refugees (Coutin 2000). The moral ambiguity of incompetence thus entrenched structural inequities, all the while providing a cover for both Italy's and Europe's humanitarian failures (Ticktin 2011).

DUBLIN, ITALY

The Mediterranean is the deadliest border in the world. Its most active migration path, which Interpol refers to as the Central Mediterranean Route, converges straight into Italy and, from there, disperses on to the rest of Europe. As the first port of entry into the EU for thousands of refugees each year, Italy is tasked with a double mission: to receive and process refugees, according to the Geneva Convention, and to secure European borders, according to EU law.

The cornerstone of European migration and asylum policies is the Dublin Treaty. Also known as the Dublin Convention, Dublin Regulation or just 'Dublin' colloquially, the treaty was first signed in 1990 and took effect in 1997. The Dublin Convention stipulates that the first country of arrival shall be the one responsible for processing refugees' asylum petitions. Because southern and eastern European member states are the only ones with

external EU borders, they are the only ones, according to Dublin, required to process asylum petitions. When Dublin was first created in the 1990s, the numbers of foreign migrants and refugees coming through the Mediterranean were so low that the agreement made sense (Carter 1997; Cole 1997); even border nations like Italy ratified it. The rule was designed to avoid ‘asylum shopping’ across Europe, and to establish a clear system to swiftly allocate responsibility for processing asylum petitions among European member states. As global migration patterns have changed drastically over the ensuing decades, however, there have been mounting critiques of the Dublin Regulation by border member states, such as Greece, Hungary and Italy (Cabot 2014).

Later amendments to the original treaty, referred to as Dublin Regulation II (2003) and Dublin Regulation III (2013), tried to fix some of the problems that Dublin had created. For instance, they granted exceptions for minors seeking family reunification in countries other than their first port of entry, they set a statute of limitation on a non-border country’s ability to ‘send back’ refugees to the first country of entry and they established an appeal process against such forced returns. Overall, however, the general principle of Dublin has remained unchanged since 1997: asylum petitions in Europe must be processed by the first country of entry.

To better enforce that principle, Dublin II established a Europe-wide fingerprint database known as EURODAC. All migrants are supposed to be fingerprinted upon first arrival, and their biometric record serves as definitive proof of their entry point. If undocumented migrants are later caught anywhere else in Europe, local authorities can access their electronically stored fingerprints in EURODAC and, on that basis, initiate return proceedings to the first country of entry, where migrants are then eligible to apply for asylum. Since 2003, it has been primarily thanks to EURODAC that Northern European countries have been able to send refugees back to southern and eastern EU states. Out of all EU member states with external borders, Italy is the country receiving the highest number of returnee petitions from Northern Europe (Fratzke 2015). The phenomenon has become so common that there is now even a word in Italian for migrants who had made it to Northern Europe, but who got caught and sent back to Italy: they are called *Dublinanti*. A grotesque present participle, *Dublinanti* might translate to something like ‘Dublinings’ in English. Legally, Italy is responsible for processing the asylum petitions of new arrivals as well as those of Dublinings, who are sent back to Italy from elsewhere in Europe.

At first sight, there is little question that the Dublin Regulation looks skewed in favour of Northern Europe. Refugee rights advocates have amply criticized it for unduly burdening asylum seekers. Given the vast discrepancies in the quality of asylum systems between poorer border member states

and wealthier northern ones, the requirement that refugees apply for asylum exclusively at their first port of entry means consigning them to longer detention periods, worse conditions and uncertain outcomes. Moreover, the policy of sending refugees back to the border country where they first entered can cause significant delays in the processing of asylum applications, as member states waste months fighting over who should be responsible for a particular asylum case.

Its supporters, however, argue that Dublin actually redresses historical inequities in the allocation of refugees among European nations. It is Northern Europe that has long had the most hospitable policies for foreign migrants and refugees, and that continues to host a larger share of refugees. By contrast, Italy did not even have an asylum law until 1990, in direct breach of the Geneva Convention.² It was only with the arrival of the first waves of foreign migrants from North Africa and Albania in the early 1990s that the country passed its first set of immigration reforms and created the possibility of asylum. Even so, the Italian asylum system and migration services more broadly have remained so labyrinthine and ineffective as to be essentially moot (Però 2007; Sorge 2021). Proponents of Dublin have suggested that the treaty helps ensure that countries with poorly developed asylum systems, such as Italy, do not abdicate their responsibility entirely.

Despite what the Dublin Regulation stipulates, what happens in practice on the ground is a different story altogether. In a report aptly titled *Not Adding Up*, Susan Fratzke (2015) shows that as of 2015 non-border nations like Germany continued to receive a share of refugees far higher than would be mathematically expected, and that Italy and other border nations have not, in fact, borne the brunt of asylum petitions. There are multiple possible explanations for these discrepancies. For instance, some migrants avoid triggering a match in the EURODAC database by burning off their fingerprints or by going underground to avoid detection. But in many cases, there has also been another reason that real-life numbers have not matched statistical estimates.

For a long time, rumour had it, Italian authorities would simply ‘forget’ to fingerprint migrants who landed on their shores. If they remembered, their computers would mysteriously break down before they had the chance to upload fingerprint records into EURODAC. The doors of detention centres might occasionally be left unlocked, accidentally, allowing migrants to escape to the north. The systematicity with which these practices took place would suggest that they could not merely be the result of individual officers’ decision-making. But whether these acts were intentional, and whether they were mandated by higher levels of government, could neither be confirmed nor denied. ‘We are in Italy’, after all, as locals recite whenever confronted with nonsense. What is certain is that for a long time Italian immigration

authorities failed to enforce the Dublin Regulation and thus enabled huge numbers of foreign migrants to cross over into other European countries.

The following story illustrates how incompetence served to facilitate the displacement of refugees from Italy to Northern Europe, and how the practice of incompetence was common knowledge among migrants and in broader Italian society.

INCOMPETENCE AS A PUBLIC SECRET

When Semir³ landed in Sicily in early 2014, Italian officials met the ship that had transported him and about a hundred others at the port of Trapani. They helped everyone onto the ground, checked their health status in the Red Cross tent at the port, then loaded everyone who was in stable physical condition onto a bus. The bus took them to a nearby migration ‘hub’, a recent Anglophone term in an ever-changing lexicon of migration that refers to a detention centre. Once inside, Semir and his fellow travellers were shown to the showers, lounge and dormitories. He barely had time for a warm meal before a military police agent working at the facility approached him and the couple of friends he had made on the boat, as they huddled together discussing what to do next.

‘You know, the door is not locked’, the officer allegedly told them. First, he said it in Italian, then he repeated the important part in English: ‘not locked’. His finger pointed to the exterior door of the facility.

Later that night, Semir and his friends walked right out the front door of the Sicilian hub where they were detained. Nobody had taken their fingerprints up to that point – not at the docks, not on the bus, not even when they were processed into the hub. Loitering right outside the detention centre, a bunch of hustlers seemed to be expecting them. Semir recognized one of them. He was a fellow Eritrean man who was also on the boat, but as a smuggler. The others looked West African, and one probably North African, Semir said. He and his friends went up to the Eritrean man first. But because one of Semir’s friends was Nigerian, the Eritrean smuggler directed him to go talk to the West African smuggler instead. There is a strict, if seldom acknowledged, ethnic protocol to human trafficking. Then they discussed next steps.

‘Where do you need to go?’ The Eritrean man asked in Tigrinya.

‘Germany’, Semir replied.

‘Do you have relatives in Italy?’

‘Yes, my aunt in Bologna.’

The Eritrean smuggler pulled out his cell phone and had Semir dial his aunt in Bologna. Semir told her that he was OK and that he had landed in Italy,

then the smuggler took the phone back. He told Semir's aunt that he could put Semir on a bus to Bologna, and that he would arrive the next day at the central bus station. All she had to do was wire 200 euros for the bus ticket and the phone call. She promised the smuggler that she would go to Western Union first thing in the morning. As soon as the money transfer went through, he kept his word and put Semir on a fifteen-hour bus from Sicily to northern Italy.

I met Semir during the short week he spent in my hometown, Bologna, on his way to Germany. There was a funeral that Sunday for an elderly Eritrean Christian woman who had worked for many years as a domestic worker around town. Many of us in the Eritrean community of my childhood knew her and went to pay our respects at the home of one of her daughters – a basement studio apartment on the outskirts of town, in a decrepit building where many migrants rented single rooms that looked like cells with shared bathrooms in the hallways.

'Ben arrivato', I told Semir as we were introduced. He was wearing a blue tracksuit and a white t-shirt like the majority of migrant men who arrive in Italy by sea. I always wondered if the clothes were standard issue at the hubs, or just cheap, comfortable and easy to find.

'Welcome', I repeated in English when I realized he did not understand my Italian. His aunt stayed close by his side the whole afternoon, as we sat drinking Ethiopian coffee from a clay pot and eating popcorn, as one does, even at a funeral. It was his aunt who told me Semir's story. Sitting next to him, she would sometimes ask him to clarify a certain point in Tigrinya, then she would turn back to me and continue the story in Italian. I understand very basic Tigrinya but I cannot speak it, and she wanted me to know his story in more detail than I could grasp.

'How did Semir get out of the migration hub?' I asked her. She repeated the question to him, then translated back how the police officer had approached him and his friends. She said that Semir said that he could not understand what the officer was telling them until he said 'not locked' in English. And since his English was also quite tentative, he had looked to his Eritrean friend for confirmation. The friend repeated back in Tigrinya that the police officer did in fact just say that the door was unlocked. The Nigerian friend who was with them and spoke English nodded that he heard it too. After lights out, the three of them opened the door that nobody was guarding and walked right out. Semir kept shrugging as his aunt talked. 'Did they take your fingerprints?' I asked Semir directly half in Italian and half in English, holding one palm up, and pointing to each fingertip with the index finger of my other hand. 'No', Semir shook his head. 'They don't fingerprint most of them', his aunt added.

A few days after the funeral, Semir continued his northbound journey to Germany. He had an appointment time and place set with the smuggler who had called his aunt from his cell phone outside the Sicilian hub. His aunt accompanied him to the meeting place. There, waiting inside a car, he found the cell phone man and another smuggler, as well as a couple of other migrants. Like the others, Semir had prepaid his trip all the way to the final destination before even boarding the boat in Libya (that is, before knowing if he would survive the sea). He was part of a cohort headed to Germany. Taking advantage of the lack of checkpoints between EU member states, smugglers and migrants crossed the border into Austria and then Germany by car. Once he arrived in Bonn, Semir surrendered himself to local authorities and applied for asylum.

Semir's fingerprints yielded no results in the EURODAC database, and he was well schooled (both by smugglers and by his aunt) to deny under all circumstances having visited any other EU country prior to arrival. Unable to prove otherwise, German authorities had no choice but to take charge of Semir's asylum petition, assuming Germany – which has no borders with non-European countries – to be his first port of entry into the EU, in accordance with the fantastic geography enacted by the Dublin Regulation.

I retell Semir's story with permission because it is representative of so many others I witnessed or heard in the migrant community of my childhood home. But Semir's voyage – one of the success stories – is not the central topic of this chapter. Europe is my focus – that 'messy' (Loftsdóttir et al. 2018) and ideological 'master symbol' (Goddard et al. 1994), whose paradoxes of liberalism, Occidentalism and modernity are built on the construction of whiteness (Mahmud 2014).

Italy's systematic failure to fingerprint and detain refugees like Semir was common knowledge in the Eritrean community of my upbringing. As Semir's aunt stated, Italian officers were known for leaving doors unlocked, for forgetting to enter fingerprints into databases and for their overall unbelievable incompetence in enforcing EU regulations. But it was not just immigrant communities who partook of this knowledge. Italy's incompetence in matters of migration was arguably a 'public secret' – that is, a commonly known truth that goes unspoken (Taussig 1999). Playing on national self-stereotypes of both cunningness and inefficiency, incompetence was an example of what Michael Herzfeld (2005) has called 'cultural intimacy'. Turning a blind eye became a familiar coping strategy among Italians vexed by migratory flows that they were unprepared and unwilling to handle.

In the summer of 2015, during the Syrian refugee crisis, it became apparent that incompetence as a strategy to handle immigration was, in fact, a public secret in Italy. In the aftermath of the war in Syria, thousands of refugees arrived at the doorstep of Europe from the east, through Greece and

Hungary. Unlike African migrants who have died along the Central Mediterranean Route for decades and with comparatively little outrage, the plight of Syrians captured European hearts. Much of the world watched daily images of their drownings, protests and despair. An especially poignant scene took place at the Budapest train station. Over three thousand refugees had found themselves stranded in Hungary, after the country closed its border with Austria to enforce the Dublin Regulation. Images of Syrian families sleeping on the train station floors or desperately clambering onto overcrowded trains hoping to go to Austria or Germany circulated in news media across the world (*Al Jazeera* 2015).

Watching the Budapest crisis from Italy that late summer, I was struck by the tone of everyday conversations. Journalists and ordinary people seemed perplexed not so much by the plight of Syrian refugees (an unfortunately habitual sight in border nations) but rather by Hungary's self-defeating response to it. The Eastern European state closed its own border and kept refugees *inside* to enforce EU rules, seemingly against its own best interests. A worker in an Italian immigration services cooperative that I visited told me, 'It's such a strange thing. Don't they [Hungarians] realize they can let them go?' When Hungary did in fact open the border in September and allowed Syrians to cross into Austria, the general attitude I heard among my interlocutors in Italy was one of amused sympathy.

Hungary's belated decision to open the border, however, was not an act of defiance or incompetence. It came as a result of diplomatic efforts among various EU member states to accept quotas of Syrian refugees – a humanitarian measure rarely if ever applied to refugees coming from the south. Germany, one of the most faithful proponents of Dublin, invoked the discretionary clause built into the treaty that allows a non-border state to take charge of a refugee's petition voluntarily. In late summer 2015, Germany thus suspended the Dublin accord and accepted a large share of Syrian refugees, who travelled to Germany from Hungary and through Austria on foot, in convoys and by train, no visas necessary. The refugees were escorted by NGOs and volunteer groups, and they arrived in Germany famously carrying signs with photos of Chancellor Angela Merkel, who turned this outcome into a political victory and even gained the nickname of 'Mama Merkel' (*Guardian* 2015).

The irony of Germany's complete policy reversal in the case of Syrians, but not in the case of Eritreans and other sub-Saharan African refugees who land in Italy through the Central Mediterranean Route, was not lost on Italian audiences and politicians (Buscemi 2015). In the Eritrean community, I heard more than once a cynical reading of Germany's actions as favouring the 'good' refugees – highly educated, skilled, middle-class Syrians – over the darker, poorer, uneducated ones who hail from Africa. As we saw again

in 2022 with Ukrainian refugees, EU nations are undoubtedly able and willing to provide safe pathways for refugees to travel legally across European soil, and to distribute them across the EU, when they wish to do so. But Syrians and Ukrainians have been exceptions, rather than the rule. Instead of ushering in a new era of common asylum policies, the suspension of Dublin in those selected cases was merely temporary. As of 2023, when a new pact to revise certain aspects of Dublin and to introduce quotas has recently been approved by EU member states, the principle of responsibility assigned to the first country of entry still stands (Council of the EU 2023).

The reactions of ordinary Italians to the Budapest crisis of 2015 illustrate both the shared common sense of using incompetence as resistance against EU policies ('don't they realize they can let them go?') and also the racial hierarchies that underpin migration discourses more broadly. Around the same time that Germany suspended the Dublin Regulation to accept Syrian refugees, the EU came after Italy for not keeping *other* refugees within its borders. Too many were showing up inexplicably in non-border nations, just as Semir did, though their fingerprints were not in EURODAC, and geography suggested they must have travelled through Italy. The EU started asking questions. Could the country of *la dolce vita* really be that incompetent? By December 2015, the EU was no longer buying it. After months of threatening memos and unsuccessful talks, and shortly after the Budapest crisis, the EU Commission initiated formal inquiry proceedings against Italy. The public secret of incompetence was spoken out loud, as the EU accused Italy of wilfully violating the Dublin Regulation.

The inquiry, however, was never completed. Faced with the prospect of severe sanctions, Italy's bureaucracy of migration showed miraculous improvements. By December 2016, barely a year after the inquiry began, Italy's fingerprinting numbers increased so drastically that the EU dismissed its proceedings altogether (Custodero 2016). Now in full compliance with the Dublin Regulation, and despite protests of refugee rights advocacy groups, Italy started diligently and competently fingerprinting and detaining everybody.

CONCLUSION: RESISTANCE, SOLIDARITY AND COMPLICITY

Io non c'ero e se c'ero dormivo.

(I wasn't there, and if I was there I was asleep).

—Italian saying

Both in English and in Italian, the word *competence* has a double meaning. It refers to having the ability or skills to do something well and, also, to the

legal or administrative authority to do so, as in jurisdictional competence. By contrast, the lack of competence, or *incompetence*, refers to one's inadequacy in fulfilling tasks or to the lack of authority or qualifications to do so. In matters of migration, Italy performs incompetence in both senses: by being bad at the job and, also, by claiming that it is not its job to do.

In this chapter, I have explored Italy's systematic incompetence in migration matters as the not-so-secret strategy of a weak state whose interests do not align with EU regulations. I call it a strategy, rather than a tactic, because its primary and immediate effects harmed the most vulnerable people: refugees. By using incompetence as a form of national protest against seemingly unfair EU regulations, Italy positioned itself as the 'underdog' of Europe. A country that lacks the diplomatic power to push back, Italy pushed back instead through the weak weapon of sabotage – that is, a refusal to do its job. Incompetence has therefore been a strategic resistance of sorts. But when a liberal democratic country abdicates its custodial responsibility and releases refugees to the mercy of human traffickers on its own soil, one must ask, what kind of resistance is this?

To be clear, the refusal to comply with the Dublin accord brought together all sides of the Italian political spectrum. For the centrist Right and neofascist groups, the critique of Dublin is rooted in familiar xenophobic tropes depicting migrants and refugees alike as undocumented invaders who should either 'stay in their own homes' or go elsewhere in Europe (Holmes 2000). On the Left, a humanistic critique of incarceration and criminalization, coupled with a recognition that Italy cannot even provide for its own citizens (Muehlebach 2012), supports migrants' and refugees' freedom of movement to their desired European destinations. In an imperfect world, therefore, leaving the doors unlocked seemed like a morally and politically acceptable compromise.

But once the public secret of incompetence was exposed publicly, and the EU began formal inquiry proceedings, that compromise was no longer tenable. As soon as Europe cracked down on Italy, Italy cracked down on refugees – fingerprinted them, detained them and confined them to its seemingly never-ending and highly inefficient bureaucratic process of asylum seeking, which rarely works out in favour of the applicant. While Italy's numbers looked much better to the EU, the situation on the ground became, if possible, even worse. Since 2016, refugees whose asylum petitions are routinely denied, or those who cannot bear the living conditions of detention centres for months or years while waiting for their petitions to be adjudicated, have found ways to escape, undocumented, living stuck in a 'documentation regime' that leaves most feeling as though there is no future for them (Tuckett 2018). That is, they have ended up back at square one. Only this time they have been subjected to long periods of detention,

trauma and family separation, before winding up in the hands of traffickers or local Italian organized crime. Some stay in Italy, but many more cross the border into the rest of Europe, where they burn their fingerprints to avoid being *Dublined* back. The lucky ones make it to the promised land of welfare-based asylum systems, just as they did before, where they gain documented status by pretending they arrived there by magical apparition. The rest join the wide swaths of surplus labour working in the illegal economies that sustain Europe's wealth (Krause 2018). As Vanessa Grotti and Marc Brightman write in this very volume, the 'social death' that refugees experience is slow and drawn out; it may start in the homelands they are forced to escape, but it is not completed until they narrowly survive drowning in the Mediterranean only to be sunk in the abyss of Europe's racial regime of belonging.

To say that the system is broken would be to offer an alibi to the European countries that have established and then reinstated the Dublin Regulation three times in as many decades, all the while making selective exceptions to its core tenets for white or light-skinned refugees. Besides, the European migration system is not in fact broken, as demonstrated by the extraordinary promptness and humanity with which it welcomed Ukrainian refugees in 2022. It is, however, a racial system that exempts white bodies from being subjected to it.⁴ Written in the very text of the Dublin Regulation is the ability to suspend it. In other words, violating the Dublin Treaty is allowed by the treaty itself. That prerogative to break or suspend the law, however, belongs only to non-border EU states of Northern Europe. Refugees do not have the legal option to break the law, and neither do the border nations of Southern and Eastern Europe, which cannot, legally, refuse to comply. Italy may therefore perform incompetence but, as I have argued elsewhere, the EU also performs liberal humanism as an alibi (Mahmud 2016, 2018). It masks as modernist biopolitics, regulations and efficiency what are in fact racist necropolitics (Agamben 1998; Mbembe 2003).

Some might say that we are already living in a version of Hell where the migration police are German and the bulk of European migration is run by Italians. Italy's handling of migration from the Mediterranean has certainly become a litmus test of the country's modernity and belonging in the EU. But different and competing national stereotypes have played out through these political dramas. On the one hand, enduring Orientalist tropes about Italy's backwardness made Northern Europe buy its performance of incompetence for longer than reasonable (until, eventually, it stopped being plausible altogether). On the other hand, Italians' own self-stereotypes as *brava gente* (good people) have provided a justification for the nefarious consequences that the country's strategy of incompetence has had on the lives of Black and brown refugees. That self-stereotype of Italians as good people who do not mean to do evil dates back to the Second World War. It has served to elide,

at least in national memory, the genocidal racial crimes of Italian fascism and its colonial enterprise against Jewish citizens and Black colonial subjects (Ben-Ghiat and Fuller 2005; Del Boca 2003). It is hard not to hear echoes of that unfortunately common ‘Hitler-made-us-do-it’ approach to historiography in present-day political discourses that blame the EU for Italy’s (in)action, and that absolve the good people of Italy of the ongoing genocide of Black and brown people at its shores (Merrill 2018).

But while Italian state authorities, institutions and politicians blame the EU for the refugee crisis, deploying incompetence as both resistance against Europe and alibi for failing refugees, ordinary citizens have shown countless examples of effective and unambiguous solidarity. From ship captains disobeying orders and rescuing refugees at sea to volunteers driving migrants safely across Italy to the next border, cases abound of NGOs and regular people breaking the law and taking on the serious criminal risks that come with the moral stance of solidarity. When Black lives are made illegal by a system that offers no legal pathway to Europe, no viable pathway to asylum in the first country of entry and no realistic hope for future integration, perhaps the only morally tenable solution is to do exactly what the EU does for white and light-skinned refugees: break the law. That is, to become complicit – sharing risks and vulnerabilities – with those we purport to aid.

From this Hell of migration, it is hard to envision what state-sponsored complicity with refugees could look like. For a long time, the question has been whether it is better (kinder, more just) for Italian state officials to leave the door unlocked and release refugees to human traffickers, or to enforce the law and confine them to a harsh and dysfunctional system with little hope of ever ‘making it’. But this is a false choice rooted in an inhumane and self-interested European view of Black and brown lives as disposable. To be sure, there are better options, and the acts of defiance demonstrated by resisters both in Italy and elsewhere are lessons in imagination about what alternative, feasible and just solutions could look like. Elizabeth Krause’s chapter in this volume builds a critique of racist responses to migration in Italy on Gramsci’s notion that ‘since all men are “political beings”, all are also “legislators”’ (Gramsci 1971: 265). Like Gramsci, Krause recognizes that not all humans are in the same position of power to establish and enforce new norms. Against the coercive force of the state (in this case both the EU and the Italian state), the role of protest is to increase the odds that alternative and counter-hegemonic norms may one day become social rules.

In the mode of protest, many NGOs have called for ‘humanitarian corridors’ – legal pathways to fly refugees safely and directly from their country of origin to a host country in Europe, visa in hand, bypassing the graveyard that is the Mediterranean. If nothing else, Italy as a sovereign nation could allow migrants to fly into its airports, rather than chancing their lives

at sea, just as Germany allowed Syrians to enter the country by train, and also as Italy and the rest of Western Europe did for Ukrainians. The Italian navy could go back to rescuing refugees in international waters, as they did for an entire year under the Mare Nostrum operation until funding ran out (Albahari 2015). Rather than feigning incompetence and releasing refugees to the ruthless business of human trafficking, Italian officials could charter buses from detention centres all the way to the borders with France, Switzerland and Austria. Or perhaps, if we could let ourselves dream as big as some anarchist movements in Italy do, complicity could mean dismantling Fortress Europe altogether (Brexit reminded us that it is in fact possible to leave) and replacing it with a borderless Mediterranean region instead (Ben-Yehoyada 2017; Mahmud 2018). Complicity is the solidarity we need when human beings are made illegal. And if it sounds far-fetched to imagine that state institutions could ever defy the law in such a way, that the Italian police could break the law in such a way, that European nations could break their own laws in such a way, then just remember what they did when refugees were white.

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NOTES

1. Germany borders Switzerland, which is not a member of the EU. However, Switzerland is a signatory of the Dublin Regulation, and I therefore do not consider the German–Swiss border to be an external European border for the purpose of this discussion.
2. Before 1990, Italy limited the attribution of refugee status to European citizens. Although it had signed the UN Convention of 1951 regarding international refugees, Italy had not signed the Convention's Protocol in 1967, which extended the coverage of refugee status to non-Europeans (Papademetriou and Hamilton 1996: 48).
3. All names and identifying information have been changed.
4. Although Islamophobia may certainly be a contributing factor to Europe's

discriminatory application of asylum policies, my argument is that this is primarily a racial (and, specifically, anti-Black) system of values. Suffice it to remember that many Eritrean and other sub-Saharan refugees are Christian, whereas the majority of Syrian refugees in the 2015 case I discussed above were Muslim.

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CHAPTER 2

NOT SO ‘OTHER’

Challenging Ideas of Citizenship and Belonging in Italy

Anna Tuckett



INTRODUCTION

‘No matter how Italian you feel, no matter how much you love it, the bureaucracy always excludes you and makes you feel *straniero* [like a foreigner].’ These were the words of 25-year-old Bilal,¹ a Moroccan citizen who grew up in Italy but now only visits the country as he lives in Finland. He arrived in Italy from Morocco as a child with his parents and two siblings. After turning 18 Bilal could not find a work contract and had no desire to carry on with his studies. Two years ago his permit expired and, lacking the necessary requirements to renew it as an adult, he fell into ‘illegality’. When his girlfriend invited him to move to Finland with her, Bilal decided he had had enough of living the life of an ‘illegal’ migrant in Italy and joined her there.

This chapter analyses the ways in which immigration and citizenship laws create disjunctures for Bilal and others like him, who live with the paradox of risking illegality in a country they have grown up in. Bilal also embodies another paradox in Italian society: he is both Moroccan and Italian. This chapter explores the dynamic tensions that shape experiences of migration, citizenship and belonging in Italy. In the Italian context, understandings of citizenship and membership are highly racialized, and ethnicity and nationality are often conflated. This conflation, which is rooted in a ‘biopolitics of otherness’ (Fassin 2001), not only excludes the possibility of ‘genuine’ citizenship for those who do not ‘look’ Italian, but also assigns those who appear ‘other’ the status of low-level workers with associations of criminality and

poverty. Yet despite this, and despite the marginal position that migrants have been structurally and socially assigned in Italy, migrants and their children are actively challenging and reshaping ideas about insiders, outsiders, citizenship and Italianness. Italy's exclusionary immigration and citizenship laws, however, remain out of sync with these 'ground-level' shifts. The exclusionary bureaucratic system effectively blocks a gradual process of inclusion that might otherwise occur in Italian society. The disjuncture between the integrated lives that migrants build for themselves and the repeated hurdles that immigration and citizenship laws put in their way is at the heart of the lived experience of migration and exclusion that my interlocutors faced.

THE ITALIAN CONTEXT

In comparison with some of its other European neighbours, Italy was a relative latecomer as a destination for migrants, but in the past decade it has become one of the main receiving countries in Europe (see Mahmud, this volume). As is the case across Europe, migrants have not been universally welcomed onto the nation's shores, but low birth rates and a very large ageing population make their presence crucial. As 'useful invaders' (Ambrosini 1999), migrants fill positions that Italians – with ever-increasing levels of education – refuse to. These include manual labour jobs in construction, manufacturing, agriculture, the service industry and domestic work. As Emilio Reyneri (2004: 78) observes, 'immigrants tend to be concentrated in jobs where conditions are hard, requiring physical strength, willingness to do shift-work, and where occupational hazards are high'.

This chapter is based on research conducted from 2009 to 2016 in a city in the Italian region of Emilia-Romagna. Following migrants' bureaucratic encounters as they sought to become and stay 'legal', I conducted nineteen months of intensive fieldwork between 2009 and 2011, followed by annual visits. My fieldwork was principally based in an advice centre for migrants. The centre's main functions were to act as a drop-in advice clinic on issues relating to immigration law and to complete application forms on behalf of clients free of charge. These included applications for permit renewal, family reunification and citizenship. Reflecting the diversity of migrant nationalities across Italy and the city where I was working, the clients who frequented the centre were a heterogeneous group hailing from all over the world. Overlapping partly but not completely with the list for Italy as a whole, the 'top ten' nationalities in the region at the time of research were Moroccan (14.6 per cent), Romanian (13.1 per cent), Albanian (12.6 per cent), Ukrainian (5.1 per cent), Tunisian (4.9 per cent), Chinese (4.6 per cent), Moldovan (4.6 per cent), Indian (3.2 per cent), Pakistani (3.2 per cent) and Polish (2.6

per cent) (Caritas 2010). Clients were also diverse in terms of their personal trajectories. Some had recently arrived in Italy, others had been in Italy for decades or were even born in the country. Some already held citizenship, while others were looking for ways to regularize their status. The peculiarities of Italian immigration bureaucracy mean that legal status is highly fluid, and it is not uncommon for somebody who has been in the country for decades to lose their legal status. Documentation status does not, therefore, reflect length of time spent in Italy. As a volunteer at the centre, I spent most of my time on the reception counter, but I also spent long periods of time with advisers at their desks in the back room participating in longer consultations. Much of my daily fieldwork was conducted in the space of the centre and other institutional settings, but over time, I also developed close relationships with staff members, volunteers and some clients, taking my research into more intimate and social spaces.

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP LAW

Italian immigration law, which has been criticized as discriminatory and driven by anti-immigrant politics, is key to the process of migrants' othering. Under the law, a migrant's legal status is contingent upon presenting a regular work contract. Consequently, regardless of how many years one has lived in the country, losing one's job or being employed unofficially in the 'black market' can result in the loss of legal status. Calavita (2005: 43) has argued that this 'institutionalizes irregularity' within the immigration law itself, which is inseparable from migrants' labour function. Through their precarious and temporary legal statuses, migrants remain perpetually 'other', which is a 'critical ingredient of their flexibility' (ibid.: 63) and ensures that they remain in low-level, poorly paid and insecure jobs – the so-called 'non-EU' jobs (those that native European citizens refuse to do). Accordingly, in the Italian context, migrants are othered through legal, political and discursive processes that characterize them as second-class subjects associated with low-level jobs, criminality and poverty.

These harsh and exclusionary immigration policies, however, exist alongside frequent amnesties through which 'illegal' migrants can regularize (or re-regularize) their status. In addition, there are fairly regular *decreti flussi* policies that allow for the legal entry of foreign workers (although in practice these also work as unofficial amnesties). In the words of one migrant respondent: 'It is easy to get in [to Italy], but hard to legally stay.' This is because while temporary and contingent legal status is relatively accessible, the long-term permit and citizenship, which offer possibilities for secure legal status, are both notoriously difficult to obtain. The current Italian citizenship law,

passed in 1992, is based on the principle of *jus sanguinis*, the right to citizenship based on one's ancestry. For those who have newly arrived with no ancestral links, or even for those born in the country, naturalization is the only option. To become a naturalized Italian citizen, among other bureaucratic requirements applicants must document ten years of continuous legal residence in Italy (five years for EU citizens). In Italy residency refers to one's place of address but is also an official bureaucratic status for citizens and non-citizens alike. Residency is distinct from legal status, and non-citizens are not obliged to hold residency: registered domicile is sufficient for the purpose of permit renewal, family reunification and other applications. The official status of residency, however, is necessary for citizenship applications. The requirement of ten years of documented *continuous* residency (not just domicile) was a frequent stumbling block for long-term migrants who desired to submit citizenship applications. Loss of residency, caused, for example, by an eviction following a problem with one's landlord, means that applicants are required to rebuild ten years of documented residency. This is the case even if the period of loss of residency is very short. Given these bureaucratic requirements, those I knew who did hold Italian citizenship had usually been living in Italy for much longer than the required ten years in order to have become eligible to apply.

Because the citizenship law favours Italian ancestry, attaining citizenship is a lengthy and difficult process for those who were born or grew up in Italy but whose parents are not Italian nationals. Minors can obtain citizenship through their Italian parents, and anyone who is born in Italy can apply for citizenship within one year of their eighteenth birthday. The latter, however, is a bureaucratic procedure that is far from straightforward. If, for example, a child's parents fall into 'illegality' after losing employment, the child is no longer eligible to apply for citizenship on turning 18. Instead, they are required to meet the same requirements as any adult migrant. In addition, if one who is born in Italy does not submit the citizenship application within a year of turning 18, the right to apply for citizenship is lost. After reaching 18, young people no longer have the right to a family permit and thus must either work or study full-time to avoid losing their legal status. Accordingly, many young people face legal precarity on reaching adulthood and certainly do not have the same possibilities as their peers with parents who hold Italian citizenship.

AUTHENTIC AND INAUTHENTIC CITIZENSHIP

In the Italian context ethnicity and nationality are conflated, meaning that anyone who is not considered to be Italian (or a tourist) is demarcated as '*immigrato*' or '*extracomunitario*'. '*Extracomunitario*' is an ideologically

loaded, racist term. It refers to a non-EU citizen, but the term is primarily used to refer to migrants from the Global South and post-Soviet countries, notwithstanding their home country's EU member status. For example, Romanians and Poles, who are EU citizens, are labelled '*extracomunitari*', while Australians and Americans, who are technically '*extracomunitari*', are not labelled in such a manner. Accordingly, the term refers to migrants who are deemed to originate from poorer nations, and its use is related to the notion that migrants are low-level workers, criminals or objects of charity. Bruno Riccio and Monica Russo (2011: 362) have observed that the racialized divisions that exist in Italy are 'not a matter of mere cultural racism; phenotypic characteristics have also become more and more relevant in fostering Italian internal boundaries.' As a result, a 'biopolitics of otherness' is produced in which skin colour and supposed origin overwhelm the legal definition of the 'other' (Fassin 2001: 6). Through the identification of complexion, skin colour, dress, *tracce* (referring to facial features), language and other indicators, migrants and their children are automatically identified as '*extracomunitari*', meaning non-Italian, immigrant and non-citizen.

Given this, notwithstanding their actual citizenship status, in my field site migrants were indiscriminately placed in the category of '*extracomunitario*'. The cultural category 'Black Italian', for example, did not exist, but one could be an '*extracomunitario*' with citizenship. In this context Italian citizenship was stripped of any significance other than its formal legal meaning. Most of my newly Italian interlocutors – migrants who had acquired citizenship – considered their Italian citizenship to have no more significance than a piece of paper: they viewed it as akin to a *permesso di soggiorno* (permit to stay) and as serving solely instrumental ends. Other studies of migrants in the Italian context make a similar observation (see Andall 2002; Bianchi 2011; Colombo, Domaneschi and Marchetti 2011; Zinn 2011). All of my 'new Italian' friends had accounts of times they had been stopped by the police either on the street or at some kind of security checkpoint. On such occasions the presentation of their Italian identity card had caused confusion and suspicion, and had elicited a demand to see a *permesso di soggiorno* (a document that an Italian citizen would not have). Once their citizenship status was eventually and grudgingly acknowledged, it was nonetheless considered 'inauthentic' (Gilroy 2002: 50). Which is to say that, in the view of the officials, having an Italian passport did not mean that someone was 'really' Italian. These racist ideas about authentic and inauthentic citizenship were evident in the everyday workings of the advice centre. Clients were asked if they had Italian citizenship rather than if they were Italian. When staff members or centre users affirmed that they were Italian, it was voiced as a political statement rather than a neutral comment. Someone who claimed Italian citizenship in this way did so as if responding to a disbelieving official.

Alternatively, the affirmation was made in a tongue-in-cheek tone; these neo-citizens were sardonically communicating that they knew they would never be considered really Italian, but were also simultaneously challenging this assumption.

The case of Rose highlights how citizenship was often understood as nothing more than a bureaucratic process. Rose came in to the centre one day to ask if it would be possible to bring her sister to Italy from Nigeria through family reunification. She was initially told that this was not possible before the staff member thought to ask if Rose had Italian citizenship. It turned out that she did, and therefore, on grounds of family reunification, her sister would be able to obtain a permit in Italy. Rose then asked if she could bring her mother and husband. 'No problem', she was told. By this point the staff member had left, and she and I were speaking in English together. She was beaming and said, 'I had no idea I could do all this. It's not bad, this Italian citizenship!'

Two points are highlighted by this encounter. First, despite the large number of clients who passed through the centre who were Italian citizens, staff members often immediately assumed that the clients did not have Italian nationality. And second, clients who were Italian citizens did not identify as Italian nationals and were often not aware of the rights they had gained by obtaining citizenship. Rose's ignorance about her newly acquired rights revealed her attitude about her procurement of Italian citizenship. For her it was like the renewal of her last ever permit, a bureaucratic step that meant she no longer had to deal with the *questura* (immigration office). She did not view her Italian citizenship as giving her the same rights as a 'real' Italian. Similarly, people did not consider her to be Italian.

Others I knew understood their new citizenship in the same way, although their attitude was sometimes more critical. Indeed, the most common statement in conversations about obtaining Italian citizenship was: 'It doesn't change anything, but it is good not having to queue at the *questura* any more.' When stating that it did not change anything, my interlocutors were referring to the fact that, despite their citizenship status, they were still treated like '*extracomunitari*'. Those who were particularly angry about the discrimination they experienced distanced themselves from their Italian citizenship, emphasizing that they did not 'feel' Italian or did not want to be considered so. Many felt disheartened that no matter how long they spent in Italy, they would always be considered '*extracomunitari*' along with all the negative associations the term implies.

In this context, then, legal citizenship was not culturally considered to confer equality or to be an instrument to create common sociality. Rather, there was authentic citizenship and inauthentic citizenship. The inauthentic citizenship of migrants was a legal document and nothing more. Although the new Italian citizens were entitled to all the formal rights of

citizenship, they were still considered ‘*extracomunitari*’: that is, poor, low-status non-citizens.

PERFORMANCE AND APPEARANCE

Migrants who spoke Italian with a foreign accent seemed to be easily demarcated as inauthentically Italian. In contrast, those who came to Italy as children, or those born in the country to foreign parents, came to embody an Italian ‘habitus’ (Mauss 1973) that disrupts ideas about authentic and inauthentic citizenship that are embedded in the normative construction of whiteness in relation to Italian national identity (Pesarini 2017). The literature on the second generation in Italy has explored the challenges of daily racism and difficult access to citizenship that this cohort of young people face (Andall 2002; Bianchi 2011; Riccio and Russo 2011). In particular, scholars have explored second-generation associations and this group’s attempts to further their political agenda and challenge racist and discriminatory attitudes (Riccio and Russo 2011; Zinn 2011). This section examines similar themes, but instead of looking at political arenas in which the 1.5 – those who migrated as children – and second generation challenge attitudes, it focuses on everyday encounters and the apparent disjunctures that they embody in the incongruity between their bodies and bodily performances (see Krause, this volume on the power of quotidian practices). Although the processes of ‘othering’ described above imply a straightforward understanding of what makes an Italian ‘Italian’, both the historically weak sense of nationhood and the lived reality of the 1.5 and second generations suggest that the notion of a clearly demarcated national identity is not as strong as it may seem.

The first time I met Tesfay, the leader of the Young Eritreans’ Association, he was teased by Claudio, a white Italian volunteer at the centre. Claudio grew up in Lecce in Puglia (in southern Italy), and Tesfay grew up in Bari, which is Lecce’s rival city. As Tesfay was leaving the centre one day, he and Claudio well-meaningly heckled each other with partisan banter. After Tesfay had left, Claudio said to the others at the reception counter, ‘God, it is such a shock when he speaks. A *Barese* Eritrean!’ Here Claudio and the others were referring to Tesfay’s strong *Barese* accent. A Black man speaking with a southern regional accent was ‘matter out of place’ (Douglas 1970: 36), and Tesfay’s manner of speaking destabilized Claudio’s and others’ rigid understandings of identity. The importance of regionalism in Claudio’s comment was significant. Because of Italy’s regional character and late national unification, people often feel closer to their region than to the country as a whole. Thus, for a migrant to identify with a particular region is a strong indicator of Italianness (see also Zinn 2011: 380). The shocked

reaction to apparent ‘outsiders’ speaking in local accents is not unique to the Italian context, but two issues make such a reaction noteworthy. First, in Italy, notwithstanding class, everybody has an accent that betrays their regional background, and accents are common topics of conversation. To speak fluently in Italian is to speak with a regional accent (the local accent I developed during fieldwork was often the subject of confusion or humour among my interlocutors). In addition, migrants’ presence is fairly evenly distributed across Italy, meaning that there is not a particular Italian accent that would be deemed acceptable for a migrant or Italian of colour to have. And second, because migrants and Italians of colour are automatically assigned to the category of ‘*extracomunitario*’, being identified as non-Italian is to be identified as somehow inferior.

Not all migrants feel cowed by such assumptions and prejudices. My friend Chiara, who volunteered at the advice centre, is an Eritrean by birth who has lived in Italy since she was 13 years old. She is called Chiara Mariotti – due to her paternal grandfather’s ancestry – and is a native Italian speaker. Her gesticulations and ways of speaking, eating and walking all demonstrate her embeddedness in an Italian ‘habitus’, but in the Italian context her dark skin and long braided hair automatically make her ‘*extracomunitaria*’. As she told me: ‘Italians who know me will say, “you’re different, you’re not a real immigrant”, because I speak perfectly and play the Italian. But, if they saw me on the bus, in an office or on the street and did not know me, they would be just like everyone else. They would presume I am an *immigrata di merda* [shitty immigrant]. That is what Italians think when they see an *extracomunitario*.’ When Chiara was younger she would run home crying after episodes of racism in which she was mistaken for a prostitute or heckled in the street. On other occasions she struggled to find a job and to secure a tenancy from a landlord. And at her workplace – where she is the only non-white employee – she is frequently mistaken for the cleaner and asked to refill the toilet paper in the bathroom. ‘Black person equals cleaner’, she commented wryly. In recent years, she told me, she has learned to deal with the prejudice in different and more empowering ways, mainly through humour and her strong sense of irony. She recounted to me that while she cleaned the stairs of the building in which she lived, she allowed her white Italian neighbours to think that she was Signora Chiara Mariotti’s *colf* (cleaner) and then revelled in their discomfort when she turned up at her building meetings as *the* Signora Chiara Mariotti: no one would match the Italian name with her dark skin. She laughingly told me about how, when she goes to public offices, officials often speak slowly to her, thinking that perhaps she does not understand Italian. I witnessed this myself when I accompanied her to offices to run errands: a moment’s delay between when the official first saw her and then heard her speak was typically followed by a slightly bemused

expression. She told me that she enjoyed this moment of tension when the official was left looking rather foolish. Playing on prejudices, she questions and challenges people's views by embodying the contradiction of dressing, speaking and behaving like an Italian but not conforming to what is normatively racialized as Italianness. Chiara is fully aware that people are often surprised and perplexed by her 'immigrant' looks and contrasting 'Italian' behaviour and language skills. Playing dialogically with the signifiers that are foisted upon her as a Black Italian, through irony and joking Chiara is able to mock prejudice and subtly challenge the discriminatory assumptions of those around her (see also Mahmud 2014: 34–38).

As early members of the 1.5 generation, Chiara and Tesfay embody what Paul Gilroy (2002: 69) terms 'ideological contradictions'. Like the Black athletes Gilroy describes as challenging ideas of Britishness, Chiara's and Tesfay's embodied Italianness, expressed through language, dress and body movements, seemed to contradict their black skin – and vice versa. The contradictions that Chiara and Tesfay embody correspond to Stanley's (2008: 56) observation that 'those seen as physically distinct from Italians, regardless of their performativity, also carry the assumption that they are not citizens of the Italian state'. As has been argued, judgements about who is (or could be) Italian are based on a very limited notion of Italianness. Identity is expressed and practised according to body politics, where difference from the physical 'Italian look' immediately demarcates somebody as not Italian. Stanley may be correct in her analysis of people's immediate judgements, but both Chiara and Tesfay unsettle these naturalized and racist assumptions. Claudio's joking with Tesfay and Chiara's teasing of her neighbours reveal the discomfort and ideological contradictions that the tension between 'body' and 'body techniques' creates. There is not yet a mainstream discourse about the possibility of a hybrid Italian identity, but ideas about Italianness, race and belonging are becoming more open to disruption and subject to temporal change. Chiara and Tesfay are not easily made other, but rather cause uncomfortable and perplexed reactions through the ideological contradictions that they embody.

Despite the extent to which 'body techniques' disrupt normative understandings of whiteness and Italian identity, the bureaucracy remains an exclusionary force that structurally others cultural insiders. These processes of othering and structural marginalization need to be understood as working in tense and contradictory relationships with everyday social relations that are challenging and negotiating 'boundaries of Italianness' (Hawthorne 2021: 706), notwithstanding the absence of a discourse on hybridity. The 1.5 and second generations complicate the division and hierarchy between 'formal citizenship' and 'substantive cultural identity that defines genuine membership' (Gilroy 2002: 50). In this way, documents, citizenship, appearance,

body techniques and habitus can work at diverse tangents to one another and must often be negotiated simultaneously by the migrants themselves.

'ILLEGAL' CITIZENS

Work on the so-called 1.5 generation has explored the way in which, on reaching the age of 18, those who are undocumented must learn to be 'illegal' (Gonzales 2011). This literature explores the contradictions inherent in being an 'illegal' migrant in the country where one has grown up and challenges ideas about citizenship and legality. On reaching legal adulthood those in this group experience trauma as they become 'illegal' subjects overnight. In a political climate in which the citizenship policies of migrant-receiving countries are becoming increasingly restrictive, the production of 'illegal citizens' – those who have grown up in a country but hold no juridical right to stay there – is rapidly growing. With anti-terrorism laws establishing the terrain, it has become increasingly common for young people who have grown up in Europe and North America to be sent back 'home' following encounters with the police – often to a country to which they have no or few links (De Genova and Peutz 2010; Drotbohm 2011; Peutz 2006). The situations of these young people, who may have multiple senses of identity and belonging, contradict the passport and other documents that imply unambiguous identification with one singular place (Coutin 2003; Drotbohm 2011; Mandel 2008). In these situations the ambivalent and tense relationship between belonging and citizenship comes to the fore.

The situation of the 1.5 and second generations in Italy, which is characterized by precarious legal status and racialized ideas about citizenship, offers important comparative contributions on this subject (Andall 2002; Bianchi 2011; Colombo, Domaneschi and Marchetti 2011; Colombo and Rebughini 2012; Riccio and Russo 2011; Zinn 2011). The cases of Lindita and Aurelie, outlined below, highlight the disjunctive and precarious position that makes the 1.5 and second generations particularly vulnerable in immigration politics (see also Riccio and Russo 2011: 363). It was precisely because of their cultural capital and embodied sense of integration that many young people, out of sheer ignorance – theirs and their parents' – risked their legal status.

'BUT I HAVE AN IDENTITY CARD': ITALIANS WITHOUT CITIZENSHIP

In the last few days of my fieldwork, a 17-year-old named Lindita came into the centre for advice. Her citizenship was 'almost ready', she said, but her

permesso had expired. The *permesso* had expired over a year ago and thus was theoretically unrenewable. Since a valid permit is a requirement for concession of citizenship, this could have created serious problems. Lindita was born in Italy, and when she turned 17 years old the *comune* had written to her, informing her of the possibility of applying for Italian citizenship within a year of her eighteenth birthday. Receiving such information from the *comune* is rare, and ignorance of the fact that one must apply within a year after turning 18 leads to many young people losing out on the possibility of attaining Italian citizenship. Fortunate to have received the letter, Lindita and her mother followed the instructions and completed the appropriate paperwork for the application. However, they were unaware that obtaining citizenship required one to have a valid permit at the moment of the *giuramento* (swearing of the oath). Lindita was very relaxed about the situation, and when I met her she seemed as though she had entered the advice centre on a whim. On hearing about her situation, Alberto – a staff member – became concerned about her losing this possibility for citizenship. Lindita, however, remained calm, saying, ‘It’s fine, I have a *carta d’identità*’ (identity card, which is a valid identity document for an Italian citizen but useless for a non-citizen). Her ignorance about the details of the procedure revealed her liminal status. Although by law she was considered a migrant, she did not inhabit a ‘migrant world’, which might have bestowed her with the appropriate knowledge. Further, her calmness and certainty of the power of her identity card demonstrated that she felt she belonged in Italy.

In a similar situation was Aurelie. Her father was well known in the centre, having been back and forth in his efforts to sort out her permit. He had told staff in the centre that Aurelie’s permit had been ‘blocked’ in the *questura* for two years, although his had already been issued. According to staff members this situation was strange, as children are dependent upon their parents: if Aurelie’s father had the correct requirements to renew his permit, then hers should automatically have been renewed. Unable to fit all the pieces of the story together to create an understandable narrative, Alberto finally asked him to send his daughter to the centre. A few days later, Aurelie came in. She stood out from many of the other people in the centre. She was dressed in the manner typical of Italian teenagers, wearing tight jeans and brand new Converse trainers. Her accent and fluency in Italian gave away her local upbringing. When she showed me an old photocopy of her father’s permit, a ragged sheet of paper with a photo of her 6-year-old self stapled on, I realized who she was and told her to wait while I went to find Alberto. Since Alberto was going for his weekly meeting at the *questura* with the vice director the following Friday, he asked Aurelie for all her identity documents so that he could present her situation and find out what had happened. Accordingly,

on Alberto's request, I photocopied Aurelie's documents. When I asked her for her identity card, she presented me with a flimsy paper document with the details written in French. 'It is from the Ivory Coast's consulate', she informed me, as I quizzically turned it over in my hands. I told Alberto that she did not have the usual Italian identity card (to which all legal residents are entitled), and the reality of Aurelie's situation dawned on Alberto as he put together the pieces of the story. Alberto realized that there was no blocked application for renewal of a permit. Instead, Aurelie possessed no valid permit at the current time and had not possessed one for the three years since her father's renewal.

The problem lay in her father's ignorance about the need for children to acquire their own, independent legal status. When Aurelie's father had renewed his permit, she had already turned 15, at which age, although still dependent upon her father, she ought to have applied for and been issued her own permit. But since she had never submitted an application, Aurelie had technically slipped into the limbo of 'illegality'. Passing Aurelie back her Ivory Coast embassy-issued identity card, Alberto asked, 'So you haven't had a permit for three years?' She shrugged her shoulders with a curious look, apparently totally oblivious to the significance of, or unbothered by, this information. As I chatted with her later she told me that she had arrived in Italy when she was six months old: 'I was practically born here', she said. Later that evening I saw her with a group of young people, giggling on the arm of her boyfriend. She may have been technically undocumented, but like Lindita she did not seem to feel disenfranchised or concerned; her sense of belonging in Italy overrode the technicalities of her legal status. Both girls' reactions to the news that they were 'illegal' and at risk of being denied citizenship were a kind of casual bemusement. For these young women the world of immigration bureaucracy was one from which they felt disconnected, and one that was completely out of sync with their sense of belonging.

The second generation were not all strangers to the immigration bureaucracy. In fact it was common for children to accompany their parents or other members of their communities to the advice centre to act as interpreters. Notwithstanding their familiarity with the immigration bureaucracy, however, for those without citizenship the contradiction between holding precarious legal status in the country where they had grown up and citizenship in their parents' land was common to all. Lindita's and Aurelie's rather indifferent reactions to the news of their precarious legal status differ from those reported in research conducted in the United States, which emphasizes the second generation's feelings of abjection on realizing their 'illegal' status (Gonzales and Chavez 2012). Instead, the young women seemed to hold what Jacqueline Andall (2002) has called a 'second-generation attitude'. Perhaps over time Lindita and Aurelie would also feel like they had 'awoken to

a nightmare' (Gonzalez and Chavez 2012). For the moment, however, their seemingly nonchalant attitudes highlighted the contradiction that immigration and citizenship laws pose for the 1.5 and second generations: being socialized by their 'host' country through their education and environment while simultaneously holding the status of undocumented migrant. Like migrants in other settings, Lindita and Aurelie challenge our assumptions about who an undocumented migrant is. Their experiences offer insights into the disjuncture that exists when state practices simultaneously produce the same individual as both 'cultural citizen' (Ong 1996) and undocumented migrant. These young people are culturally socialized as Italians or Americans but as adults become subject to the same laws that work to produce a vulnerable and tractable workforce (De Genova 2002).

Individuals such as Lindita, Aurelie, Chiara and Tesfay undoubtedly challenge ideological assumptions concerning race, belonging and citizenship. Moreover, as a growing body of literature on second-generation associations has explored, the 1.5 and second generations in Italy are becoming politically active and demanding more nuanced recognition of Italianness and citizenship (Riccio and Russo 2011; Zinn 2011). Despite these changes, however, the structural obstacles that exclusionary immigration and citizenship laws create entrench the marginalization of migrants and their children, fundamentally limiting possibilities for change. Exclusionary citizenship laws, economic marginalization, low-level work opportunities and racial stigmatization interact to produce and reproduce migrants as inferior and other. As Calavita (2005: 165) notes, 'With this powerful economics of alterité, and the legal infrastructure that supports it', integration policies and initiatives demanding equal recognition face considerable challenges.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored the tensions in the pervasive processes of othering in Italy, which are rooted in the normative construction of whiteness in relation to Italian national identity (Pesarini 2017). In line with Fassin's (2001) discussion of biopolitics, racialized discourses based on skin colour and appearance are used to dichotomously characterize non-Italians as either tourists or '*extracomunitari*'. To be identified as '*extracomunitario*' is to be made into a low-status worker other with associations of criminality and poverty. However, examining the situation of the 1.5 and second generations shows how unstable and contestable these racialized assignments are.

Inflammatory media reports that emphasize entry and flows of immigrants have dominated the political discourse on migration in Italy, making

immigration appear to be in a permanent state of emergency (Cole and Saitta 2011: 528; see Mahmud, this volume). In spite of this, and of the structural marginalization that migrants and their children are subject to, however, the 1.5 and second generations are challenging ideas of insiders, outsiders and citizenship in everyday encounters simply by being. Yet those who challenge still remain potentially structurally and legally marginalized because immigration and citizenship regimes are out of sync with everyday social contexts and encounters. The exclusionary bureaucracy, as well as the lack of a mainstream alternative political discourse about migration and hybridity, blocks any real change that could occur over time in Italy. These young migrants have cultural capital but do not necessarily have the legal right to remain in the country. Worse still, they run the risk of being excluded from citizenship if they fail to closely attend to their legal status. Although being a legal citizen would not necessarily diminish the racism or processes of othering they experience, it could encourage changes in society over time so that, for example, being Black and Italian need no longer be considered mutually exclusive categories (Riccio and Russo 2011: 370). This analysis challenges and contributes to our understanding of citizenship and the ways in which inclusion in a society is multifaceted, precarious and temporal. What it means to be a citizen exists in law and on paper, and also in everyday encounters that create new and unexpected meanings. Possibilities for change in Italy lie with the 1.5 and second generations, whose situations are profound evidence of the injustices that the current immigration law creates. While immigration laws successfully naturalize migrants' otherness, making their social, legal and economic marginalization seem acceptable (Calavita 2005; De Genova 2002), when those who appear less other – such as the 1.5 and second generations – are also subject to such processes, these injustices are brought into sharp focus. This reality is pertinent not only to Italy but also in different host settings, where members of the second generation are deported back to their 'home' nation states, parents are unable to legally enter the country where their children have citizenship and husbands and wives struggle to live within the same borders. Examining the 1.5 and second generations' everyday experiences of immigration bureaucracy underscores the profound difficulties, contradictions and injustices that immigration law creates in the lives of *all* migrants.

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NOTE

1. All respondents' names have been changed.

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CHAPTER 3

A RETURN TO LIFE

Narratives of Birth and Death in a Southern European Periphery

Vanessa Grotti and Marc Brightman



INTRODUCTION

Pà, you know I still see the dead? Each time the reports come on the news of the rescues at sea, I start to weep . . . But today I went back and dived right there . . . On the wreck sitting at the bottom of the sea, there are corals now, there's seaweed, there are fish swimming around. The first time there were just the corpses, but today the sea has transformed everything. I saw the overcoming of death. A return of life, that's it.

—Davide Enia, *Appunti per un Naufragio*

In this passage the Sicilian author Davide Enia quotes Simone, a Lampedusan professional diver, who describes how the sight of the resurgence of marine life on the hull of a sunken migrant boat lying on the seabed just off Tabaccara bay south of his native island helps him to overcome the painful memory of his experience of handling dozens of corpses from the same vessel three years before. After the boat had capsized, in the early hours of 3 October 2013, Simone had assisted the Italian Coast Guard (*Guardia Costiera*) in locating the wreck and had been the first diver to enter the hull, crammed with the bodies of drowned passengers. Sicilian fishers describe going to sea as a rite of passage: Ben-Yehoyada (2017: 111) quotes Hajj, a Tunisian-Mazarese fisherman: 'you who go in [the sea] are absent, and when you go out you are reborn.' While death at sea has always been a reality for Mediterranean fishing communities, it loomed large in the 2010s with the growing intensity of migrant crossings from North Africa, mostly departing

from Libya since the fall of its autocratic leader Colonel Muammar al-Gaddafi in 2011, and in line with the increasing European restrictions on regular migration channels imposed since the 1990s.¹ Local fishers now perish less often at sea, but these irregular crossings produce new victims, strangers to the island's fishing community, construed officially as 'migrants' or 'asylum seekers', many of whom are women and children. During the 2010s, gateways into the European Union such as Lampedusa grew synonymous with media representations and political discourses of a 'crisis' of migration in the Mediterranean, characterized as 'archipelagos of melancholia', surrounded by a 'watery grave' (Sarnelli 2015: 150–51). Migrant maritime disasters made a powerful mark on the public imagination in Italy and abroad, especially in Sicily, and most of all among those working in rescue and treatment of passengers saved at sea, and in the handling of the remains of those who died. Often thousands of people were saved at sea by the coast guard in a single week, and after large disasters, such as those that occurred on 3 October 2013 and 19 April 2015, the emergency services must handle the remains of hundreds of victims (ANSA 2016; Marceca, Viviano and Ziniti 2015; Tervonen and Pourquié 2017). Survivors present serious physical and mental health conditions and complications related both to violence experienced on the trail and to the conditions of the crossing (Crepet et al. 2017; Grotti et al. 2008). Yet local people and migrants alike frequently emphasize the way that the passage of time and the succession of seasons and ecological processes can contribute to healing and to a return to life. Based on our interviews and everyday interactions with migrants who have survived the crossing to Lampedusa or Sicily, with local people, and with healthcare staff and personnel in reception centres in small rural communities, we explore the trope of the return to life through kinship, work and reproduction as an expression of a transcultural effort to re-emerge from the shadow of abandonment, violence and death.

DEATH AND THE REGENERATION OF LIFE

The theme of 'death and the regeneration of life' recalls the classic work of that name by Bloch and Parry (1982), which evokes two sides to the phenomenon we describe here: narratives of the rebirth of migrant personhood can be seen alongside a complementary narrative of social and ecological regeneration in a neglected and impoverished territory. These narratives are linked by the ways in which life exceeds the individual subject: much as death concerns not merely the physiological facts of bodily mortality but also the symbolic and sociological resonances of mortuary practices (Hertz 1960), life involves human and nonhuman agents in multifarious processes

of making (Pitrou 2017). Pitrou's approach to life suggests an interpretation compatible with a Maussian concept of the person, such that the individual person is composed of social relations and processes, evident in initiation rituals marking stages in the life cycle (naming, adulthood), in which death and rebirth are a dominant symbolic theme (Mauss 1985; cf. Van Gennep 1960). Death is not everywhere considered to be a 'matter of an instant', which is a view narrowly associated with a Western concept of the person as a bounded entity (Bloch 1988: 13). Life is reproduced through relations – not only those of kinship and sexuality, but also human–nonhuman relations, as Pitrou suggests. The severing of these relations, through separation and bereavement, can be experienced as a kind of death. Jackson's notion of the 'social death' from which migrants seek to escape is grounded in Spinoza's treatment of life and death as matters of degrees of being alive, rather than as absolute poles (Jackson 2013: 6). He draws on Ricoeur and Levinas to show how a 'quest for life itself' can justify movements across borders, since they place an ethics of living well before the morality of norms.² If we follow Pitrou (2017: 20) in taking an ecological view of life 'as the process of creating a relational system between beings', Jackson's modest-sounding concept of the 'wherewithal of life' can be understood with greater force. Our interest here is in narratives of the undoing and remaking of relations between beings, and in their performativity, such that the story of the return to life may indeed itself help people to begin new lives.

The ecological dimension of the themes of death and rebirth was already implicit in the motif of the sacrifice of a sacred king in fertility cults, explored in Frazer's (1922) famous study, and Hocart (1936), Dumézil (1968) and Sahlin (1981) all explored aspects of the relationships between kingship, alterity (the 'stranger king') and fertility or rebirth.³ Without asserting that the symbolic resonances of migrant reception in southern Italy as a return to life constitute a direct iteration of this ancient theme, we suggest that the formal resemblance is worth noting. Migration journeys described as death and rebirth, and migrant reception described as a return to life for migrants and local communities, together offer a compelling symmetry with the ritual process of death and rebirth and the role of an outsider (Frazer's inquiry begins with the escaped slave in the cult at Nemi) in renewing fertility and prosperity through the performance of a sacrifice. Perhaps this symmetry may offer a window into patterns of human thought and action that defy narrower culturalist or mechanistic explanations. What is certain is that these motifs have a powerful cross-cultural hold on the human imagination.

Migration research has largely eschewed considerations of myth or symbolism, even while emphasizing the theme of life. Border regimes have been described as reducing the possibilities for a life worth living, by confining people to reception or 'detention' centres and rendering them temporarily

immobile (Andersson 2014). Less attention has been paid to the possibilities for life that exist during such times of waiting (Rotter 2015). We focus on particular kinds of reception centres in which the beginnings and ends of life play central roles: centres for migrant maternity and perinatal care, and centres for unaccompanied minors, victims of trafficking and women suffering from mental health conditions resulting from trauma. Many of the migrants there described crossing borders as ritual events marking symbolic death and rebirth, and the centres we studied explicitly aim to provide the where-withal for starting a new life, leaving death behind. They strive towards the form of ethical action constituting a new beginning that Arendt (1958: 178) called 'natality'. Their functioning offers insight into the power of social and cultural notions and emotions related to the beginnings and ends of life, showing how they may attempt to transcend or escape biopolitical regimes of control by offering new possibilities for the regeneration of the relations between living beings.

BIRTH IN BORDERLANDS

We carried out field research from September 2016 to June 2017 in south-eastern Sicily. Vanessa Grotti studied migrant maternity and perinatal clinics, with contributions from Chiara Quagliariello,⁴ who carried out additional fieldwork in Palermo and Lampedusa. They examined small clinics (*poliambulatori*) and larger wards (*maternità*) that assess, treat and follow reproductive care patients at various stages of rescue and reception. Italy's state-funded universal healthcare system provides medical assistance to undocumented or unregistered patients, regardless of their legal status. Within this framework, reproductive care and paediatrics are considered national priorities protected by law, especially for patients deemed 'vulnerable' such as pregnant women and minors. In places where demand for medical assistance to undocumented patients is high, such as urban centres and borderlands, medical assistance to migrants is provided in specialized healthcare centres, with the assistance of interpreters (when funds are available), and the centres are often staffed by doctors and healthcare personnel who have chosen this type of work out of a sense of civic or religious duty. Contracts and work schedules in migrant clinics in peripheral, structurally under-resourced borderlands are often precarious and exhausting. In the case of southern Sicily and Lampedusa, these migrant health centres often function on the emergency model, providing assistance and specialized services around the clock, seven days a week. This is particularly true of the medical services present on board rescue ships and in ports. While nongovernmental organizations such as Médecins Sans Frontières and Save

the Children play a role in the rescue operations, almost all medical care is provided by mostly Sicilian state employees, in public structures. This trend is especially strong in reproductive and maternity care services.

Sicilian health workers frequently raised the theme of the ways in which birth and death are intertwined in the Mediterranean. After Vanessa and Chiara started fieldwork in the health clinics that were created for migrant care in a borderland characterized by high death tolls from maritime disasters, it quickly became noticeable that medical staff were drawing symbolic links between birth and death. Healthcare staff, midwives and rescue personnel pondered the subject of death when talking about birth, as they spoke about the emotional toll and profound satisfaction they felt from their practice, and the feeling of relief and healing they felt when witnessing and assisting a live birth in the midst of suffering and desperation. This theme of life emerging from tragedy was taken up by public figures: in a tweet posted by the then mayor of Lampedusa, Giusi Nicolini, on 4 September 2015, we are told of the triumph of life over death: above a photograph of a newborn baby she writes, ‘yesterday evening life and death arrived in #Lampedusa, but the winner was him: born on Motorboat @guardiacostiera #azzurromare.’⁵ After rescue operations of extreme tension and drama, in which a handful of emergency workers race against death and grapple with split-second moral dilemmas over whom to save as they struggle to recover scores of drowning victims, the birth of a live and healthy baby on board a rescue ship is described as a moment of collective healing and happiness.

Yet migrant women’s experience is not generally characterized by healing or catharsis. If Bloch and Parry highlighted the recurrence of the themes of fertility, sexuality and rebirth in funeral rituals and other mortuary practices, Vanessa’s field research seemed to expose the other side of the coin: the way that death and disintegration may be present at the time of birth, but also that choosing death over birth may be necessary to heal broken bodies. Most women seeking reproductive care in southern Sicily and Lampedusa spoke of feeling that their bodies were no longer their own, as a result of the physical and mental abuse they had suffered on their migration trail. In comparison with the equivalent data collected by members of Vanessa’s research team in other EU borderlands, such as Greece and Spain, the women who had arrived from Libya had endured considerably greater levels of violent abuse and exploitation. She did not intend to study the subject of the termination of pregnancy in relation to pregnant migrants in EU borderlands, but it soon became evident that due to the particular context of trafficking, violence and assault that women have to endure on the central Mediterranean route, the original scope of her team’s research had to open up to integrate wider aspects of reproductive health, and to include unwanted pregnancies and medical conditions such as amenorrhea, as these represent two

prominent areas of medical intervention requiring referral to specialized clinics in regional centres such as Palermo. Chiara found that biomedical staff described their choices for referral and treatment as being a way to help women rebuild their bodies and their senses of self; while they were deeply aware of the limitations of the services provided by the region, for instance the lack of mental health advisors and interpreters, their decision-making was informed by their stated attempts to heal the whole person, including her physical and mental states. The women felt that their potential reproductive forces had been shattered, and their own bodies had become aberrant to themselves. In some cases this was due to physical violence; in others, it was due to having taken or having been forced to take multiple doses of hormonal suppressants that halted their menses, with long-lasting effects. Their ability to give life had been suspended or terminated, disrupting or eliminating an entire life-stage – that of their fertile womanhood. Despite their youth, they felt as if they had become old women, in a brutal distortion of their cosmological role. Indeed they felt that they had become other to themselves – they barely recognized their own humanity. In equating this sensation to death, they evoked a conception of death that is articulated more clearly by certain animist peoples according to Istvan Praet (2013), for whom death is a form of alterity, rather than non-entity: in this sense, when one no longer recognizes oneself, one may consider oneself dead. Such cases demonstrate that the clinics' regenerative aims were often frustrated in practice.

HEALING AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

Special reception centres for vulnerable migrants seek to offer relief from the chaos and high tension of the rescue and first reception at sea, and from the immediate aftermath of landing in Italian ports. They provide an opportunity for recovery and healing after traumatic journeys that have usually lasted several years. In Italy, the law allows asylum seekers to take part in 'social integration' programmes and to attend school, and these centres are part of the publicly funded SPRAR (Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees), which takes a holistic approach to migrant reception, including rehabilitation through counselling and initiatives for social 'inclusion' (a term they prefer to 'integration'). Marc Brightman studied several such centres, situated in quiet country towns in Syracuse province and managed by the social enterprise Passwork under contract with the local authorities. Passwork's director, Sebino Scaglione, told Marc that he sees his objective as being to help the people hosted by his organization to regain personal 'autonomy' by guiding them through administrative processes, helping

them to engage with local communities through cultural activities and community work, and helping them to obtain employment. There are considerable obstacles to all of these objectives: many asylum claims are rejected, and some people spontaneously leave the centres to continue their journeys without waiting for their papers to be processed.⁶ The directions of Scaglione's efforts are nonetheless in marked contrast to the kind of 'infantilization' of migrants that occurs at large migrant detention centres (Andersson 2014: 185). Within reception centres, migrants' lives are structured by the physical environment and by the rhythms of daily life. The social life of the centre necessarily reinforces a shared sense of being migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, patients – more precisely, of having a place of asylum or refuge after a perilous journey, at least in a moral sense, if not (yet) officially. Especially in the case of trafficked women, but also for minors (and especially for those who fit into both categories), relations with outsiders are controlled and limited by the centre personnel; yet these personnel try to organize as many activities and outings as they can, and nearly all of the minors attend local schools.

Tomi's⁷ story illustrates the experience shared by many. Short and wiry, Tomi describes himself as having a strong personal philosophy of 'getting on in life'. He comes from Guinea, from the Peul community, in Ratoma (a part of Conakry strongly associated with the opposition to the government of President Moussa Dadis Camara). He recounts how the army killed and arrested demonstrators against the government; they came to Ratoma where they beat and raped the women and arrested men and boys.⁸ On 9 November 2015, Tomi escaped from prison and left the country; he fled to Mali, then to Libya, where he worked in the construction industry. He had to work twelve hours a day, and at the end of the day, he would never be sure whether the 'Arab'⁹ in charge of the work squad would pay wages or threaten him with his gun instead. In Libya he lived in a prison where the prisoners were beaten daily. They received tiny amounts of bread and water to eat and drink. There were even more flagrant forms of slavery, including for sex.¹⁰ In Libya, he said, a Black person cannot move around freely – they risk arrest, imprisonment and extortion¹¹ – the water is undrinkable and they cannot obtain medical care. One of his companions had malaria and asked to go to hospital; the 'Arab' took him away, and later said that he had brought him to a hospital for people with AIDS or Ebola. The man never returned. Some time later, following a collective beating, Tomi and his companions had the courage to ask what had happened to the ill man. Asking such a question was a challenge to the 'Arab's' authority, and asking it was risking punishment by death, but, Tomi says, 'we were all together, so he wouldn't kill all of us'. The 'Arab' answered that he had taken the man into the desert and killed him. One day the 'Arab' suddenly said, 'I'm going to get rid of you – go and die',

and the next day Tomi was taken to a boat. It was his first time travelling on water; there were some women and children sleeping; when he raised his head and saw water all around, he felt dizzy. A Nigerian had a telephone to call the Italian Coast Guard, but he had exhausted the battery. After a long and frightening time lost at sea, a helicopter flew over them and took an aerial photograph to identify the boat's helmsman. There were 130 people on board, including forty women, some of whom were pregnant. They were saved by Spaniards. Tomi comments that according to Islam, if you die in the water, you are responsible for your own soul.¹² Despite this, many people prefer to die in the water than to stay in Libya.

Since arriving in the south-eastern Sicilian port of Pozzallo a year and a half earlier, Tomi had lived in a reception centre for minors in the small town of Palazzolo Acreide, in the Hyblaeen hills. There, he had to work because he received no pocket money and no clothes; he picked peas, spinach and beans as an undeclared labourer, at a rate of EUR 15 for seven hours. He said that he did not want to work in the countryside again – it is too hard. Here in Floridia, he recently passed the examination of the third year of middle school, and he hopes to become a geologist and to travel the world.

Many people told us of how they had escaped death by drowning only to spend months in overcrowded first-stage reception centres in Italy, far from urban centres, where they were fed badly and were denied the meagre allowance they were due: most felt lost, disorientated and not yet ready to make their own way.¹³ Almost all of them were between the ages of 15 and 25. The social inclusion initiatives can take many forms: in 2017 the young men at the SPRAR in Floridia chose to clean the municipal cemetery, as an act of commemoration for those who had died at sea. At Carnival they acted as a human cordon, donning fluorescent jackets and holding a rope to protect the crowd of onlookers from straying into the path of the procession. In the summer of 2017, Marc took part in a ceramic art project in several of the reception centres, together with two local artists, to produce a collective work to be displayed permanently in the town centre – tellingly, this project celebrating migrant reception as urban renewal was not fully realized, despite having the support of the mayor, and instead culminated in a temporary exhibition. During the same summer, the boys in the centre for minors in Canicattini Bagni, who attend the local middle school, participated in a production of Aeschylus's play *The Suppliants* at the annual European youth theatre festival in Palazzolo Acreide. According to the abilities and experience of the individuals concerned, the SPRAR organizes paid work experience or apprenticeship programmes, sometimes leading to employment contracts. These small successes are enabled by a belief, continually reaffirmed by the centre's staff, and, more waveringly, by its inhabitants, in the possibility of a return to life.



Figure 3.1. The cast of *The Suppliants* at the Akrai Greek theatre in Palazzo Acreide. © Marc Brightman.

In these small rural towns where most young people of working age go to seek employment elsewhere (in the city, in northern Italy or in Northern Europe), those sympathetic to the work of refugee hospitality regard the refugees as a resource for the community, a potential source of new vitality, as the mayor of Canicattini Bagni, Paolo Amenta, enthusiastically told Marc to explain his support for Passwork. The programme most symbolic of this vision is the collaboration between the SPRAR and Arcolaio, an NGO that cultivates and gathers aromatic herbs (rosemary [*Rosmarinus officinalis*], wild sage [*Salvia triloba*, better for essential oils], domestic sage [*Salvia officinalis*], parsley [*Petroselinum crispum*] and wild fennel [*Foeniculum vulgare*]) in the Hyblaeen hills. At first it used labour as a form of rehabilitation for newly released prisoners, and it subsequently included refugees. The herbs are sold through a solidarity network, and the essential oils are being sold to the cosmetics company Lush, through the British NGO Gaia Education. One participant in this programme, Ali, found his vocation, and went into partnership with Mario, a former schoolteacher and IT engineer, to create a small farm on permaculture and agroecology principles, producing saffron and olives in addition to the aromatic herbs. Ali's case is a good example of the 'autonomy' that Sebino strives to obtain for his wards.

Few of the teenagers and young men and women in these reception centres, and fewer still in the perinatal clinics, have clear ambitions or visions for the paths ahead of them, and they find their way tentatively, improvising and taking opportunities as they arise. Some sink into depression and will not discuss their futures. But most young migrants in Sicily take extraordinary care of their appearance, spending what little money they have on new, colourful shoes and clothing – their bright colours stand out like a new skin, symbolizing new life, the new start that they hope to make.¹⁴ Others request that their old travelling clothes be destroyed, to help them forget. The importance of this change of clothes should not be underestimated – other authors have noted the way that clothes can create connections between biological and social selves (Basu and Coleman 2008) or express personhood (Küchler and Miller 2005), but in this case the act of donning new clothes expresses a metamorphosis of the kind we are used to encountering in native Amazonia, where cosmological mobility is accompanied by the changing of ‘skin’ (in the Trio language, ‘skin’ and ‘clothes’ are known by the same word); even more than this, it suggests a social transformation evoking the symbolic rebirth characteristic of initiation rituals; yet in the absence of formal organization, ritual ideology or explicit articulation of the ritual aspects of this transformation, we can only compare these symbolic elements.

Some migrants in the reception centres in Sicily do gradually start new lives. One woman, living in the sanctuary for refugee women with psychological trauma in Canicattini, succeeded in becoming an apprentice pastry chef in the Corsino pastry shop of Palazzolo Acreide, awarded the prize of best pastry shop in Sicily and listed in the prestigious *Gambero Rosso* restaurant guide. But the promise of a new life can be illusory: Sebino and his colleagues worried about another woman who was clinging to a possible job opportunity as a hairdresser in Turin. Far away in Piedmont, they suspected that she might once again fall into the hands of her traffickers, to be coerced once more into prostitution; yet they had conflicting feelings because they were at the same time keen to support her in her desire to become autonomous and begin a new life with her infant son. These two examples also illustrate that Sicily can be more than a mere stage on migrant journeys with destinations in large metropolitan cities or in Northern Europe, as is commonly imagined. Very few of the people we met had a clear idea of their destination, and those who did want to travel north usually hoped to join family members. Some people would travel as far as Scandinavia, before coming, or returning, to Syracuse (Passwork 2015). Others would be glad to go anywhere they were offered a job; others still chose to settle and start their new lives in Syracuse or in the Hyblaeen hills.

KINSHIP, REBIRTH AND PERSONHOOD

However they may begin, the journeys that migrants make along the central Mediterranean route have the effect of blurring any possible distinction between refugees and economic migrants – by the time they reach Italy, most migrants have lost nearly everything, have suffered torture and bereavement and cannot go back. Social death, at least in the case of the central Mediterranean route, does not necessarily occur at the migrant's place of origin; instead, while it may begin there, it is drawn out and gradually completed during the course of the journey itself. Before arriving in reception centres, migrants have left their homes, their kin, their countries, gradually shedding layers of sociality as they went. There is an important reason that these refugees' personhood is so powerfully defined by their deadly crossings: each of them has become socially alone, without kin. At each stage of their journeys they were separated from familiar relations. First they left their homes and immediate families, and then, as they moved from one form of bondage to another along the migration trail, they were separated repeatedly from companions, and lost most of their possessions. But beyond this, going back to their first departures, we discovered that many of these young people left their homes because of problems with kinship. Many girls fled because they were being forced to marry: for instance, one girl, Mina, from Nigeria, was from a Catholic family and fell in love with a Muslim man from Senegal; her parents opposed the marriage, and the couple eloped, first to Burkina Faso, and then to Libya. Another Nigerian girl, Hope, discovered when she finished school that her education had been paid for by a friend of her father, in exchange for her as his third wife. Many boys left after falling out with fathers or uncles, such as Sam, from Guinea, who left after being mistreated by his uncle, with whom he was sent to live in the city when his father was killed in political violence. The breakdown of family relations, often intertwined with political turmoil and violence more conventionally associated with refugee narratives, has repercussions for these young people following their arrival in Europe, because it reduces the possibility for them to reconnect with their kin using social media.

Family reunifications after the trail are often complicated. For instance, Blessing, from Nigeria, was living in Libya with her 9-year-old son. She decided that it had become too dangerous to stay there, but only managed to find passage to Italy for him. She sent him ahead alone. It took her four years to find a way to follow him, and when she arrived, she found that he had been taken in by a Sicilian foster family in Florida. He had adopted a new identity through family life and school, and at first he wanted nothing to do with his biological mother. Blessing, traumatized by her journey and by her break with her son, was taken in by the sanctuary for vulnerable women

migrants, where, over time, she was able gradually to rebuild a relationship with her son.

Migrants rebuild social relations in the idiom of kinship and processual consanguinity, even from within reception centres. The teenage boys and girls in these centres call each other brothers and sisters, in a fraternity they say was forged through the experiences of suffering that they have shared (cf. Weston 1991). Yet this solidarity, expressed as kinship, may in fact be a symptom of trauma, or a temporary coping mechanism, rather than a way of overcoming social death. The psychologist working at one of the centres we studied reflected on an Eritrean girl's description of being in a prison camp in Libya, where she and all of the prisoners were forced to kneel in a space barely large enough to contain them; they were so close together they could not move. When they were fed, the guards threw bread into the space. Those fortunate enough to catch some pieces of bread never tried to take as much as possible for themselves, but instead, the pieces were divided up so that everybody received a share, however small. One day the same girl, in the reception centre, started an argument with some other girls over a sandwich, which she was determined to have for herself. How was it possible that here, where there was plenty to eat for everyone, the girls would fight over food, when in Libya they had shared their scarce rations equally? The psychologist hypothesized that, during the ordeal of camp life, individual identities become submerged, allowing the formation of a single body of people; when a person becomes well again, the individual re-emerges, sometimes leading to conflicts and disputes. Her interpretation is consistent with analyses of migrants' political protests as important expressions of their personhood and agency, in contrast to the dehumanizing (albeit well-intentioned) accounts of their suffering (Kallius, Monterescu and Rajaram 2016). However, rather than undermining the processual kinship relations that have been forged through suffering, we suspect that this re-emergence of the individual allows for the strengthening of particular ties and the breaking of others – a heterogenization of the ties of relatedness characteristic of vital processes.

There is a strong temptation for researchers to represent the migrant as a suffering subject. Once they have shed relations of kinship, many friendships and possessions, and been housed in a structure that frames them as objects of care and charity, it is difficult to see beyond their individual plight. But in yielding to this temptation, as Heath Cabot (2016) has argued, what ethnographers or advocates portray are little more than ghosts – absent presences – in which the subjects in question may scarcely even recognize themselves. Such representations neglect other dimensions of the social worlds of migration, reducing diverse moral and cultural subjectivities to positions of (instrumentalized) oppressor or oppressed under regimes of governmentality (Robbins 2013; Ortnor 2016). This no doubt tells part of the story. But

we are not convinced that control, discipline or governmentality are the principal motive forces behind migrant reception, or that the provision of universal healthcare for migrant patients or the operation of small reception centres for migrants can only be analysed through this lens. At the very least, the border regime itself is a diverse system, and in its margins there lie new possibilities for life (cf. Tsing 2017).

CONCLUSION

Narratives of suffering tend to treat subjects as isolated individuals. Instead, kinship resurfaces at every opportunity, not only among migrants themselves: often local families become guardians, foster parents or adoptive parents for migrant children, and while it is easy to argue for why children have a need for parents, it is worth thinking about the motivations of Sicilians and other Italians who want to care for them. All that we can be sure of is that they see migrant children without kin, they recognize their need for kin and they feel impelled to reciprocate by satisfying this need – but, as with acts of grace as defined by Julian Pitt-Rivers, these acts of becoming guardians or fosterers, or of adoption, also transcend reciprocity (Pitt-Rivers 2012; Grotti and Brightman 2019).

We have seen that migrants in reception centres call each other brothers and sisters, and it is not unusual for notional consanguinity to be a way of bypassing or neutralizing alterity, creatively transforming kinship to ensure social reproduction (Grotti 2012). Similarly, Vilaça (2010) has shown how the Wari' readily adopted Protestant Christianity because it made it possible for them to bypass the danger and ambivalence of affinal relations by calling each other brothers and sisters, helping them to maintain their social cohesion in a time of severe social trauma and crisis. But the ethnography of Amazonia demonstrates that while consanguineal relationships may be desirable and reassuring, they are ultimately sterile (Henley 2001). In the case that we are discussing this is true for migrants as well as for local communities. We are referring here not to the cases of guardianship, fostering and adoption, but rather more broadly to Sicilian communities that have themselves been gradually left sterile through decades of abandonment through emigration. The land itself has been abandoned by farmers, and projects such as that of Arcolaio seek to regenerate it. Migrants, as objects of hospitality, are stranger-guests, and as Pitt-Rivers (2012: 504; cf. Grotti and Brightman 2019) writes, 'the status of guest . . . stands midway between that of hostile stranger and that of community member'. This midway status, in terms of kinship, evokes affinity and thus the potential for the creation of new life in the form of social reproduction.

Finally, it is through time that relations of alterity can be turned into relations of affinity or kinship: by physical proximity in the materiality of a landscape, sustained interaction or shared substance through commensality. For migrants in Sicilian migrant reception centres and clinics are not merely subjected to the medical or institutional gaze, and the time of waiting there is not just reduced to an endless liminal state of disciplining suspension. On the contrary, as these migrants wait, they weave new webs of consanguinity and affinity, hoping to be reborn as new social persons, and sometimes succeeding. In their relationship with the other – with local inhabitants, and with reception and medical personnel – the memory of suffering and bereavement produces a cathartic effect, which, as Cabot (2016: 655) argues, ‘may incite a transformation of the relationship between self and other, demanding a different vision of how the body politic is constituted’, that is, a ‘vision of tragedy which centres on the power of encounter, indeterminacy, and potentially also transformation: in other words, possibility.’¹⁵ Death, as Bloch and Parry (1982) suggested, can lead the living to act to create or reconfigure social order.

If migrants’ descriptions of their own journeys in terms of death and rebirth frame them as rites of passage, meanwhile in the marginalized places of Sicily, where people feel abandoned by the Italian state, migrant reception actors associate migrants’ efforts to return to life with the possibility of social and ecological renewal: strangers and ‘devalued outsiders’ (though hardly kings) representing hopes of restoring the land’s prosperity. This view echoes the utilitarian arguments of economists who suggest that young migrants are necessary to correct the demographic deficit due to low birth rates in Europe, especially in Italy (Bagavos 2022). To be sure, the compassion that many ordinary people show to migrants in borderland ‘hotspots’ like Sicily and Lampedusa starkly contrasts with widespread political expressions of fear, resentment and prejudice, and the calls for migrants to be allowed to revitalize the economy stoke the incendiary narrative of replacement theory (Shatz et al. 2022). As Henri-Georges Clouzot (1949) powerfully illustrates in the post-war film *Retour à la vie*, the return to life can be traumatic, messy and prone to failure, challenging the optimism of utopian visions of resurgence. But the will to live persists, and with it the narrative of return.

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NOTES

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1. Arrivals in Lampedusa began to significantly decrease from 2017 due to Italian and EU policy measures to contain migration from the African continent, especially through cooperation with the Libyan authorities.
2. This ‘quest for life’ can also be seen as a sort of resistance, and an assertion of legitimacy; cf. Krause, this volume.
3. Allen (2007: 192) writes that the ‘fourth function’ that he identifies in Indo-European myth ‘is defined as covering what is other, outside, or beyond relative to the three “classical” functions [identified by Dumézil], and its positive aspect covers sovereigns, kings, founders, and creators, while its negative aspect covers enemies, slaves, demons, and other devalued outsiders’. Greater attention has been paid to kingship as this ‘positive aspect’ of the fourth function, and rather less to the symbolic dimensions of ‘devalued outsiders’.
4. A postdoctoral fellow on Grotti’s ERC research project ‘EU Border Care’.
5. Giusi Nicolini (@giusi_nicolini), 2015, ‘Ieri sera a #Lampedusa sono arrivate vita e morte, ma ha vinto lui: nato su Motovedetta @guardiacostiera #azzurromare’, Twitter, 4 September, retrieved 21 November 2023 from https://twitter.com/giusi_nicolini/status/639700710033092608. In fact the baby was a girl.
6. Problems connected to documentation can continue even into the next generation; see Tuckett, this volume.

7. We use pseudonyms for persons (except public figures) throughout.
8. These events are discussed in a UNHCHR report (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2014).
9. Tomi uses the term 'Arab' to designate a member of Libya's majority Arabized Berber population.
10. The extent to which rape has become a weapon of terror in Libya has yet to be properly understood; the investigative journalist Cécile Allegra (2017) offers a first appraisal.
11. The form this generally takes is that the prisoner is forced to contact their family members and is tortured; they must ask their family to send money to end the torture.
12. We have found no evidence that this is part of Islamic doctrine, but this by no means diminishes the emotional consequences of holding such a belief.
13. Rather than being a clear matter of (in)competence in either case (Mahmud, this volume), the emergency response in Italian borderlands suggests very high technical competence, whereas in first-stage reception centres it is difficult to disentangle accusations of mismanagement from the problems arising from insufficient resources.
14. As Edmondo de Amicis described (1996), Italian emigrants in the nineteenth century did the same thing.
15. There is a kind of scholarly myth of origin of Greek tragedy, which suggests that it arose out of Dionysian rituals 'connected with the circling year, the mysteries of death and rebirth, alternating joy and sorrow' (Kitto 1960: 3), whose doubtful basis in historical fact does not prevent the association from persisting.

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CHAPTER 4

‘AN UNJUSTIFIED REVOLT’

Italian Political Discourse and Chinese Migrant Resistance to Inspection Culture

Elizabeth L. Krause



INTRODUCTION

Since all men are ‘political beings’, all are also ‘legislators’.

—Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*

In what ways does contemporary political discourse limit or expand rights? In this chapter, I draw on ethnographic research to parse the ways in which official political discourse appeals to common sense to rationalize an inspection regime and demonize migrant resistance. I take as the object of analysis political discourse connected with a series of events culminating in a protest that turned violent in the heart of metropolitan Tuscany after Chinese migrants clashed with Italian health inspectors and riot police. What is it to negate or justify political protest? This case study has implications for the knowledge production of contemporary anthropology and for understanding the epistemologies of quotidian life. It extends the anthropological study of Italy to a transnational scale.

Two noteworthy events – a fire and a protest – frame this chapter. These events are remarkable not only for their tragedy and violence but also for the political discourse and reactions they generated. This chapter begins with the fire, situates the event in anthropological methods, moves to the protest and then analyses the inspection regime that developed in between. The narrative arc connects the two events as new political discourses emerged.

This chapter resonates with a number of others in this book as they contribute collectively to an intimate understanding of the migrant experience in Italy. Migrant experiences are often assumed to be similarly ‘othered’; instead, we learn that their experiences are deeply varied, whether in terms of the ways in which migrant youth express their feelings (Tuckett), refugees encounter state-sanctioned incompetence that leaves them undocumented and vulnerable to European racial hierarchies (Mahmud), or migrant survivors become enlivened through regenerative discourses that foster an ecology of life on Italy’s deadly southern border (Grotti and Brightman). Provocative are the contrasts in bureaucratic practice, as well as in different forms of resistance, perspectives and meaning-making. Migrant alterity becomes less a monolithic mass and more a floating fragment (see Jhally et al. 1997).

THE POLITICS OF FIRE

On 1 December 2013, around 7 o’clock in the morning, flames swept through Teresa Moda, a small fast-fashion factory in the heart of greater metropolitan Tuscany. The fire killed seven Chinese migrants, who worked and lived in the space. Initially, I followed the happenings from afar. An investigation revealed that the facility had barred windows and lacked emergency exits. The small firm, located in the Prato industrial district known as Macrolotto 1, included sewing machines and clothing pieces as well as a mezzanine where workers used dormitory-style rooms separated by plasterboard to sleep or take breaks (Revelli 2016). Somewhat ironically, the factory was located in Via Toscana – indexing the association between Tuscany, the Renaissance, the Made in Italy brand and all things beautiful. Reports described smoke quickly filling every corner of the workshop, thus rendering in vain any attempt by the workers to find their way out. The seven victims died through asphyxiation. Responses to this deadly fire repositioned institutions, stimulated new political alliances and accelerated workplace safety and surveillance practices (Krause and Bressan 2014; Bracci 2016: 310).

The fire had a strong impact on international public opinion (Krause and Bressan 2014), occurring as it did the same year as the collapse in Dhaka, Bangladesh of ‘Rana Plaza’, an eight-storey building that housed garment subcontractors and took the lives of over a 1,100 victims. Although far smaller in scale, Teresa Moda upended the notion that ‘Made in Italy’ meant dignified working conditions. International coverage intensified concerns. Textile and fashion industry representatives expressed worries about the Made in Italy brand’s international reputation, which has generally proven resilient even in a globalized fashion market.



Figure 4.1. A fast-fashion warehouse in Prato. © Agnese Morganti.

For example, a cartoon circulated on the internet that depicted singed shirts and dresses hanging on a clothesline with a Made in Italy tag. The image played on the common English idiom of hanging dirty laundry out to dry as it referenced damage to the label's reputation, suggesting that the cartoon was directed at an international anglophone audience. Meanwhile, television, print media, film, and garment activists reported on the complex layers of subcontracting and hidden immigrant labour behind even luxury name brands (Clean Clothes Campaign 2014).

In the weeks that followed the Teresa Moda fire, alliances swiftly forged across the political spectrum in the name of security. Anti-immigrant xenophobes suddenly joined forces with pro-immigrant politicians. At a discursive level, both sides positioned themselves as humanitarian supporters, accusing Chinese migrants of exploitative working conditions that mirrored slavery. On the policy front, the event mobilized Tuscany's Regional Council to promote greater levels of safety in the workplace and greater protection of the dignity and health of workers (Decision No. 5 of 16 December 2013; Bressan and Krause 2017; Krause and Bressan 2014). The fire accelerated workplace safety policies and charted new ground as it extended to a wider political territory than was customary (Bracci 2016).

More than six months after the fire – to be exact, some 203 days – I attended the heart-rending public funeral of the victims, in a parking lot



Figure 4.2. The funeral of the Teresa Moda fire victims (21 June 2014).
© Elizabeth Krause.

across from the hospital where I had conducted fieldwork with migrant parents and their infants.

The funeral was the saddest day of my fieldwork. Local dignitaries joined about three hundred mostly Chinese migrants. Attendees sat in folding chairs facing six coffins, overflowing with flowers and identified with names and photos of the deceased. The memorial service combined Christian, Buddhist and secular elements: military wreaths of state; official flags; Buddhist bells; evangelical hymns. Young women handed out long-stemmed gerbera daisies to greet attendees. A charismatic evangelical preacher offered condolences. The mayor and other dignitaries called for increased workplace safety measures. A choir led the singing of ‘Amazing Grace’, familiar to Chinese evangelicals and to me, a lapsed Lutheran, but not to my Catholic-raised Italian sweater-maker friend. The most moving part of the ceremony occurred when everyone was asked to bring their white daisies to the front to place them on a coffin. This was followed by the survivors going to the front to mourn their loved ones. Women wailed and wailed; men mourned quietly. One woman was so overcome with grief that she had to be treated by paramedics.

The near six-month delay offered a symbolic contrast between the time it took for one of the most fundamental of human rites and the breakneck pace at which these migrant worker-victims toiled. The temporality suggests that something was terribly wrong – that the value of their lives was almost as inconsequential as the clothes they made. The message from a memorable

handwritten sign, ‘Sorrow Has No Colour’, appearing in the *New York Times* (Povoledo 2013) rushed through my mind. The event revealed that there *was* a colour to sorrow: its hues were saturated by a global economic system that demands cheap and super-flexible labour to make possible trendy clothes at bargain prices. The message conveys that all humans regardless of their colour or creed experience sorrow. The sign asserts humanity in the context of a brutal system of racial capitalism.

This chapter takes seriously the insight that ‘hurricanes and earthquakes do not make history; people’s conceptions of such phenomena, and responses to them, do’ (Farnetti and Stewart 2012: 432). The fire stimulated a formidable inspection regime with profound changes in the political discourses and policies concerning migrant workers in a city known for its thriving post-war economy and population boom, as well as its contemporary concentration of transnational labour and births to ‘foreign’ women (Bressan and Tosi Cambini 2011; Baldassar et al. 2015; Krause 2018). As an inspection regime gained momentum, Chinese migrants responded with political organizing and bold resistance.

In many ways, the multitude of responses was unexpected and thus invites reflection. This chapter focuses on the politics surrounding ‘crisis’. It departs from the fire, takes stock of the surveillance regime and analyses the political discourse surrounding a protest that turned violent as Chinese migrants clashed with Italian health inspectors and riot police. In particular, the chapter takes as its object of analysis the contrasting evaluations of the protest: Italian political discourse described it as an ‘unjustified revolt’ whereas Chinese observers stood firm in the view that the protestors’ actions were fully justified.

ANTHROPOLOGY AS A BASTARD DISCIPLINE: UNDERSTANDING AND CRITIQUING WORLDS

In centring political discourse related to two events, this chapter opens a window onto contemporary dynamics of Italian public life. A goal of the anthropological project has long been to illuminate and critically contemplate worlds as they are and as they might be (Crehan 2016; De Martino 1977; Hurston 2018; Tsing 2015; Willis and Trondman 2000). In a sense, anthropology has always been a bit of a bastard discipline. Its methods have been questioned as lacking in reproducibility. Its modes of knowledge production have been viewed as quirky and genre-bending. Geertz (1988) famously described it as mulelike: part lab report, part romance. Its positions have often been accused of being contrary and troublemaking. What constitutes legitimate political engagement? Who decides when politics

become stigmatized as illegitimate? How do borders and regimes that reproduce them shape these logics?

The metaphor of bastardy, with its underlying tensions between legitimacy and illegitimacy, is productive to think with. In *Bastards of Utopia*, Maple Razsa's (2015) account of alter-globalization political actors makes use of the term 'bastards' to underscore how certain political subjects are produced as debased. These actors' politics and desires transcended state borders. Their modes of political engagement subverted what Razsa has described as a nationalist version of culture that tended toward being unified and bounded. They were bastards precisely because of the way in which they affirmed instead a sense of culture that was not exclusionary but rather steeped in do-it-yourself, or 'DIY', sensibilities and collectivities.

Razsa's project brings to mind Antonio Gramsci's ideas about political participation, especially the insight that everyone is a legislator: 'Every man, in as much as he is active, i.e. living, contributes to modifying the social environment in which he develops . . .; in other words he tends to establish "norms", rules of living and of behaviour' (Gramsci 1971: 265). The idea that every person is a legislator has always struck me as profound. Establishing norms does not happen exclusively in parliamentary and congressional procedures but also through quotidian practices. Gramsci suggests that not only lawmakers make laws, but that everyone does so. Core to our species being is to be political – to contribute to the social environment in which we exist. In contributing, we are constantly remaking that social environment.

Of course, the naked truth is that rights vary widely in a globalized world of nation states and borders due to a range of statuses, from those who are incarcerated or carry the burden of a felony conviction to those who are undocumented and thus have limits to their participation in key institutions, those who are residents but without full citizenship rights, and those who assume substantial care work due to choices or limitations (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Krause and Li 2020). Nevertheless, all humans are subject to the cultural revolutions of ongoing state formation as they follow laws or defy them. Corrigan and Sayer (1985) argue that capitalist development and state formation are deeply linked, and that together they create a moral ethos that shapes mindsets and leans towards validating the inequalities of bourgeois society. In this sense, quotidian acts are deeply political. These acts can also reveal core values and a given population's relationship to politics and civil society. Participating in a protest as an exercise of one's fundamental rights may be riskier for certain individuals than for others. Thus, at the end of the day, the stakes of negating or justifying a protest are high.

Of course, Gramsci knew in an embodied sort of way about political subversives. He was writing from a prison cell because he had criticized and threatened the Fascist regime, a fact that suggests beyond a doubt that he

was poignantly aware that all political engagement was not equally legitimate in the eyes of the state. All men – and all humans – have the potential to be political beings, but all humans are not in a similar position to realize that potential. Gramsci distinguished between different degrees of power, such as that held by ordinary people as opposed to by state actors. This latter group, elected or career, ‘have at their disposal the legal coercive powers of the State’ (Gramsci 1971: 266).

In sorting out the case of the protest and its evaluation in political discourse, it is important to frame all participants as political actors. That said, there are significant differences in their roles as ‘legislators’. The most significant difference is access to state coercive powers. In the case of the protest discussed below, Italian elected officials had coercive powers at their direct disposal whereas Chinese migrant protestors were directly subjected to those coercive powers, although they eventually reached out to the consulate for intervention.

ENCOUNTER ETHNOGRAPHY AS METHOD

My analysis draws on insights from various periods of ethnographic fieldwork extending back to the mid-1990s with in-person and virtual stints continuing into the present (see Krause and Bressan 2020). Beginning in 2012, I served as principal investigator for several years on the transnational collaborative project ‘Tight Knit’ focusing on Chinese migrants working in the fast-fashion industry in greater metropolitan Tuscany. I spent 220 days across seven trips between 2012 and 2015 as the project’s principal investigator conducting urban ethnographic research at various sites and events across the city, its industrial district and nearby *frazioni*, or villages. Ethnographic data derived largely from two different types: unstructured, in the form of participant observation and socially occurring discourse, especially in a hospital paediatric ward as well as at public events, and semi-structured, in the form of audio-recorded interviews with Chinese as well as Italian participants (N = 72). Conference participation and short-term field visits have continued into the present as much as possible. Prato and its sprawling province, which cuts across post-war industrial districts and picturesque hill towns, serve as a laboratory of globalization (Krause 2015; Krause and Bressan 2018).

The idea to examine inspections articulates well with the innovation of *encounter ethnography* as a method. I conceptualized encounter ethnography as a methodological strategy to guide a team-based transnational collaboration. Encounter ethnography offers an approach to conducting research as well as a tactic for enriching analysis. In the legacy of ethnographic research,

many anthropologists have described encounters to emphasize experiences or processes that are at odds with one another, as in the phrases ‘colonial encounter’ (Asad 1973), ‘development encounter’ (Escobar 1991), ‘inter-cultural encounter’ (Sahlins 2000), ‘clinical encounter’ (Ferzacca 2000), ‘fieldwork encounters’ (Borneman and Hammoudi 2009) and ‘activist encounters’ (Razsa 2015).

Rather than leave encounters to the realm of common sense, our team nurtured encounter ethnography as a theoretically informed framework. Considering encounters as points of interpenetration and mediation enriches interpretations grounded in local contexts yet with global dimensions. The approach takes inspiration from Eric Wolf’s (1982) billiard ball critique of the culture concept, Anna Tsing’s (2015) call for the arts of noticing and Ernesto De Martino’s (1977) sensibilities related to analytic categories and observational paradoxes. The approach offers value for understanding relationships between immigrants, majority populations and global systems. How do the ways in which people are entangled in global supply chains bind people together or tear them apart? How do security or health systems underwrite or undermine belonging? Multiple senses of belonging may be rendered invisible through urban segregation patterns, heightened security and criminalizing discourses. In this sense, I see encounter ethnography as a methodological positioning that works against the sorts of divisions coursing through many societies the world over.

THE OSMANNORO PROTEST: JUSTIFIED OR UNJUSTIFIED?

Three years after the fire, its after-effects on the relationship between migrant workers and local authorities were still being felt. A hostile inspection is what supposedly triggered protests near Prato. On 29 June 2016, Italian public health (ASL) inspectors entered a large workshop in Osmannoro, a commercial area in the Commune of Sesto Fiorentino on the outskirts of Florence. They were accompanied by law enforcement. Public versions varied from social media to news accounts. *La Repubblica* emphasized a scene involving shouts, shoves and clashes; the arrival of inspectors, then riot police, ignited a fuse that set off tensions and erupted in protestors throwing stones, bottles and cans. Sirens blared. Seven were reportedly injured. Protesters raised the Chinese flag in a show of solidarity (Serranò et al. 2016). Even the mainstream press acknowledged contrasting accounts of what initiated the protest. All versions agree that there was a baby in the fray. An Italian account suggested that the Chinese factory owner pushed the inspectors and police, using a baby as a shield; the Chinese community offered another version of the story.

The Chinese blog 华人街, or *huárén jie* (referring to Chinatowns scattered around the world), circulated a version of events based on eyewitness accounts as well as numerous photographs. When inspectors arrived, in addition to encountering workers, they also met a visitor: a man of about 50 years holding his ten-month-old grandson. This grandfather figure had stopped by to visit a relative. When the man noticed the inspectors, he tried to leave, but the officials ordered him to stay inside. The man protested, a scuffle ensued and the baby fell to the ground. The grandfather, shaken and angry, reportedly bit the hand of the police officer who was blocking him, at which point other agents intervened, pushed him to the ground and wounded him on the head. In less than an hour, hundreds of Chinese citizens arrived at an open lot, just walking distance from the large Ikea store in Florence. Protests continued late into the night and violent clashes took place with law enforcement and riot police.

Versions of the underlying cause of the protest vary wildly depending on the observers' point of view – from that of the firm owner (who was later arrested) to those of the Chinese protesters and those of Italian officials.

The blog *huárén jie* circulated images of injured protestors. In one, a Chinese man is pictured in the foreground, sprawled on the pavement, extending his arms above him, holding his left wrist with his right hand; a Carabinieri (military police) van looms behind him flanked by an imposing row of riot police with helmets and shields.

The image conveys a sense of vulnerability. In another, a Chinese man lies on a stretcher in front of an ambulance surrounded by Italian emergency responders as a crowd of Chinese bystanders watch.

The Chinese blog Mobile Phone Abroad Forum (手机留园), popular among overseas Chinese, reported the results of a poll about the Osmannoro clashes. In just a few hours, more than three thousand readers participated, mostly Chinese migrants living in Italy, but also those based in Zhejiang with family in Tuscany, as well as former migrants themselves. The survey asked, 'Considering the tension between Italian Police and Chinese people, what do you think?' Although the survey was hardly scientific, it arguably represents a quotidian form of political participation. The results suggested that a large majority viewed the protest as justified whereas a minority of respondents supported a calmer approach:

- 26 per cent (797 respondents) believed that the 'Chinese people were not very calm. They should rationally request for protection of their rights and respect the local laws.'
- 74 per cent (2,253 respondents) expressed the view that 'Italian police were too cruel. Chinese people should be united and fight back.'

Another line of evidence that demonstrates how the Chinese migrant actions were seen as justified came in the form of two screenshots from WeChat, the most popular social media platform in China, which appeared on the Overseas Chinese Street Forum on 30 June 2016:

The battlefield is at the backdoor
 The police came to get fines
 No problem,
 but they found some problems to get fines on purpose
 The ambulance came
 The final witness came out
 The worker swore at the police, *cazzo*, no money
 The policeman handcuffed him, then he bit the police
 Later, four policemen came and violently beat him
 The witness said she was so scared,
 and apologized on her knees,
 then the police lightened up a little.
 Asked the police to leave first
 Somebody took photos, but got deleted by the police
 There were few people behind
 He was at the empty ground at the back door,
 some people were trapped in the factory,
 some left before.

(Translation by Ying Li)

The reference to a ‘battlefield’ indicates the fierceness of the conflict, the intensity of the stakes and the determination of migrants. In a sense, the idea that the ‘battlefield is at the backdoor’ itself suggests how the migrants were living this fight on a daily basis. Describing the conflict as a battlefield situates the Osmannoro protest not simply as a pursuit of benefits or rights, but as a claim of community protection given a collective sense of being unfairly targeted and violently treated. Just as Gramsci predicted, the workers’ protests were ‘legislating’ new norms as they pushed back against the practices of a racialized inspection regime.

By contrast, Italian officials questioned the legitimacy of the resistance and attributed the spontaneous mobilization to the Chinese mafia, thus reinforcing a stereotype of migrants as criminals who negate civic life and refuse to integrate (Lem 2010). The audacity of this attribution becomes clear as one recalls the history of the mafia, especially in southern Italy, but also the extensive anti-mafia movement throughout Italy in recent decades (Schneider and Schneider 2003). A detail that most struck political commentators and officials was the speed with which hundreds of Chinese individuals assembled in protest. It is to that temporal detail that I now turn.

Two days after the Osmannoro clashes, the President of the Region of Tuscany, Enrico Rossi, known for his role in promoting the quick

implementation of the Safe Work plan shortly after the Teresa Moda factory fire (discussed below), declared: 'If there are excesses in the controls, there is a right way to respond.' He described the protest as 'an unjustified revolt', and emphasized its 'dimensions', saying: 'it makes me suspect it was planned. . . . If I had to summon 30 people here in two hours, I could not succeed' (Il Tirreno 2016). Describing the protest as an 'unjustified' reaction dismisses not only its legitimacy but also the very rights of the participants as political subjects. A few days later, on 3 July, Prato's chief prosecutor took his turn to highlight the speed with which the protest went from just a few to hundreds of demonstrators, underscoring 'the fact that the Chinese community of Prato mobilized within a very short time and moved to Sesto' (Notizia di Prato 2016). For the investigation, he assigned an expert to analyse information on smartphones, tablets, computers and other devices seized during searches.

The hypocrisy of these statements and assumptions deserves to be highlighted: labour unions and political parties are often quick to mobilize. Had the workers in the factories been Italian, one can imagine that the Italian labour unions would have organized at least a local if not a national strike. Chinese workers have tended to avoid participating in the labour unions, however, and this refusal has created complex tensions between the unions and migrants.

Among Italian officials, awareness of the intensity and complexity with which migrants use the internet and smartphones was apparently low despite there being a range of studies, even promoted by the European Commission itself, to highlight the significance of mobile devices in integration processes related to social life and citizenship (see Codagnone and Kluzer 2011). Surprising consequences result from low awareness of social media. On the one hand, common sense leads to the belief that Chinese immigrants rely on an efficient network of relationships, or social capital, and hence express a fair degree of autonomy over public practices and policies. On the other hand, this belief promotes an attitude of exclusion: their ability to organize economic activities and social life is read as a denial or refusal of integration (Lem 2010).

The consequences of exclusion are significant. Ultimately, it is through such cultural logics that a large number of individuals and officials came to the conclusion that the spontaneous mobilization could be attributed to only one thing: the actions of the 'Chinese mafia'. Otherwise, observers reasoned, how on earth would it be possible to get so many people to show up so quickly?

'SAFE WORK' AND THE COMMON SENSE OF INSPECTIONS

Questioning the protest, in terms of how quickly so many people showed up, became possible in official political discourse as a new common sense. This common sense was in turn built on a new control apparatus. The apparatus took the form of a campaign dubbed 'Lavoro Sicuro', or Safe Work. In the most fundamental way, this campaign can be understood as a step-by-step construction of a security apparatus, involving protocols and inspections, that intensified after the Teresa Moda fire.

A bit of context is crucial. Inspections are not new. They are deeply entangled with modern nation states. Archival work related to demographic shifts led me to research the history of weavers and wet nurses in rural Tuscany (Krause 2009) and unveiled the report of a labour inspector who in 1893 lamented the gruelling work of *trecciaiole*, or straw weavers (Krause 2005: 36). Vanessa Maher's (1987) oral history of seamstresses in Turin noted the Italian Labour Inspectorate's inquiry in 1911 into the health of workers in dressmaking ateliers. Anthropologists among others have theorized inspections, most prominently related to border inspections of people and things (Briggs and Mantini-Briggs 2002; Carter 1994; Chavez 1998; Chu 2010; De León 2015; Kearney 1991; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013), but also in the context of value and quality control (Tsing 2015), workplace safety and chronic illness (Qureshi 2019), immigration and demographics (Hampshire 2005) and food and public space (Nowak 2012).

My encounters with inspections while conducting fieldwork come to mind. For a stint of about six months during my dissertation research in 1995–97 in the province of Prato, I worked in a family finishing workshop attaching buttons on sweaters. It was a world of subcontractors, of diffuse industry (Becattini 2001). I still recall Italians complaining about the *bolle di accompagnamento*, the invoices that had to accompany all orders or the firm could be fined for tax evasion. I recall people in my orbit being extremely stressed by these controls, which represented a crackdown on *lavoro nero*. This form of informal economy was widespread in those years.

Inspections morphed as Chinese migrants settled in Italy and not only operated various garment cut-and-sew machines but also assumed management and ownership of small sweater firms and, more importantly, fashion workshops, whether in the fast-fashion or luxury fashion supply chain. At the time of the fire, Chinese migrants reportedly owned nearly 45 per cent of Prato's manufacturing businesses. When considering all foreign-run enterprises, recent data suggests that Chinese citizens managed 6,202 out of 9,079 firms in the province of Prato (Camera di Commercio Prato 2019). As of 2023, *stranieri* (foreign residents) made up 24.8 per cent of Prato's population (46,154 of 194,848 residents), well beyond the national average of

8.5 per cent residents who are non-Italians. The vast majority of non-Italians in Prato hold Chinese passports (64%). At least 74 per cent of resident foreigners have origins in Asia (Comune di Prato 2023). When undocumented migrants are included, estimates rise substantially in terms of the number who live in the city and its surrounding municipalities. Chinese entrepreneurs and workers make substantial contributions to the Made in Italy sector, especially fashion but increasingly food. These contributions are also often contentious; labour leaders report trying in vain to convince workers to join unions and fight for better conditions.

The tone of surveillance became increasingly militant, with helicopter raids and armed forces, in the 2000s under the right-wing mayor Roberto Cenni and an anti-immigrant security minister who served a five-year term beginning in 2009. On the evening of 27 June 2014 – on the heels of Cenni's defeat – I attended a dinner at a *circolo* in San Paolo, a working-class neighbourhood of Prato that since the 1960s had attracted migrants from southern Italy and since the 1990s from overseas. I befriended an Italian woman who worked as an inspector of quality control for a French company, and I recounted in a fieldnote her heartfelt description of seeing Chinese migrants and their families put out on the street with just their suitcases. The police raids and the round-ups mortified her. They brought to mind, she said, other bad times in Europe, such as when the Nazis were in power.

This affective disposition and accompanying visceral image enlivened my ethnographic sensibilities. I still remember the moment when I set eyes upon a large poster on the side of a bus stop announcing 'Lavoro Sicuro', a campaign for Safe Work.

Two young adults, one male and the other female, presumably Chinese migrants, had features that complemented the text, written over the human forms, in Chinese characters with Italian translation beneath:

LA SICUREZZA DI OGGI È IL BENESSERE DI DOMANI
(Today's security is tomorrow's well-being)

I remember photographing the image and sending it to my colleague Massimo Bressan. In light of our ongoing conversations about inspection culture, I was struck by the appearance of the campaign in public space and its positive framing in terms of public health and workplace safety. It occurred to me as an instance of political discourse disguised as a public health campaign. In essence, it was a classic instance of a war of position in the making. On the surface, the message seemed innocuous. The campaign played into common sense in terms of health and safety. There was nothing blatantly nefarious about this campaign. The workers were depicted as attractive, the setting was clean and modern. In small print appeared a rationale in both Chinese



Figure 4.3. The Safe Work Campaign, Region of Tuscany. © Elizabeth Krause.

and Italian with a justification and a warning: ‘Rispettare le regole e lavorare in sicurezza protegge i lavoratori dagli infortuni. I controlli per la salute e la sicurezza sul lavoro continuano.’¹ (To respect the rules and work in safety protects workers from injury. Inspections for workplace health and security continue.) Still, something about the messaging struck me as questionable.

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I had a flashback to my days working in the sweater-finishing firm and wondered at how strange it was that in a factory city where Italians still made things, a campaign primarily targeted immigrant labour. Workers, namely transnational ones, had become culprits. No longer were the Italians represented as the ones evading taxes. As one former Italian sweater-maker said, like the chorus of a song, *‘siamo noi i cinesi – we are the Chinese’*. The metaphor reminded me that Italians and Chinese had occupied similar structural positions in a globalized fashion industry but at different moments in time.

How did a public campaign that seemed so well-intended on the surface lead to such heightened anger, protest and violence? Some dots need connecting. What the campaign does not convey is how inspection practices morphed into a veritable inspection culture, a surveillance apparatus that became mainstream and targeted a foreign population. It is as though the inspection regime served to uplift Italian society and distance its citizens from a history of performing work ‘in nero’ – sometimes associated with possessing semi-feudal social relations tainted by mafioso criminal activity (Schneider and Schneider 2003: 9).

My colleague Massimo Bressan, as lead author of our co-authored article ‘La Cultura del Controllo’ (Bressan and Krause 2017), deserves credit for sorting out the complex history of the security campaign. The apparatus built on the Patto per Prato Sicura, formalized in 2007, underscored ‘economic crimes’: Article 8 explicitly refers to behaviours that unlawfully hinder mechanisms of free competition, namely the counterfeiting of trademarks and patents, the irregular circulation of money and the exploitation of workers without a residence permit. Over the course of years, various agencies became involved. Indeed, a veritable consolidation of operations occurred. A provincial functionary came to coordinate the entities: local and state police, finance police, the territory’s labour directorate, the public health agency, the revenue agency and local branches of other state entities. In 2009, an interforce entity was established to coordinate the inspection activities, which coincided with the election of Prato’s first right-wing mayor since the fall of Fascism. The pact was due to be renewed in 2013, just two months before the Teresa Moda fire, with the goal of reasserting the objective of controlling ‘fair competition’ in the labour markets. The fire, however, fuelled a shift in the security regime.

The Lavoro Sicuro campaign of 2014 expanded to a wider political territory than was typical, extending its reach to the sprawling Florence-Empoli-Prato-Pistoia urban area. Indeed, the council approved the ‘Extraordinary Three-Year Plan for Workplace Security Measures’ (Appendix 1 to Delibera 56 of 28 January 2014). The plan sought to strengthen controls aimed at clandestine and informal economy labour and to reduce risky enterprises. The region approved an EUR 12 million package to substantially increase

inspection efforts and hire seventy-five new public health ‘prevention inspectors’. The goal was thus set to triple inspections (Bressan and Krause 2017).

It is important to underscore the fact that, in practice, the Region of Tuscany’s new security apparatus focused almost exclusively on Chinese-owned or managed firms, whether through inspections or campaigns. In the two-year period beginning September 2014 and ending May 2016, public health technicians completed 5,826 inspections. Sanctions resulted in substantial fines: from an annual average of less than EUR 1 million to EUR 2.6 million by May 2016. Inspections progressively extended their scale to the entire metropolitan area. As the Regional Plan enacted its shift in emphasis from economic crime and unfair competition to risk profiles for health and safety, its inspectors focused their gaze on the following: non-compliant dormitories, electrical systems and gas cylinders. Textile trash arose as a major concern. In a subsequent phase of the Safe Work campaign ending in 2018, 7,404 Chinese firms versus seven Italian firms were inspected (personal communication, Director, Disease Prevention, Central Tuscany Department of Health, 3 April 2018). The targeting of Chinese firms became a source of consternation among local Chinese residents. As a way to quell the rising tensions, the official Region of Tuscany website announced that the subsequent phase of the *Lavoro Sicuro* project included a ‘fruitful collaboration’ with the consulate of the People’s Republic of China in Florence and representatives of the Chinese community.

The way that various institutions were drawn into the security project offers an excellent example of a modern form of power (Wolf 1999). Foucault (1978) refers to regulatory controls as a ‘bio-politics’ of the population that unfolded in an era of ‘bio-power’. This form of power operates through diverse mechanisms and dispersed networks – what in *Security, Territory, Population* Foucault names an apparatus, or *dispositif*. The apparatus has a disciplining and normalizing tendency that works on bodies and spaces, on life itself. ‘Discipline is essentially centripetal’, Foucault wrote in a Collège de France lecture in 1978 (Foucault 2010: 44). ‘Discipline concentrates, focuses, and encloses.’ It also produces new behaviours, new senses of self, new forms of resistance and new narratives. It powerfully shapes a new common sense. In the context of Prato, the common sense fuelled a heightened surveillance regime that targeted Chinese migrants.

REFLECTIONS: OTHER MEANINGS, OTHER BASTARDS

Once upon a time, a bastard referred to a child born out of wedlock. The term was convenient for condemning a form of unsanctioned intimacy. I picture the wheel at the Spedale degli Innocenti in Florence that once served

as a collection point for infants whose parents abandoned them (Kertzer 1994). Such children were considered illegitimate in terms of their claims to resources, such as inheritance. In a similar vein, the new actors of global supply chains have more often than not been rendered illegitimate subjects of the territories upon which their labour happens.

Thinking with bastards opens up connections to other ‘illegimates’. Such illegitimacies produce tensions. They also produce questions: Who is permitted political agency? Under what conditions? What are the limits of legitimacy? And when legitimacy hits a wall, what does its opposite, illegitimacy, expose?

As I have argued, the Teresa Moda fire prompted a reconfiguration of the security apparatus to emphasize health and safety. In *Gramsci's Common Sense*, Kate Crehan (2016) argues that all common sense is not good sense. Indeed, I want to suggest that the inspection regime itself became a sort of common sense in a war of position that sought to criminalize migrant labour. I use the term ‘inspection culture’ because it became taken for granted that conducting the inspections in the name of safety was good sense. In fact, the way in which it was operationalized suggests a racial apparatus that perpetuated the intensification of inspections.

The ethnographic encounters described here bring to light how Italian authorities attempted to displace onto Chinese foreign workers the negative stereotypes of Italian labour itself: illegal, under the table and run by the mafia. ‘The hypocrisy here is obvious, but the political strategy is remarkable’ (Lilith Mahmud, personal communication). What might it be to think about fire as an epistemological category? Fire is the ultimate force of destruction, yet from ashes spring new life. In this sense, the fire created the possibility of renewal for Italian politicians to remake Italy as ‘secure’. It is as though a security-fuelled Renaissance generated political discourse to cleanse and rebirth the Made in Italy brand.

Reading these events opens up space for understanding political alternatives. The protest itself serves as a reflection of emerging political identities – complex, ambiguous and fragile. Many Chinese residents in Tuscany’s metropolitan area live in a liminal space between legality and illegality. They have felt frustrated. Their resort to protest came from the margins of legality. And yet there existed legitimate reasons behind their protest: standing up against the intensification of the inspections and the brutal tactics of law enforcement. Concerns about the coherence, integrity and effectiveness of political discourse remain at the heart of Italian public life. Political discourse ultimately is a manifestation of everyday dynamics and power struggles. As Italy struggles with economic crisis, migration dynamics and an ageing population, understanding a single event in context shows how Gramsci’s reflections from a prison cell may continue to illuminate the ways

in which all people ultimately have the potential to legislate and shape their social worlds.

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Tight Knit: Global Families and the Social Life of Fast Fashion (University of Chicago Press, 2018). She is past president of the Society for the Anthropology of Europe.

NOTE

1. The website provided on the poster was originally regione.toscana.it/lavoraresicuri, but recent attempts to access it resulted in a 'not found' message. A current link from the Tuscany Region website still references the inspections but with different content. See 'Lavorare Sicuri' (n.d.).

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PART II

POPULISM



CHAPTER 5

MAKING FASCISM HISTORY IN 'THE LAND OF THE DUCE'

Paolo Heywood



It is said among the Greeks that Themistocles was endowed with a certain incredible greatness of thought and intellect. It is said that once a certain learned man, one of the most educated of his time, approached him and promised to teach him the art of memory, which was then first becoming popular. When Themistocles asked what that could do, the teacher responded that it could make one remember everything. Themistocles responded in turn that the teacher would be doing him a much greater favour if he taught him to forget rather than remember what he wanted.

—Cicero, *de Oratore*

INTRODUCTION

On a cold December morning in 2017 a sparse crowd of journalists and TV cameras gathered in front of an aged but otherwise nondescript stone house in a very small town in the north of Italy. People rubbed their hands together and stamped their feet, while trying their best to avoid slipping on the ice and snow around them. After a little while, a short, stocky man in his fifties, with dark thinning hair on a round head and an elegant cashmere scarf, appeared climbing the gentle hill leading up to the house, trailing a small entourage. A few reporters turned to point, and cameras swung to focus on him. As he neared the house he donned a bright tricolour sash of green, white and red, the symbol of his office as mayor of this very small town, before climbing the stone staircase leading up to the house's entrance, and turning to face the assembly.

Ninety-four years earlier, in 1923, a different – and considerably larger – crowd was assembled in front of the same house to see a different man. This

man too had thinning hair and a round head, and also dressed elegantly (a suit, cravat and overcoat). He too stood at the top of the house's stone staircase, but he did so surrounded by admirers, a crowd of people pressing to touch him or shake his hand, while others strained to see him from below and still more leaned out of the house's windows to catch a glimpse of him. In sepia photographs of the moment he is smiling somewhat haughtily, below banners that read 'W [viva] l'Italia'.

In 2017, by contrast, the man in the tricolour sash looked solemn as he told the crowd of reporters that this place – the house, but also his town – had given birth to a man who had dishonoured his country. 'So perhaps', he said sadly, '*Damnatio memoriae* is all we deserve'.

This very small town is Predappio, birthplace and burial site of Benito Mussolini. He was born in the house that formed the background to both the events described above. His visit to his home in 1923 was his first as Prime Minister of Italy, and the occasion of great celebration, for it inaugurated the massive urban engineering project that transformed Predappio from a hamlet of a few hundred people to a bustling town of ten thousand, a jewel in the crown of Fascist planning and a sort of open-air museum to the Duce's early life. In honour of its native son's newfound glory, the town donated his birth house to him on the occasion of that visit.

The 2017 press conference was also one of inauguration. It marked the opening of a public exhibition in Mussolini's birth house (now owned by the municipality), one that would display the plans for the museum, or 'documentation centre', focused on Fascism that was projected to be installed in the ruins of the town's enormous *Casa del Fascio* (Fascist Party Headquarters).

Predappio's mayor in this period, Giorgio Frassinetti, was one of the leading figures in this project. So, while he began his remarks to the press that day with the suggestion that perhaps all Predappio deserved was *damnatio memoriae*, it soon became clear that he believed that in fact it deserved much better. Referring to recent episodes of neo-Fascist violence in the wider region, he declared them symptoms of a failure to confront the past, of 'letting things go their own way'. 'I refuse to accept that we are contaminated, that we are the Chernobyl of history', he went on, employing one of his favourite metaphors. 'That would mean they have won.'

I had been doing fieldwork in Predappio for a year or so by 2017 (see Heywood 2019, 2020, 2022, 2023, 2024) and had got to know Giorgio and others involved in the plans for the museum. I was part of the group that followed him up the hill to the house that day, alongside the project's technical and academic directors, and a few associates. Before we set out for the birth house and the press conference, Giorgio had arranged an early lunch at one of Predappio's other landmarks: Ristorante del Moro, the only restaurant in Predappio to have been in existence since before Mussolini's reconstruction

project. It would have fed and watered nineteenth-century travellers on the road from the Romagna across the border and Apennines into Tuscany. It is a small and traditional eatery serving mostly local produce. Yet we ate our lunch beneath wooden cabinets filled with bottles of Sangiovese, the local red, on which were printed propaganda-style photographs of Mussolini, labelled 'Duce d'Italia'; and three of the restaurant's neighbours on Predappio's main street are euphemistically known as 'souvenir shops', selling Fascist and Nazi-themed memorabilia, T-shirts with Donald Trump's face printed on them and even replica *manganelli*, the clubs with which Fascist goons used to beat their political opponents.

They sell such merchandise to the roughly one hundred thousand neo-Fascist visitors Predappio receives every year, who come mainly to visit Mussolini's tomb. After a series of post-mortem misadventures (documented in Luzzatto 2014), Mussolini's body was returned to his family and buried in the crypt he had had built as part of the reconstruction of Predappio. Today he lies in a stone sarcophagus beneath a bust of himself and the Italian flag, gazing out over a visitors' book in which are inscribed messages like 'come back to us Duce!'

Given this context, it is not altogether surprising that the proposal for the museum in Predappio (its planners actually referred to it as a 'documentation centre', *centro di documentazione*) acquired controversial status very swiftly. Polemics erupted in the national press between proponents and opponents, with well-known intellectuals like Luzzatto and Carlo Ginzburg participating (Luzzatto and Ginzburg 2016), and petitions and counter-petitions circulating around international academic institutions (see Carrattieri 2018 for a short summary). Much of the discussion over lunch that morning in 2017 on the part of the museum's planners had indeed been about how to respond to the recent announcement on the part of ANPI, Italy's powerful ex-partisan association, that it was coming out against the project, so Giorgio's speech that day – as on many other such occasions – was delivered with these debates in mind.

Predappio – especially in those days of furore over the museum project – has often been in many ways ground zero for ongoing Italian debates over how the country should relate to its Fascist past. While monumentalist architecture, Fascist sites of memory and revolting souvenirs can all be found throughout Italy, nowhere are the leftovers of Italian Fascism so concentrated and condensed, and nowhere else does the contemporary Italian far-right gather so regularly and in such large numbers. Giorgio, a former geology teacher, called it the 'epicentre' of Fascist 'earthquakes' in Italy in his speech that day.

Later, at another press conference in the local cinema on the same day, he invoked another of his favourite analogies: Walter Benjamin's 'Angel of

History', looking back at the rubble of the past as he is blown irresistibly into the future on the storm of progress. 'We mustn't just look backwards', argued Giorgio, 'we must look forwards'. Later, when we were alone, Giorgio was more scathing: 'if I read that Benjamin quote in one more book I'm going to throw it in the bin immediately. . . why is he looking backwards anyway? Is he a shrimp?'

Giorgio's position is of course the reverse of the standard reading of Benjamin's interpretation of Klee's *Angelus Novus*. To Benjamin, the storm of 'progress' and an inability to attend to the rubble of the past were partly responsible for the rise of Fascism at the time he was writing, in 1940. Benjamin in some ways echoes a point made ten years before him by Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce, who suggested that 'anti-historicism' and an obsession with an abstract, vitalist future with no past were an important dimension of the philosophy that animated Fascism (see Peters 2021).

So, ironically, arguments about the relationship between Fascism and history are not new. Indeed, as Giorgio's appearance at the birth house in some ways echoed Mussolini's visit nearly a century before, some of the arguments taking place over Predappio's museum project echoed arguments from the very time that was to be museified.

If the opening conceit of this chapter is that some aspects of the debates around Predappio's museum project on Fascism constituted a repetition or reiteration of debates from the time of Fascism about time and Fascism, its ethnographic focus is on three positions within those debates about the museum, each of which took a different view on the relationship between Fascism and history.

The first such position was that of proponents of the museum, exemplified by Giorgio, who was in almost all respects its public figurehead and most vocal advocate. To Giorgio and his colleagues Fascism was already, as it were, history: that is, it was over, it had happened, occurred, been and gone, ended. Those who failed to recognize this were mistaken, whether because – like the neo-Fascist visitors who flocked to his town – they clung to some ghostly and clownish remnant of Fascism that still lingered, or because – like opponents of the museum project on the left – they feared the same ghostly and clownish remnant and could not or would not see that ghosts were all they were afraid of. Hence his annoyance at Benjamin's angel, and its inability to look forward.

To opponents of the museum, on the other hand, such as ANPI, Fascism is not history. Pointing to the failure of the Italian state to 'defascistize' itself after the war, such opponents argued that Fascism never really died. They would cite, for example, the ample evidence that exists for collaboration between the post-war Italian state and various neo-Fascist organizations, or, more obviously, they would simply point to Predappio itself, to the hundred

thousand visitors Mussolini's tomb receives every year, and to the black-shirted marchers who come to perform the Roman salute there, in defiance of its prohibition in the Italian constitution (Heywood 2019). To construct a museum of Fascism in a place that lives and breathes Fascism would be an absurdity, even setting aside the deeply problematic political possibilities.

Neither of these two positions are particularly surprising. They correspond in some ways to an age-old distinction in literature (present in the work of Benjamin, among others) between history and memory, between on the one hand an understanding of the past as essentially distinct from the present, separated from it by the brute force of time's passage, and on the other hand an understanding of the past as somehow still alive in the present, simultaneous with it. This latter position is not so much about repetition or iteration, as in the ways in which Giorgio's press conference repeats aspects of Mussolini's visit a century earlier, about the return of something gone, but about understanding the continuous and animating presence of the past in everyday life (often through the prism of the human faculty of memory).

Most of my focus in this chapter is on a third position taken in relation to the museum project, a position that also relates to memory. This position is that taken by the majority of the inhabitants of Predappio, who regarded the museum project – as they regard most things related to their uncomfortable heritage – with a striking sort of cultivated indifference. If the first two positions might be seen as roughly corresponding to the scholarly distinction between history and memory, this third conjures up what is sometimes called the 'underside' of memory, namely forgetting. The first two positions are essentially descriptive, in the sense that for the first position Fascism is dead and therefore a possible object for the historian's gaze; for the second it is still alive in some form or another, and therefore not really the proper object of history but of politics. This third position is more obviously aspirational: for the majority of Predappiesi, their home would be a happier place not only if Fascism really were dead but if it were also condemned to *damnatio memoriae* and forgotten. Such a position of course carries with it the risk that in trying to forget Fascism one ends up repeating it – as perhaps in the elements of repetition visible in the vignette above – but trying to forget Fascism in Predappio provides at least some modicum of relief from its overwhelming presence, and from the memories of it pursued by those who visit in black shirts.

Despite the uncountable number of anthropological works devoted to memory published over the preceding three decades or so, and though it is a truism in that work and in the broader 'memory studies' literature to note that forgetting is a necessary corollary of remembering ('Seeing one thing is not seeing another. Recounting one drama is forgetting another' – Ricoeur 2004: 452), anthropological interest in forgetting has been largely sporadic

and unsystematized, a fact often noted by those who have taken interest in it (e.g. Battaglia 1993: 430; Carsten 1995: 317; Vitebsky 2008: 244). In the 1990s, during the initial ‘memory boom’ (Berliner 2005), Debbora Battaglia, Anne Christine Taylor, Janet Carsten, Marc Augé and Jennifer Cole all produced brilliant but more or less isolated interventions on the subject (Augé 1998; Battaglia 1992, 1993; Carsten 1995; Cole 1998; Taylor 1993; cf. also Forty and Küchler 1999), and remarkably little has been said on the topic since then (though see Harrison 2004 and Vitebsky 2008), despite the fact that some recent work outside the discipline has returned to questions of forgetting in critique of the wider ‘memory studies’ paradigm (e.g. Rieff 2016; Symons 2019).

What literature does exist on forgetting is more or less united in insisting that it is erroneous to understand forgetting as a ‘culture-free process’ (Harrison 2004: 150), and as always and simply the negative obverse of remembering that occurs merely in the latter’s absence. Rather, we should look to examine instances of what Nietzsche termed ‘active forgetting’, the human capacity to ‘feel unhistorically’, to knowingly abandon links with the past.

Much of this small literature is also concerned to point out the socially productive effects that can come with forgetting, in line in some ways with some recent polemics against our memory-saturated age (e.g. Rieff 2016). While Euro-Americans are habituated to think of forgetting as a moral failure of sorts (Connerton 2008: 59), Battaglia, Carsten, Cole and Taylor all describe non-Western contexts in which more or less ritualized versions of forgetting lead not to disintegration and social anomie but to what Connerton (*ibid.*: 63) calls ‘the formation of a new identity’, or in Battaglia’s (1993: 430) case, in an echo of Renan’s famous characterization of a nation as united by forgetting, even to ‘society’ itself; and as the Ciceronian epigraph to this chapter suggests, there is an undercurrent to Western thought on memory too in which forgetting has a constructive role to play.

A key strand in work on memory in general is the relationship between memory and place (as in the neologism ‘memoryscape’), a strand that also emerges specifically in literature on memory in Italy around Fascism and the Second World War (e.g. Diemberger 2016). Just as correspondingly less attention has been paid to forgetting than it has to memory, however, so has less attention been paid to the relationship between place and forgetting. Simon Harrison (2004) makes this point in a fascinating discussion of the role that the landscape around the middle Sepik River of Papua New Guinea plays in local understandings of memory, which is understood as a distinctly human faculty, in contrast to natural surroundings prone to constant shifting, erosion and forgetfulness.

In this chapter I describe Predappiesi attitudes to an urban landscape utterly saturated with difficult memories and dissonant heritage, and their

efforts to transform it into a space of forgetting. These broader attitudes to their home, I suggest, inform the specific stance that people in Predappio tended to take in relation to the museum project that their mayor hoped would rescue them from '*damnatio memoriae*'. I show this through three examples of spaces in and around Predappio. I argue that to characterize Italian attitudes to Fascist heritage as forgetful in the sense of being failures of memory – as they often are characterized – is, at least in Predappio, to misread the nature of forgetting as a passive rather than an active process.

A 'HOUSE OF MEMORIES'

The Villa Carpena is a little way outside of Predappio, on the road to Forlì. Its association with Predappio stems from the fact that it was the post-war home of Mussolini's wife, Donna Rachele (as she is often called). It is rarely spoken of by people in Predappio though, and is mainly associated with the town by tourists who combine a visit to both in the same trip.

The Mussolinis first bought the house in 1914 when Benito Mussolini was made editor of *Avanti!*, the socialist daily. It was one of the regular family residences during his time in power, and in 1957, after a period of time in confinement and with the return of her husband's body to the area, Rachele Mussolini moved there permanently. It remained in family hands after her death until 2000, when it was bought and transformed into a 'museum' by an outside entrepreneur who already owned one of the neo-Fascist 'souvenir' shops in Predappio.

The word 'museum' is written in inverted commas on the sign on the front gate of the Villa Carpena, as if to warn the visitor of what is to come. Below, without the inverted commas, are the words 'house of memories'. It is advertised by large signs on a number of main roads around the area, all of which have been defaced by anti-fascist graffiti.

The villa is a vast and almost entirely uncured collection of objects related to Fascism and to the Mussolinis. It seems to have no guiding thread. Its grounds are filled with stone plaques commemorating Fascists fallen for their country, busts of Mussolini of various sizes, some extremely unhappy sounding peacocks, a haphazard and seemingly random array of agricultural machinery that Rachele Mussolini is said to have collected, a replica of the glider used by German troops to rescue Mussolini from imprisonment after the coup of 1943 and a life-size model of Father Christmas wearing Fascist black.

To get in you have to pay an entrance fee, and to see the interior of the house you have to go on one of the regular tours, run, when I visited, by a skeletal man in his eighties with a shaven head.

The interior of the house, he claimed, has been preserved as a shrine to the domestic life of the Mussolinis. If this is true, then Rachele must have found it difficult to throw things away, because almost every wall and surface in the house is occupied by an object or a photograph with some tangential relationship to Fascism or the Mussolinis. During our visit the guide picked up a perfectly ordinary men's shoe from a shelf and told us simply, 'this was Romano [Mussolini]'s shoe', as if that was all we would need to know to understand its importance.

The trope of the museum (especially the biographical museum) as a space the subject has only just left, as it were, a preserved reminder of the ordinary traces of an individual life, is not in itself uncommon (see e.g. Reed 2002). Fictionalized or literary versions of it can also be found, as in the Sherlock Holmes museum in London, for example. Yet the Villa Carpena is not quite the same sort of phenomenon. While it contains elements of this genre (for example, one of Mussolini's uniforms laid out on his bed, as if he were just about to get dressed), its enormous range of hodgepodge objects is too excessive for one to imagine the house as an actual dwelling. Some of the walls are covered almost floor to ceiling in pictures, plaques and framed Fascist slogans; kitchen surfaces are nearly invisible beneath a plethora of cups, plates and crockery of all forms. Yet the aesthetic of ordinary memories is very much the target.

On my visit our guide claimed to have known Rachele Mussolini and spent a great deal of time extolling her merits as an 'ordinary' Italian housewife, pointing out her inexpensive clothes and kitchenware. The whole point of this 'museum', he noted repeatedly, was to show visitors the 'real', private lives of the Mussolinis, as normal, 'ordinary' people, away from politics. This did not stop him from also engaging in spirited debate with some on my tour group over broader political and historical questions regarding the merits of Fascism: he repeatedly claimed that the Holocaust was a myth, and that more people were killed by partisans after the war than by Fascism in twenty years. He lamented the erasure of Fascism from Italian history, at one point holding up a street sign from 1930s Predappio, decorated with the fasces: 'Why would you throw this away?' he asked rhetorically, 'Look at how well-made it is!' and he knocked it with his fist to demonstrate its durability. Unknowingly echoing some of De Certeau's remarks on the affordances of street names as tools of power, he added, 'Just so that everybody had to learn new street names!'

He was also very keen to suggest that the house was haunted by those whose memories it contains: one of his proudest exhibits is a mirror in which he claimed you could see the outline of Mussolini's face. I could see only smudges, but an Italian TV programme called 'Ghost Hunters' has filmed an episode at the villa based on this mirror.

In the attic of the house is what the guide called a 'documentation centre', full of pro-fascist pamphlets and newspapers (most of them still in plastic wrapping) and decorated by amateurish murals of Fascist soldiers. Our guide argued that schoolchildren should be brought here to learn about their 'real' history.

After the tour, one is gently guided towards a shop selling souvenirs of the sort one can find in Predappio, alongside fascist-leaning history books, and even some of Romano Mussolini's paintings (though many in Predappio insist that these are forgeries). On the tour I attended, a special guest was wheeled out to meet us at its conclusion: a 94-year-old woman with one of the most strikingly blue pairs of eyes I have ever seen. I had read about her in the local press before my visit: she had been a volunteer for the Italian Social Republic (the German-controlled puppet state based in Salò) in the last days of the war, and her continued devotion to the cause was so strong that she had decided to live her final days at the Villa Carpena. The owner and his wife were evidently proud of this living addition to their collection of memories, and encouraged me to talk to her in English. To my surprise, she spoke the language perfectly and with a cut-glass accent. This, she told me, was a result of having lived in England for a few years in the 1950s ('in exile', she called it). She said she'd decided to die at Villa Carpena because her happiest memories were of the RSI, and it brought them all back to her.

The Villa Carpena is not in any genuine sense a museum, as its owners themselves seem to acknowledge when they put the word in quotation marks. It is far more like De Certeau's 'anti-museum', or, in the language of the owners, a 'house of memories'. It is an uncured assemblage of objects related not by any kind of master narrative but by fragmented associations ('this is Romano's shoe') and the ghosts of Rachele Mussolini the ordinary housewife and Mussolini's outline in his mirror. This 'ordinariness' is created and constructed, and obviously so (cf. Heywood 2021, 2023, 2024): if indeed Rachele was a master of household management, she would certainly have disapproved of her kitchenware being strewn around as it is. The haphazardness and disorganization, whether deliberate or not, sit strangely beside the clearly reverential attitude of its staff, evoking an impression of bathos: Fascist slogans about Mussolini always being right sit oddly amid the chaos of what we are supposed to see as his ordinary life.

The 'memories' in the Villa Carpena are not ones that Predappiesi themselves welcome. When they speak of Villa Carpena they will often snort or raise their eyebrows at what they perceive to be a cynical, money-spinning enterprise of the same genre as the souvenir shops. Furthermore, the content of Villa Carpena's 'everyday' memorialization is geared towards tourists and outsiders because it is exactly what many Predappiesi go to considerable lengths to avoid. Where the Villa Carpena self-consciously positions itself as

a 'house of memories', clearly constructed to appear as if its erstwhile owners have only just departed, other parts of Predappio's urban landscape over which the Predappiesi themselves have control have undergone the opposite process: stripped of almost anything that could conjure up memories, they have been emptied out into places of forgetting.

THE HOUSE OF THE FASCES

Unlike the Villa Carpena, only a couple of signs point the way to the house in which Mussolini was born in Predappio, the one on whose steps Giorgio stood to announce the museum project, and they are small and coloured brown for 'heritage', again unlike the large advertisements for the Villa Carpena that dot the roads around the town, which are banded by the Italian tricolour.

The house itself is completely unmarked on the outside, unless there is an exhibition inside (I am aware of three since it opened for this purpose, in 1999), in which case a small A-frame sign may be placed by the door, or a poster on the wall. To get inside, one climbs a stone staircase and enters through a door, in front of which is a reception desk manned by a municipal worker (it is owned by the municipality). The house gets few visitors, largely because there is nothing to see inside of it. It is completely empty. Before my fieldwork in Predappio it had once hosted an exhibition about Mussolini's early life, and while I was there it was briefly used to display the plans for the *Casa del Fascio*.

Similarly empty is the *Casa del Fascio* itself. This is the most emblematic building in Predappio. It dominates the main square of Sant'Antonio, and its tower is one of the clearest sights from the surrounding landscape. Built not only to host the local party headquarters, the *Casa del Fascio e dell'Ospitalità* also originally held a theatre, a library and a bar, and was used to provide facilities for the many visitors who flocked to Predappio under the regime (Storchi 2019; Tramonti 2014). With the fall of Fascism it became state property along with all party-owned buildings (cf. Maulsby 2014 on the national legacy of *Casa del Fascio*), and, as Simona Storchi (2019) has documented, the subsequent seventy years saw a constant tug-of-war between the municipal authorities and the state over who should be responsible for the building's upkeep. In the 1960s and 1970s parts of it played host to a manufacturing company and a socialist working men's club (*circolo*), but already by 1968 the *Casa del Fascio* was beginning to fall to pieces (Storchi 2019: 144), and that decline has steadily continued.

To enter the *Casa del Fascio* today you have to be accompanied by someone from the municipal authorities, and you have to wear a hard hat. That

is because the interior of the building is a wreck. There are piles of rubble everywhere, and holes in the walls and ceilings where water comes in and forms pools on the floor. Bits of corrugated iron block access to various corridors, and in one of its main rooms the huge iron flagpole that used to fly the tricolour lies abandoned on the floor. Pigeons have made their home inside, and the hard hat protects one from more than just collapsing ceilings.

Storchi (2019) has demonstrated that various municipal authorities have, over the years, sought to intervene in this process of decay, restore the *Casa del Fascio* and put it to some kind of public use. The museum project is only the most recent such attempt. None of those attempted interventions, however – including, as of the time of writing, the museum project itself – have met with any success, and the building remains in a sort of spectral state: despite its ruined interior, apart from some graffiti and broken windows it appears more or less undamaged on the outside, allowing it to blend relatively unremarkably into its surroundings.

Storchi's extensive archival research has shown that the problem of what to do with the *Casa del Fascio* preoccupied a number of successive municipal administrations over the decades. Yet part of the reason that Storchi's account is so valuable is that it flies in the face of everyday wisdom in Predappio, which holds that nobody has ever really cared for the fate of the building. Some people remember the manufacturing company, or the socialist bar, but nobody that I knew spoke of the *Casa del Fascio* as a great missed opportunity, with the exception of those involved in the planning of the present museum project. Most Predappiesi will pass the building on a day-to-day basis or sit at one of the two bars directly opposite it on Piazza Sant'Antonio, but they will do so without paying it the least attention. It has long become part of the fabric of ordinary life in the town, but what has become ordinary and taken for granted about it is that it exists in a kind of liminal state: not nearly ruined enough in its exterior to be noticeably different from its surroundings, but utterly desolate inside, the whole building exists as a façade. Without any explicit trappings of Fascism on the outside, or any marks of history bar a tiny plaque (only erected in the past few years), and with the inside safely empty and thus attracting even fewer visitors than Mussolini's birth house, it can pass as unremarkable.

Hannah Malone (2017) has shown in comprehensive detail how confused and inconsistent strategies for dealing with Fascist urban heritage have been at a national level in post-war Italy. While some aspects of this heritage, like Predappio's street names and signs (and see Storchi 2013), were marked for destruction in the immediate aftermath of the regime's fall, much of it has since been simply neglected or recycled without attention to its past (see also Arthurs 2010; and Mitterhofer 2013; Hökerberg 2017 for a

counter-example) in what Nick Carter and Simon Martin (2017: 355) call ‘uncritical preservation’, ‘which allows Fascist sites to blend into the urban landscape’ (Malone 2017: 452).

This is in contrast to post-war Germany, where Sharon Macdonald (2006, 2009) has described the fate that befell the Nazi party rally grounds in Nuremberg. Macdonald notes the ways in which the Nuremberg grounds were designed by Albert Speer with their own ruination in mind, intended to look to a thousand-year posterity like the classical ruins of ancient Greece and Rome (see e.g. Arthurs 2012 and Kallis 2014 on the importance of Rome to Fascist architecture). This led to an impasse in post-war debates over what to do with this material heritage of the Nazi regime: repair it and you risk returning it to its former glory and resurrecting it as a site of pilgrimage for the far right; but abandon it altogether and you accomplish exactly what its Nazi planners intended, and risk imbuing it instead with the allure of ruins. Macdonald (2006: 19) explains the solution arrived at by then state culture minister Hermann Glaser:

What should be done, he suggested, was to let the buildings fall into a state of semi-disrepair but not total ruin. They should be allowed to look ugly and uncared-for. And they should be used for banal uses, such as storage, and leisure activities like tennis and motor-racing. Such uses were already underway, but they had been put in place unreflectively and for pragmatic reasons. In Glaser’s new vision, however, they became something more significant and subtle: they became forms of material resistance to the Nazi meanings and potential agency of the architecture. That is, their very form made them into modes of neutralising Nazi agency. Calculated neglect was understood as blocking the two dangerous potential triggers. Glaser called this strategy *Trivialisierung* – trivialisation.

The parallels with the fate of the *Casa del Fascio* are clear: ‘semi-disrepair’ nicely characterizes its condition. Like the Nuremberg rally grounds, the more or less healthy condition of the *Casa del Fascio*’s exterior leaves it without the ‘allure of the ruin’, and indeed allows it to blend in perfectly well with the rest of Predappio’s urban fabric; when it has been put to use, it has been to utterly banal purposes – a small manufacturing company and a bar; and its present emptiness makes it even less worthy of notice.

There are interesting contrasts between the two cases, however. The most significant of these contrasts is one that Macdonald points to in differentiating Glaser’s strategy from previously ‘unreflective’ and ‘pragmatic’ usage. By making ‘trivialization’ into an explicit strategy, Glaser transformed ‘pragmatism’ into ‘resistance’.

Predappiesi have not taken this step. If ‘trivialization’ in Nuremberg was a means to an end (‘resistance’); the attitudes I am describing in Predappio are both means and ends. The point is not to disarm a specifically Fascist

historicization, one that ends in the splendour of classical ruins, but to disarm any form of historicization whatsoever. The point is forgetting.

CONCLUSION

Writing of the afterlives of *Case del Fascio* throughout Italy, Lucy Maulsby (2014) highlights the way in which, while these buildings have often been only partially cleansed of their architectural associations with Fascism, many Italians are ignorant of their history and original purpose. Comparing the country with those who drank from the River Lethe in Greek mythology, she notes that such forgetfulness 'can be . . . understood as a collective inability to completely engage with the moral and ethical problems posed by Fascism' (ibid.: 32).

The comparison is interesting insofar as it foregrounds an ambiguity in this oft-made point about the ways in which Italy has come to terms (or rather failed to come to terms) with its Fascist past: those who drank from the River Lethe did so knowingly and deliberately, in search of the forgetfulness that preceded rebirth (death constituting an inability to forget). Whereas the remark that follows the comparison, quoted above, renders forgetfulness back into its more common, passive mode of 'inability', incapacity and absence.

In Predappio, I suggest, forgetfulness is very much of the active form. It has to be, in fact, for in truth such forgetfulness can only ever be aspirational; it is impossible to forget Fascism in Predappio, stamped as the town is by the legacy of its most famous son, and flooded by visitors to his tomb.

Yet the ways in which key urban spaces like the *Casa del Fascio* and the birth house have been treated should be read as efforts towards forgetting, particularly when seen in contrast to the appropriation of 'memory' by the town's neo-Fascist visitors ('those who cannot remember the past cannot govern the present' read one banner at a Fascist anniversary march I witnessed) and by the proprietors of the Villa Carpena.

This, I suggest, helps to explain the rather curious attitude most Predappiesi I knew held towards the museum project, which put their home at the centre of national and international controversy, and their mayor on the front page of the *Washington Post*, and promised them, as the former put it, relief from the *damnatio memoriae* into which they had been long cast: neither for it, nor against, most people I knew did not appear terribly interested in it at all. While politicians, journalists and celebrity academics debated the fate of their town on the basis of its past, Predappiesi were far more concerned by the prospect of changes to municipal recycling regulations. Finally, when a new, right-wing mayor was elected, and cancelled the project on the basis of

(somewhat spurious) architectural concerns, there was neither great outcry, nor great applause. It simply faded away.

Amid the debates about the museum project in Predappio, Ruth Ben-Ghiat (who had served on the advisory board of the project) wrote a short piece in the *New Yorker* that sought to explain the continued existence of so many Fascist monuments in Italy, citing Predappio as an exemplar (Ben-Ghiat 2017). Like Maulsby, the conclusion she seemed to gesture at was a kind of collective failure of memory: ‘One doubts that Fendi’s employees fret about the Fascist origins of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana as they arrive at work each morning, their stilettos tapping on floors made of travertine and marble, the regime’s favoured materials. As Rosalia Vittorini, the head of Italy’s chapter of the preservationist organisation DOCOMOMO, once said when asked about how Italians feel about living among relics of dictatorship: “why do you think they think anything at all about it?”’ (ibid.).

Though I cannot speak to the thoughts (or footwear) of Fendi employees in Rome, I think that people in Predappio think a lot about the Fascist heritage of their built environment, because it is impossible to live there without doing so, confronted as one is by reminders of it at every turn. So while most will share Ben-Ghiat’s concerns about the reanimation of the politics of Fascism through its material heritage if the links between heritage and politics are forgotten, it is perhaps a mistake to see this risk as always the result of a failure of memory, of incapacity. In Predappio, memory is predominantly for those who come wearing black shirts, and active forgetting is the work of distinguishing oneself from them.

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CHAPTER 6

MEDIATIC SQUADRISM

Myths, Symbols and Identity in Third Millennium Fascism

Maddalena Gretel Cammelli



INTRODUCTION

When Douglas R. Holmes wrote the now classic book *Integral Europe* in 2000, he drafted a portrait of something like a European attitude towards traditions, lifestyle and the socialization of cultural forms that he named ‘integralism’. With this term, Holmes indicated a specific attitude towards solidarity, the daily practice of life and the consciousness of belonging to a specific cultural milieu. Meanwhile, by avoiding the use of the f-word, Holmes was able to chart and unveil the similarities and proximity between these attitudes and more conventional forms of social life and cultural signification. Hence the term integralism.

In 2016, however, when the crisis following the Syrian war marked a turning point in European willingness to accept refugees and face ‘the other’, ‘Fascism2’, an *Anthropology Today* editorial by Holmes, proposed a change in terminology. As confirmed in the 2019 *Focaal* article ‘Fascism at Eye Level’, Holmes now suggests that we take seriously a fascism ‘in and of our time’ with its own specific character and manifestations. This argument marks a shift in the anthropological use of the f-word to analyse contemporary political narratives, emotions and actions. What place does historical fascism still occupy in contemporary Europe, and especially in Italy? What major social and political changes have emerged since 2000, in keeping with Holmes’s intellectual journey?

Italy is a peculiar case study to observe the contemporary re-proposition and appropriation of a historical fascist legacy, not only by virtue of its being the country of birth of historical fascism, but also for its experience of the Second World War, liberation from Fascist dictatorship thanks to the partisan struggle and Allied forces, and then the collective post-war jump into the Cold War and new political balances at the moment of a new world division. Italy was again in the front line: the need to preserve the West against the advance of the Soviets made new alliances possible, and the collective representations of the past underwent changes in terms of the place and image of the country's history.

Post-Fascist fascism in Italy has a long tradition (Ignazi 1989, 1994; Ferraresi 1984, 1995) and played a significant role in the configuration of the Italian Republic and the strategy of tension (Cento Bull 2009). It is not a phenomenon emerging now as a simple reaction to the current economic and social crisis: Italian continuity with, appropriation of, reproduction of and struggle with historical and contemporary evolving forms of fascism is an issue entangled with the entire history of the Italian Republic, from 1946 to today (Pavone 1995; Bermanni 1996).¹

Nonetheless, various important features characterize the last twenty years, some of which are made visible by the lens suggested by Holmes. At first, the collapse of the Soviet Union and end of the Cold War paved the way for a whole set of identity crises: the crises of communist beliefs, class identities and the modern project of the nation state (Friedman 1994; Kalb 2011; Harvey 2015; Latour 1993). One of these was the crisis of antifascism (Luzzatto 2004) following the diffusion of what is called anti-antifascism in Italian public life, a political attitude that some historians date back to 1974 (Bernardi 2019). At the turn of the millennium during the process of European integration, therefore, memory politics surfaced and the commemoration of the victims of the Shoah was established as a founding collective memory of the Union, not only framing it from a specific perspective but also failing to foster a more contextual analysis of the place the Holocaust occupied within the broader history of Nazism and Fascism. Focusing only on the victims makes it possible to shift the process that generated those victims to a secondary place in collective representations, thus also obscuring the ideology supporting Nazi violence. A concrete and profound process of collectively dealing with the Fascist *Ventennio* has never taken place in Italy, and historians are still writing about the collective responsibility that this country has for forging the memory of its own past (Filippi 2020) as one in which Italians were 'only good people' ('Italiani brava gente'; Del Boca 2008).

In this complex turn-of-the-millennium moment when national borders were called into question and the Schengen area was imagined and built together with the 'Erasmus Generation' and the beginning of the

externalization of European frontiers, a twofold process of reconfiguring both the inside and the outside of Europe began to take place (Ciabbari 2020). As part of this process, history and its power to contribute to reconfiguring cultural identities (Friedman 1994) assumed a new role at the heart of the social crisis emerging after the neoliberal turn, that is, the crisis of national, religious and class-based feelings of belonging. At this point, the legacy of historical Fascism in Italy was able to take on a new place and present a new shape: in what Holmes has called fast-capitalist societies in which everything is moving more and more rapidly and people feel that the only thing left to them is dispossession, there was a shift from looking for something to possess to looking for something to belong to, something that would grant direction to one's actions. It is only by delving into the turn of the millennium in this complex social context that we can interrogate and try to understand the emergence of CasaPound, the first self-defined fascist movement to appear in Italy since 1945.

It was at this point that the f-word, 'fascism', could be claimed as a new, contemporary identity to draw on in facing the challenges of today. This movement thus represents not a reproduction of historical Fascism but a reservoir of new, updated ideological content capable of drawing on the past as a mythological imaginary to forge a contemporary community and sense of cohesion. This movement has proven adept at proposing identity-based content that participants use to fill the void of meaning left by the crisis of modernity we are still experiencing.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL ELEMENTS OF CASAPOUND ITALIA

The CasaPound movement emerged in 2003 when a group of young activists occupied a seven-storey building in downtown Rome. The movement saw Ezra Pound as their mentor, and their name reflected a dual reference: on one side, their attention to the housing ('Casa') crisis in Italy, and, on the other, their adoption of Pound's name to denounce the banking system. CasaPound was an integral part of the Fiamma Tricolore political party, one of the galaxy of right-wing parties founded after the Italian political crisis in 1994 (Forlenza and Thomassen 2016).

The building they occupied was located near Rome's Termini railway station, in an ethnically diverse neighbourhood populated mainly by Chinese and Bengali immigrants – a fact that led them to declare the building the 'Italian Embassy'. It was not the only building they occupied; a few years later, members of the group also occupied an abandoned former train station, which they called 'Area 19, Postazione Nemica' ('Area 19, Enemy

Position') and used for concerts and other public events. The activists were eventually evicted from Area 19 in 2015, but the group held on to its so-called 'Italian Embassy', and indeed this building is still occupied by movement activists, currently serving as both the group's organizational headquarters and its symbolic home. In 2006, CasaPound activists established Blocco Studentesco, a branch devoted to forming collectives in high schools and universities and presenting candidates for student government elections. In 2008, the group broke with Fiamma Tricolore to become CasaPound Italia (hereafter CPI), an independent association with offices in many major Italian cities. Five years later, in 2013, CPI participated for the first time in local elections (after becoming an independent political party in 2012), and in 2016 elections the party placed several delegates on municipal councils. At that point they established an alliance with the Lega party led by Matteo Salvini, supporting his candidature in the following elections. In 2019, the political party disbanded, reverting to being an independent movement with a focus on influencing far-right youth culture via publications, clothing brands and music.

CPI's political agenda incorporates many points central to the Fascist tradition (Cammelli 2018), and its political platform is clearly inspired by Benito Mussolini's 1943 'Manifesto of Verona'. While the group has eliminated explicit references to the racist policies of the epoch, their original written agenda contained an entire paragraph copied verbatim from the 'Manifesto' (although they did not present it as a quotation), and was presented in that form in public elections without raising any judiciary issues, despite the fact that Fascism is officially outlawed in Italy (Heywood 2019).

In terms of its political style, CPI has succeeded in modernizing many of the proposals already present in the legacy of Italian neofascism. Most striking are the attention it grants to communication through multiple channels, including social networks; its construction of an original and novel language; and its use of provocative media campaigns such as 'squadrisimo mediatico' or 'media squadrim'. The innovation CPI seeks to inject into the world of neofascism is not a specific policy programme so much as a new way of doing politics. As their neofascist guru Gabriele Adinolfi has said, 'push away everything that is far right, and take back everything that is fascist' (Adinolfi 2008).

Alongside its political platform and presence, CPI also grew as a cultural movement based largely around the Oi! punk rock band ZetaZeroAlfa, whose members were among the first to occupy CPI's 'Italian Embassy'. ZetaZeroAlfa's frontman, Gianluca Iannone, leads both the musical group and the political movement, and CPI as a movement revolves chiefly around the band. While the 'Italian Embassy' is where the movement began, CPI's second occupation in Rome, 'Area 19, Enemy Position' – what Albanese et

al. (2014) call the ‘temple’ of ZetaZeroAlfa – became a site for the community to meet, take shape and grow. While the station was occupied, it played a central role in this third millennium fascist movement, hosting meetings and concerts alike. Within the movement, there is a focus on hierarchy and obedience, virtues that activists interpret as absolute trust in the rightness of their leader (I have developed these aspects in Cammelli 2015, 2017).

The process of becoming involved in the CPI community entails the same kind of dynamics described by George Mosse (1975) in relation to the ‘new politics’ of the Third Reich, wherein rites and rituals helped to generate and grant structure to the political agenda. While in the past such rites consisted of militaristic parades and marches, among third millennium fascists music, concerts and even shared fashion assume the role of key rituals that assert the leader’s authority, for instance through song lyrics. Nonetheless, as we shall see, such rituals rely on an image of historical Fascism as shaped by a mythological presence. Already in the past, in fact, the construction of mythological spectacle played a central place in the formation of Fascism. As Simonetta Falasca Zamponi (2003: 181) argues, such spectacle was pursued using symbols and myths as tools for Fascism to define itself, thus contributing to forging Fascist identity. In other words, civic rituals, monuments and public holidays offered myths and symbols that were instrumental for the self-representation of the nation (Mosse 1975: 145). Mythologies served to normalize and naturalize meanings by containing them in an apparently permanent space. In contemporary third millennium fascism, on the other hand, myth, rituals and ceremonies take on a new shape: they both deploy historical Fascism as a reference point of identity on which to build, as in what CPI activists call ‘mediatic squadristism’ (which I discuss below), and, as outlined by Furio Jesi (2011), they retain the use of symbols and mythologies as a primary tool of political and cultural expression, finding in the use of language, and specifically in what Jesi termed ‘mythological machines’, a source of eternal legitimization.

VIOLENCE AND SQUADRISM

The Italian word *squadrismo* refers to the Fascist violence committed in the 1920s in which Mussolini’s earliest followers killed and tortured thousands of people – mainly political opponents – to aid Fascism in its rise to power (Franzinelli 2003, 2009; Millan 2014). According to Franzinelli (2009: 108), we cannot understand Fascism without a clear, well-defined reference to these squadrist actions characterizing the first years in which Mussolini and his supporters made their violent appearance on the scene of Italian society (1919–22).

Over time, squadristism became a historically rooted concept with the power to represent a myth in and of itself, and as such it has appeared as a mythological image in the evolution of the Italian neofascist political tradition as a whole.² Although, as Franzinelli (2003: 7) argues, squadrist violence was caught up with the civil war waged in Italy in the 1919–21 period and therefore with the crisis of the socialist movement, it has also been historically proven that violence – and specifically organized and systemically perpetrated squadrist violence – was decisive in enabling Mussolini to secure a position of power (ibid.: 8).

As a myth and identity-building point of reference, the word squadristism has made frequent appearances in the public discourse of third millennium fascists since the beginning of their political activity. They continue to claim and assert this phenomenon despite the fact that it is currently illegal.³ In 2008, for instance, a prominent Italian neofascist published ‘Sorpasso Neuronico: Il Prolungato Omega della Destra Radicale e i Vaghi Bagliori dell’Alfa’ (Adinolfi 2008), a document critiquing the radical right that was quickly adopted as a manifesto outlining how neofascists should act and what they should do. The author was Gabriele Adinolfi, former leader of Terza Posizione, one of the most well-known neofascist movements of the 1970s and a group that was involved in multiple acts of violence, murders and bombings at the time. Adinolfi fled Italy in the 1980s and spent twenty years in England to avoid serving jail time. He returned to Italy in 2002 and has since played the role of ‘spiritual father’ to the CPI movement. According to ‘Sorpasso Neuronico’:

Everything that makes up the far right should be destroyed and everything that makes up fascism recovered. This does not mean, of course, simply opposing ideal concepts and forms of ideological conditioning; rather, the right must do an about-face, gather its forces, take on consciousness, express and acknowledge honest rather than inverted hierarchies, completely change its relationship to politics and politicians, combine genius and substance and take the field as an active minority who enters into the arena as a squadrist, not an ideologized missionary.⁴

In his manifesto, Adinolfi explains how CPI ought to proceed, indicating a strategy, organizational model and even a style. This was not the first time that the word squadristism appeared in this sphere, however. The president of CPI had already asserted the crucial role played by this term and its associated image in the political organization and identity of CPI. On 7 April 2006, CPI held a demonstration in the streets of Rome involving a truck followed by approximately twenty cars and scooters. The cavalcade made its way across Rome for the entire day accompanied by ‘Roman’ (Fascist) salutes, chants and songs. In its coverage, one of the main Italian newspapers (*La Repubblica*, 7 April 2006) described this protest as characterized by a

‘squadrist style’. In the same article, the secretary of CPI, Simone di Stefano, declared that ‘this is a way of declaring our fascist identity clearly.’ He went on to specify the contemporary character of the protest, however, saying that this procession had ‘a very different climate than there was in the 1970s: smiles, Roman salutes and a carefree atmosphere’. In 2012, CPI produced a t-shirt bearing the slogan ‘Perfetto stile squadrista camuffati da rock star’ (a perfect squadrist style disguised as rock star style), once again asserting the image of and historical reference to squadrim as if it were a style.

In historical Fascism, ‘squadrim was not only an armed force, it was also a mentality, a political culture, a lifestyle based on the exaltation of violence, manhood and martial virtues’ (Gentile 2000: 53). Third millennium fascism, in contrast, asserts squadrim as a style first and foremost: a style of protesting, a style of organization and a style of music. Just as in historical Fascism, however, this tendency to represent squadrist and violent actions under the guise of carefree, playful political activity neither eludes nor erases the fact that violent actions do take place (Franzinelli 2003: 35). In this case, however, activists are not only asserting a connection with past squadrist activity and historical Fascism; indeed, by enacting this mythological narration of the past, they have been able to establish a concrete presence in contemporary political life and incorporate squadrist violence into the imaginary of the present-day movement.

This case illustrates the capacity of myth to function as a source of legitimization and the way that history permeates contemporary political identity and activities (Kapferer 2012: 19). Through their definition, CPI activists explicitly reference historical Fascism and its squadrist violence, thus illustrating the mythological function of history and the way that ‘the representation of the past [is] linked to the establishment of an identity in the present’ (Friedman 1992: 195). Nonetheless, squadrim goes beyond style. Indeed, this process of representation transforms the Fascist past into a legendary history, myth and political culture ‘giving direction to action and firing the passions’ (Kapferer 2012: 4).

CPI organizes rock concerts and these are important moments of consolidation for the movement, given that CPI leader Gianluca Iannone is also the lead singer of the rock band ZetaZeroAlfa. These concerts are the staging grounds for a very interesting phenomenon, something the participants refer to as *Cinghiamattanza* (belt-beating). This term comes from a song by ZetaZeroAlfa and, while this particular song is being performed, militants take off their belts and begin to hit each other with them, as the lyrics encourage them to do: ‘*Cinghiamattanza!* First, I take off my belt / two, the dance begins / Three: I aim well / four *cinghiamattanza* / First, I take off my belt / two, the dance begins / Three: I aim well / four *cinghiamattanza*.’ While the group plays this song, the leader sings about fighting with belts

and the activists in the pit below follow his directions, striking each other with their belts. Activism in this case goes beyond merely supporting the cause; it also entails physical involvement, pushing the activists to engage in the act of beating one another. This ‘symbolic violence’ – as one CPI sympathizer called it – is perhaps best understood as an expression of the profound degree of involvement characterizing this specific political culture. It is also a vivid example of the way violence extends beyond mere style or political rhetoric to permeate the material lives of activists. In this violence-drenched environment, in order to participate activists must use their bodies to express their commitment to the movement (as in Wieviorka’s (1998: 5) discussion of ‘martyrisme’). Music and the corporality of violence are brought together in this case on and through activists’ bodies. Violence becomes a symbol of the concreteness of fascist political identity, the means through which a myth takes form in the present.

Framing squadristism as a style and violence as mere symbolic action characteristic of group identity-building processes fails to accurately represent and position the real, concrete physical violence against human beings that we find in third millennium fascism. In describing squadrist activity at the outset of the Fascist era, Franzinelli (2003: 35) writes that ‘Fascist brutality had a taste for mockery, but – under the goliardic hood of some of its manifestations – it powerfully affected [its] opponents, subjected as they were to the constant threat of shows of force by means of a potential violence that exploded into concrete action from one moment to the next’. The same could be said of today’s CPI activists as well, as we shall soon see from several examples.

CPI reached the front pages of media outlets in November 2008 when a large grassroots student movement held protests throughout the country against the ‘Gelmini reform’, an education bill designed to introduce significant changes in the Italian schooling system. CPI activists infiltrating the protests attacked students with iron bars in an effort to make their way to the head of the demonstration in Piazza Navona. In 2008, clashes between student collectives and CPI were routine in Rome. In Milan, thirty CPI activists burst into the offices of Radio Popolare in a ‘mediatic squadristic’²⁵ incursion meant to convey their disapproval of the critical statements pronounced the night before during a radio broadcast that had targeted the core of CPI. A similar action also occurred in 2008 at the central office of Italy’s national television network in Rome. There, CPI activists threatened the director of the programme *Chi l’ha visto*, holding him responsible for showing images of CPI not in line with their own narrative of the clashes with student protesters in Piazza Navona. On both occasions, they defined their actions as ‘mediatic squadristism’. Violence defined in this way is one of the predominant manifestations of this present-day movement’s continuity and innovation in

relation to historical Fascism: on one hand we have the squadrist violence characterizing the beginnings of Fascism, while on the other we have the mediatic assertion of such violence as a merely symbolic act.

MYTHS AND IDEAS WITHOUT WORDS

If squadristism can be seen to represent a historical point of reference with the power to not only foster identity but also grant operational direction to activists' involvement and actions, I would argue that CPI's transformation of the historical narrative of the Fascist past into a mythological image with the power to inform a shared complex of values constitutes a similar process. This transformation is made possible by the role that words assume in CPI language, a role quite similar to what Furio Jesi (2011) describes in presenting his investigations into the 'culture of the right'.

Jesi coined the term 'mythological machines' to refer to the images used in political language, images that are not themselves myths but rather images of myths, 'something that by its very nature points to something that cannot be seen' (Jesi 2001: 116). Jesi has argued that these 'mythological machines' lie at the foundations of today's right-wing culture; they are functional to the type of language used in this political culture, described by Jesi as 'ideas without words':

The language used is, first of all, made of ideas without words, where a few words or phrases are enough: what matters is the closed circulation of the 'secret' – myths and rituals – that the speaker has in common with the audience. (Jesi 2011: 27)

What characterizes this language is a rhetoric full of images in which 'the aesthetics of politics' takes on the primary role described by Mosse (1975: 25): that 'force that served to solder together myths, symbols and the sentiments of the masses.' The reference to squadristism reflects a political use of words in which 'aesthetics becomes an integral part of politics and the economy' (Sternhell et al. 1989: 26). Holmes (2000: 181) argues that the power of integralist political style lies precisely in its 'intimacy', that is, its way of 'framing experience, acting as if it were indistinguishable from a specific life-style'. In this case, it casts the act of engaging in a violent clash with other groups as something that signifies – in itself – something more than the act of violence itself.

This is an example of the role that violence plays in political action, as captured by Wieviorka (2003), where violence serves to compensate for the incoherence between a political programme and an ideological statement. As argued by Jesi, in right-wing political culture, there is a rift between political practice and ideology, a 'dynamic vacuum' (Cavaglion 2007). In the same

way, the language of ‘ideas without words’ revolves around a lack of homology between behavioural alternatives and ideological alternatives (Jesi 2011: 112). Viewed in this light, rituals (such as concerts) and myths (such as squadristism) constitute the grounds for mobilizing the minds of third millennium fascists. These practices could be seen as a reinterpretation of the ideas that Georges Sorel, the revolutionary union leader, asserted a century ago: Sorel was appreciated by Mussolini and has been identified by many scholars of Fascism as a pivotal figure for understanding Mussolini’s transition from Socialism to Fascism precisely because of Sorel’s arguments about the importance of mythical thought (Sternhell et al. 1989: 112–14).

As Jesi has stated, when a language is based on the ‘mythological machine’, ideas cannot be anything but empty containers; it is only myths, and the symbols connected to them, that have the capacity to mobilize minds. Symbols are a function of this ‘flexibility’ that distinguishes third millennium fascism in that they are ‘susceptible to infinite exegetical readings’ (Jesi 2011: 48). In the case of CPI, the mythic and symbolic use of references to Fascist history and squadrist practices acts as a mythological machine capable of building community and gathering the activists around the leaders’ will in a cohesive way, making participants’ adherence to the political group and their immersion in the community a deeply emotional experience. As with other integralist movements around Europe, affective practices hold a primary place in shaping this belonging (Bangstad et al. 2019; Pilkington 2016). The process through which the words and political rhetoric of this movement are deployed to grant meaning and sense to its concrete actions not only illustrates the role that myth plays in guiding and orienting politics; also and especially, it illustrates the totalitarian tendency of fascism, which, like forms of nationalism, functions at a profound level (Kapferer 2012: 19).

CONCLUSIONS

Emilio Gentile (2019) has recently pointed out the perils of what he calls writing a-historiography, that is, the practice of comparing different historical époques to identify similarities and continuity with the Fascist past; such scholarship, he warns, risks rendering the f-word extremely banal and empty. Nonetheless, seeing as there are currently individuals who like to call themselves ‘third millennium fascists’, should anthropologists not focus on the native point of view instead of engaging in the everlasting battle of naming? We need to take seriously the other’s point of view, trying to understand what fascism means for the people who use this label and, more broadly, what it means across the multiple countries where it has resurfaced in public discourse. Here I have argued that contemporary forms of fascism are not a

mere reproduction of its historical ideological form but instead a new phenomenon emerging from the social crisis of the contemporary moment. In this new millennium, historical Fascism assumes a mythic and symbolic role in helping to build identity and form community.

I have tried to give a glimpse of two instruments used by third millennium fascists to bring the historical past into the present and give it a contemporary shape. The first of these is their forging a connection with the past through a mythological representation of history capable of producing a reinvigorated set of ideas and practices today. By asserting and refreshing the myth of squadristism through the invention of what they have called ‘mediatic squadristism’, CPI activists help to build third millennium fascist identity as rooted in historical Fascism. This attachment to the past is also expressed by their symbolic use of language, as well as the place they grant myth and especially what Jesi termed ‘mythological machines’ at the foundations of what he defined as ‘right-wing culture’. Building on Jesi’s insights, we see that, if mediatic squadristism is an element characteristic of CPI, using the concept of mythological machines may help us to understand the extension of this aspect of political language well beyond CPI activists alone to Italian society as a whole:

In *Culture of the Right*, he argues that all monumental rhetoric is implicitly right-wing even if it has left-wing content: even the celebratory and uncritical myth of the Resistance or the ‘most explosive leftism’ of revolutionary movements fall within the realm of ‘ideas without words’. During an L’Espresso interview in 1979, Jesi defined the right in these terms: ‘the culture within which the past is a kind of homogenized mash that can be molded and maintained in a certain shape in whatever way is most useful. The culture in which a religion of death or even a religion of the exemplary dead prevails. The culture in which it is declared that there are some values, indicated in uppercase, that must not be questioned: first and foremost Tradition and Culture but also Justice, Liberty, and Revolution. In short, a culture made up of authority and mythological security about the norms of knowing, teaching, commanding and obeying. Most cultural heritage, even the heritage of those who, today, have absolutely no desire to be right-wing at all, is right-wing cultural residue.’⁶ (Jesi 2011: 287, in Manera 2012: 127)

Just as Jesi saw the diffusion of this habit in Italian society of deploying symbols and style through language as a tool that distorts and falsifies social and political representation, Holmes (2000: 200) similarly suggests that it is ‘only by acknowledging the proximity of integralist ideals to more conventional political and cultural aspirations [that we can] assess their intricate nature and their abiding danger’.

Anthropologists should try to find meaning instead of arguing over definitions, to search out lowercase fascism as a heuristic device (Holmes 2019) and a violent human reaction to present-day social crises. Nonetheless,

fascism is not monstrous, inhuman or alien in any way. It is a phenomenon wholly entangled with modernity (Bauman 2010) and the way that we use reason to justify multiple forms of supremacy. Viewing fascists as monsters does not help us to understand fascism as a human and social process. Even in its new, contemporary version, fascism is not a spirit or ghost; rather, it is a concrete political actor living in the complexity of the social world with its specific who, what, when and how (Paxton 2004). Looking at the extreme others inside our own societies could help bridge the abyss built by a hundred years of ‘othering’ the fascist self as a monster that exists only in history or outside of our own societies. Having the courage to explore the diffusion of fascist style may entail staring into the abyss and accepting a dangerous insight: that searching for fascism, gazing at the extreme other, could lead us to interrogate our own societal proximity with the fascist self. And that, as anthropology teaches us, borders separate but they also unite, and a mirror may indicate a path forward.

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NOTES

1. Cf. Heywood in this volume for an updated ethnographic exemplar of the conflict between the history of fascism and its legacy in the present.
2. The definition in the *Treccani* encyclopaedia reads: ‘Since the 1960s, the term neo-squadristism has been used to talk about the theorizing and practice of violence by extreme right-wing groups that suggested once again a reorganization of the disbanded Fascist party, taking on its attitudes, symbols and behaviour.’ Retrieved 13 February 2024 from <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/squadristismo/>.
3. Any reconstitution of the Fascist Party is a crime, as specified in multiples codes and laws (XII disposizione della Costituzione; Legge Scelba; Legge Mancini). Since the word squadristism is directly related to Mussolini’s Fascist Party, even though it is not explicitly referenced in the Italian penal code, it is assumed that the practice of

squadristism may be persecuted on the grounds that it is linked to the reconstitution of the Fascist Party.

4. 'Bisogna distruggere tutto quello che c'è di estrema destra e recuperare tutto quello che c'è di fascista. Il che non significa, beninteso, che si tratta banalmente di opporre concezioni ideali a condizionamenti ideologici ma che si deve far perno su di sé, far forza, acquisire coscienza, esprimere e riconoscere gerarchie erette e non invertite, cambiare del tutto la relazione verso la politica e il politico, unire genialità e consistenza e mettersi in gioco come minoranza attiva che entra in lizza da squadrista e non da missionaria ideologizzata.'
5. It is important to stress that 'mediatic squadristism' is an emic category, a definition that CPI's activists coined to describes their actions.
6. 'In *Cultura di destra* egli sostiene che ogni retorica monumentale è implicitamente di destra anche se ha contenuti di sinistra: anche il mito celebrativo e acritico della Resistenza o il 'sinistrese più dinamitardo' dei movimenti rivoluzionari rientrano nell'ambito delle 'idee senza parole'. Durante un'intervista de l'Espresso nel 1979 Jesi ha definito la destra in questi termini: 'la cultura entro la quale il passato è una sorta di pappà omogeneizzata che si può modellare e mantenere in forma nel modo più utile. La cultura in cui prevale una religione della morte o anche una religione dei morti esemplari. La cultura in cui si dichiara che esistono valori non discutibili, indicati da parole con l'iniziale maiuscola, innanzitutto Tradizione e Cultura ma anche Giustizia, Libertà, Rivoluzione. Una cultura insomma fatta di autorità e sicurezza mitologica circa le norme del sapere, dell'insegnare, del comandare e dell'obbedire. La maggior parte del patrimonio culturale, anche di chi oggi non vuole essere affatto di destra, è residuo culturale di destra.'

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CHAPTER 7

BEFORE AND AFTER FASCIST *BONIFICHE*

Spaces of Occlusion and Recursion in Contemporary Tavoliere

Irene Peano



INTRODUCTION

On the evening of 23 May 2017 a few dozen people staged a vocal protest, pouring into the main road that cuts across the small village of Borgo Mezzanone, located in the district of Foggia, on the northern edge of Apulia. Using their bodies and the dustbins they could find, for a few hours they barred the artery linking the settlement to the district capital, expressly to halt the bus shuttles that served the nearby asylum seekers' reception centre (Centro di Accoglienza per Richiedenti Asilo, CARA). Rumours had spread that, a few hours before, a guest of the centre had robbed and sexually assaulted a 72-year-old woman from the *borgata* (hamlet), causing the rage of her fellow villagers. The images of the blockade published on local media showed some of those who had taken to the streets, presented as residents, sporting waistcoats that bore the symbol of Forza Nuova – a political party commonly identified as neofascist, despite its members publicly refusing the appellation. In fact, Forza Nuova was not new to incursions in the seven hundred-strong *borgata* nor in the city of Foggia, and in the years to come would continue to maintain a vocal, if numerically slim presence.

While far-right political organizations have their footholds in several parts of Italy, the history of the *borgata*, and more generally of the whole plain to which it belongs – known as Tavoliere since the Middle Ages – makes of these places a particularly evocative terrain in relation to fascist-leaning

politics. What is today Borgo Mezzanone was officially founded in 1934 (and completed in 1935) as part of a grand scheme, which by that time had acquired the title of *bonifica integrale* ('integral reclamation/redemption') – one of the centrepieces of historical Fascism's policy across several regions in the 'metropole' as well as in Italy's overseas colonies. If Tavoliere had been the object of projects of drainage, irrigation, settler colonization, agricultural rationalization, urban regeneration and land redistribution for over a century, it was in the Fascist period that their widely celebrated apex was reached (see Peano 2021a). However, in this region the Fascist *bonifica* remained largely in its planners' imagination: after much controversy and delay, implementation was abruptly halted first by the Ethiopian invasion campaign that began in 1935 and then by Italy's participation in the Second World War from 1940 (Bevilacqua 1988). Following the end of the war, Marshall Plan funding and a timid Agrarian Reform avowedly sought to fulfil Fascism's ruralist promises. Yet policy orientations (more than political convictions) had since changed course (D'Antone 1990), leading to widespread dissatisfaction with the results of what seemed little more than a make-up operation to quell widespread peasant unrest and demands for land (Ginsborg 1990). Today, Tavoliere's landscape is littered with the debris of such unattained plans, scarred by their violent interruptions and haunted by their serial fiascos.

Despite such failures, however, or perhaps precisely on their account, as I show in this chapter, the logics undergirding those projects since the nineteenth century, in Tavoliere as elsewhere, have survived in spectral, ruined forms. What is more, a centuries-old genealogy notwithstanding, it is specifically Fascist imageries, materialities and aesthetics – rather than pre- (or post-)Fascist politics – that bear a strong, yet implicit import on the present. In other words, not only was it during the Fascist era that such designs were theorized and aimed to be implemented to their fullest; today, Fascism is also the most readily recognizable ideal, symbolic and affective reference for this assemblage of discourses and sentiments, in many of their manifestations. And yet, such heritage often comes in disavowed, spectral forms, cutting through a wide range of contexts, subjects and positionalities. Explicit homages to Fascism are rarer than ambiguous, half-voiced, uncanny allusions, even in the case of organizations such as Forza Nuova.

On account of its past as much as of the present conjuncture, and indeed of their imbrications, the agro-industrial district of Foggia thus represents an exemplary, if largely neglected case study to address the past's presence. Starting from the material cues disseminated in Tavoliere's urban and agrarian landscapes – whether in intact, ruined or spectral form, in their absence or removal – as well as considering discourses, materialities and events across a range of contexts, in this chapter I examine the contemporary attraction to

or neglect of a multiplicity of pasts. I explore how, if at all, the latter are re-inhabited, referenced and worked through – deliberately or spontaneously – in the present, scrutinizing their complex foldings through what Stoler (2016: 26) has defined as ‘recursive analytics’, which interrogate ‘processes of partial reinscriptions, modified displacements, and amplified recuperations’. I also show how such processes operate at the same time to occlude ‘categories, concepts, and ways of knowing that disable linkages to imperial practice and that often go by other names’ (ibid.: 10). In this sense, I am not interested in definitional debates here, and therefore employ ‘fascism’ as an emic – if ever disputed – category. Yet, precisely on account of such recursions, while historical, uppercase Fascism (the political movement and party that ruled Italy from 1922 until 1943–45) may on some occasions be distinguished from generic, small-caps fascism, telling one apart from the other is not always so straightforward an exercise, as I show in this chapter. In order to convey such ambiguity, I also employ the term ‘F/fascist’ when apt.

REMEMBERING NOT TO REMEMBER: ENGRAVED NOSTALGIA, AMBIVALENCE AND THE SPACES OF CITATIONAL POLITICS

The founder of the nationwide movement Forza Nuova, former MEP Roberto Fiore, would visit Borgo Mezzanone a week after the episode with which I opened this chapter, attending a demonstration organized by his party with the slogan ‘Se la borgata non ci ridate, saranno barricate’ (‘if you don’t give us our place [*borgata*] back, there will be barricades’). According to a resident of Mezzanone, only two of those participating in the second demonstration were locals – ‘a notorious drunkard who doesn’t have a place to stay’, in his words, and ‘a woman in a wheelchair’. The others came from the larger towns and cities in the district, signalling how the place acts as a symbolically charged catalyst for more or less outspoken nostalgists of Fascism. During this second, sparsely attended rally, the Forza Nuova leader and his local acolytes reeled off the traditional repertoire of the far right: the ‘great values that bind our people together’; fearlessness against enemies, and a concomitant, if contradictory feeling of disenfranchisement and invasion by aliens who reap all wealth and benefits, depriving Italians of even basic necessities and keeping them prisoners in their own houses out of fear; the equation between migration, criminality and Islamic fundamentalism; and the defence of ‘our women’ against Black rapists, related to an essentialist notion of identity (‘If there is something that cannot be done in Italy’, Fiore stated in an interview to a local TV channel recorded on the same day, ‘and especially in southern Italy, that is touching women’¹). Ultimately, the party demanded the immediate closure of the CARA and the dismantling of

the large slum that for the past two decades has sprawled outside its perimeter. There, in the minds of the (crypto-)neofascists, but also of many locals, regardless of their avowed political tendencies, as well as in the tales of several mainstream national media outlets, ‘clandestine’ immigrants (rather than deserving refugees) find their hiding spot, dedicating themselves to all kinds of illegal, criminal and immoral activities, and should therefore be immediately expelled from the country. Forza Nuova also proposed a petition to prevent the opening of a mosque in the village – of which plan, however, no previous or further notice was given by any other source.

Fiore would return to the city of Foggia a few weeks later, to lead yet another poorly attended rally against a proposed bill then under discussion in parliament, which planned the institution of a tempered form of birthright (*ius soli*) to grant citizenship to the children of (financially buoyant) migrants (cf. Tuckett, this volume).² To this day, no such bill has been approved, and debate on the matter is still raging. The demonstration demanded, again, the closure of the CARA and the ‘requalification’ and ‘reclaiming’ of the neighbourhood adjacent to the train station in the district capital, known as the Quartiere Ferrovia (the Railway Neighbourhood), where a high presence of migrants is manifest (‘Fiore, Forza Nuova’ 2017). Since 2016 the party has engaged in vigilante-style ‘security promenades’ (*passeggiate per la sicurezza*) to escort Italian citizens and protect them against the alleged dangers lurking in the area; organized self-defence training workshops for women; and staged demonstrations – not only against ‘migrant crime’ in the slum near Mezzanone and in Foggia, but also to protest the threatened eviction of several Italian families illegally occupying a former military barracks in the city. Most recently, they took to the streets to denounce the measures imposed by the government for the containment of the pandemic, as well as to oppose social media censoring of Forza Nuova’s (like CasaPound’s) accounts, which had been found to ‘spread hatred’ (cf. Molé Liston, this volume). In September 2017, Forza Nuova would also establish its local chapter in the city, and later campaign in some of the district towns for the upcoming general election, with very poor results.³ During one such rally, which took place in February 2018 in one of central Foggia’s most prominent halls, when asked about his proposals to eradicate the mafia, Fiore first surreptitiously identified mafiosi with ‘Nigerians’ and – implicitly migrant – ‘gangmasters’, or *caporali*, supposedly operating within asylum seekers’ reception centres and often blamed for the conditions of fierce exploitation and inadequate housing reserved for most migrant farm labourers. He then put forth the idea to intern ‘such people’ in ‘concentration camps’, ‘suspending juridical datums [*il dato giuridico, il fatto giuridico*] and neutralizing their [mafiosi’s] capacity to do harm until the battle against the mafia is won’ (Greco and D’Agostino 2018). At the same time, he presented such ideas, alongside that

of forcibly deporting migrants, as an act of ‘love’ for African people, who have the right to ‘develop’ each in their own country.

In the small *borgata* of Mezzanone, parades led (or co-opted) by Forza Nuova had already taken place in the spring of 2016, when party members had ridden the wave of anger that ran through the residents, related to the daily, age-old scuffles with migrants from the CARA and the surrounding slum for access to public transport, especially during schooldays (‘Forza Nuova’ 2016). Two demonstrations had been organized, in which a range of complaints were vented against ‘degradation’ (*degrado* – see Sorge, this volume), lack of civility, and the threat to ‘mothers, sisters, wives and girlfriends’, and where the usual litany demanding ‘Italy for Italians’ was rehearsed. A Ghanaian migrant and long-term resident of Mezzanone also took part in one of the rallies, and was quoted as pleading with fellow Africans to behave in a more ‘respectful’ manner. As with Fiore’s statements regarding repatriation as an act of love, referenced above, the presence of an African migrant implicitly denied the racist character of the demonstration and of Forza Nuova more generally.⁴

While attempting to skirt accusations of racism, but also of ‘nostalgia’ and denialism (and to avoid being indicted for seeking to restore the Fascist party – a crime according to the Italian constitution), Forza Nuova’s rhetoric and its members’ public appearances gesture to the language and symbolics of historical Fascism and Nazism. Overt connections, ambiguous references or insider hints often relate to spaces that are strongly charged with the memory of those pasts – as testified by connections with the *borgate* of Fascist *bonifica*, references to concentration camps, or pilgrimages to sites such as Piazzale Loreto in Milan (where Mussolini’s corpse was exposed in 1945), among others (cf. Heywood 2019, 2022, on Predappio as a pilgrimage site where Forza Nuova organizes yearly commemorations in honour of Mussolini). In December 2023, together with several other party members, Forza Nuova’s leader was convicted in the first degree to eight years’ imprisonment after having been arrested for allegedly orchestrating a siege on the Rome headquarters of the post-Communist labour union, CGIL, during a rally organized by anti-vaxxers and anti-pass protesters in October 2021.

In the 1980s, Fiore had avoided arrest by escaping to London, where he was granted political asylum, to then return to Italy a free man in 1999.⁵ Forza Nuova’s leader had been convicted for his active membership, during the previous decade, in the ‘black’ terrorist group Terza Posizione – whose symbol (in turn inspired by that of a Nazi SS combat division) would reappear tattooed on the forehead of Luca Traini, a 28-year-old who in February 2018 fired several gunshots at, and wounded, six migrants from sub-Saharan Africa in the city of Macerata (Marche). His attack also targeted the local chapter of the centre-left Democratic Party (PD), one of the heirs of Italy’s

Communist Party (PCI). Traini, who the previous year had run for local council elections with the Lega party, would be apprehended by the police shortly after the rampage, while intent on shouting ‘Viva l’Italia!’ and performing the Fascist Roman salute in front of Macerata’s 1933 Great War memorial, clad in the Italian flag. Immediately after the news had spread of the shootings, Forza Nuova expressed their solidarity, blaming uncontrolled migration and the mounting insecurity and anger it causes among Italians. They offered Traini economic and legal support through Foggia’s party candidate and lawyer, Margherita Matrella, who publicly declared her readiness to defend the author of the attack free of charge – to then retract her offer a day later (‘Macerata’ 2018).

Traini would be finally sentenced to twelve years’ imprisonment for attempted mass murder aggravated by racism. His gesture, as he himself declared in court, was conceived as a vendetta for the brutal murder of 18-year-old Pamela Mastropietro, which had taken place in Macerata five days earlier. Innocent Oseghale, a Nigerian citizen and street drug dealer, had been arrested a few hours after the recovery of the young woman’s body, found dismembered in two suitcases on a roadside, and would be subsequently tried and finally sentenced to life in prison. Thus, the logic of Traini’s actions derived not only from the purported equivalence of all Black bodies – a signature mark of racist thinking – but also from a concept and form of retribution that recalls Nazi-Fascist reprisals in the last phases of the Second World War, as they were recounted after the end of the conflict, in cinema and popular narrative, becoming ingrained in collective memory. For each German soldier attacked, multiple civilians would be put to death.⁶ Traini’s homage to the First World War memorial built during the Fascist period, performed after his blind frenzy of armed violence, and to ultra-right terrorist groups, as well as his saluting gesture, equally testify to his attachment to historical Fascism and its post-war reincarnations. In turn, Luca Traini’s name would show up, alongside those of many other white supremacists and anti-Muslim ‘crusaders’, on one of the several magazines feeding the assault weapons employed by alt-right fanatic Brenton Harrison Tarrant, an Australian citizen who in March 2019 killed dozens of Muslim worshippers in what became known as the Christchurch Massacre. This chain of references makes the citational rhetoric, networked materiality and violent practice of far-right, supremacist politics explicit, pointing to its nostalgic core, regardless of attempts to whitewash the image of its organizations, to make them more ‘respectable’ and protect them from legal charges.

In Aprilia, one of the *borgate* founded during Fascism in Agro Pontino (now the district of Latina) as part of the project of *bonifica integrale*, on International Holocaust Remembrance Day in 2014, three young boys from the town, later identified by the police, hung a banner reading ‘Remember

not to remember' outside the local high school (named after the Rosselli brothers, killed by the Fascist regime for their political convictions while in exile in France), where a discussion on the Holocaust was taking place. The banner also bore the symbol of Forza Nuova, who were quick in disassociating their party from the gesture. The message, however, uncannily captures (crypto-)neofascists' ambivalence towards memory – as the celebration of Fascism's feats is often masked, downplayed or, indeed, denied through the very act of un-remembering, hence seeking to delete and thus implicitly validating that which public memorialization identifies as its major crimes. Even the siege on the CGIL union in 2021, just like Traini's attack on the PD chapter, recalls, indeed restages through an unclaimed citation, early twentieth-century Italian Fascism's violent suppression of the labour movement.

The history of Borgo Mezzanone is itself witness to such (censored) genealogy, which recent events have evoked. The *borgata* was originally named Borgo La Serpe, in honour of Fascist blackshirt militia fighter Raffaele Laserpa, killed in 1921 during a bloody attack against the labour chambers⁷ of San Severo (an 'agro-town' in the northern part of Tavoliere). The name of the settlement would be changed in 1943, following the wave of *damnatio memoriae* (lit. memory-damning or cursing) that, across Italy, accompanied the fall of the regime – first with the arrest of Mussolini and then, to a lesser extent, after the end of the war (Fogu 2006; Foot 2009; cf. Heywood 2019) – and that was cast upon Fascist toponyms, buildings and monuments. The stone slab that had been placed on the *Casa del Fascio* (the Fascist Party's headquarters in the *borgata*) as a tribute to Laserpa was removed by the US troops stationed in the village (Mercurio et al. 1993; D'Alessandro 2002).

The same fate also befell the fountain placed at the centre of the hamlet, a heavily symbolic piece of infrastructure in a land that historically had suffered from the lack of drinking and irrigation water, as well as from swampiness. The lictorian fasces (symbols of the regime, in turn mimicking those of Roman *imperium*) that originally decorated it were removed. It was on this very fountain that in 2017, after the aggression against one of the *borgata's* residents by an African asylum seeker (and the reactions that followed it) took place, two swastikas and the word 'DVCE' were spray-painted in black, to be later erased. In November 2020, the same inscriptions, as well as a Celtic cross, were marked (this time in white spray paint) all over the shutters of Borgo Mezzanone's recently opened CGIL labour chambers ('Svastiche' 2020). The union, for their part, denounced the desecration – pointing out that it occurred on the eve of one of its founders' birth: local peasant turned national leader and popular hero, Giuseppe di Vittorio,⁸ hailed from Cerignola, a few miles to the south, where on the same date in 2022, the town's chapter of the labour chambers was also attacked and vandalized, in what was interpreted as a fascist attack ('Cerignola' 2022).

In this corner of the Mezzogiorno, the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century's landless peasants' struggles, animated by revolutionary, anarcho-socialist and communist ideals, were taken up again in full force after the Fascist regime's downfall, but apparently disappeared at the close of the 1960s, with public memorialization only faintly and selectively recalling them in the present. The celebration of this history is in fact circumscribed to the iconic figure of Di Vittorio himself, usually purged of his revolutionary edge. While the plight of today's migrant farm labourers is often compared to that of local peasants at the dawn of the workers' movement, little mention is usually made of migrants' current (self-)organized struggles. Furthermore, any explicitly antifascist reclaiming of space on the part of locals is limited to sparse inscriptions, graffiti and sporadic demonstrations, and usually confined within the official rhetoric of anniversary commemorations. The same cannot be said of F/fascist orientations.

Across the *borgate* of *bonifica* – which in Tavoliere were for the most part erected between 1938 and 1941 – as well as in the city of Foggia itself, nostalgic attachments materialize among the (symbolic or actual) heirs of those who invested economic, physical and emotional resources into the Fascist project. The material, affective and ideological debris of Fascism emerges from and attaches to landscapes, architectures, discourses and dispositions (cf. Heywood, this volume). Buildings, monuments, landscapes and ruins from that era or later contribute in various ways to an uncritical or even celebratory recollection of Fascism, evoking and relaying a nostalgia that is picked up on and reinscribed onto places, not only by the most 'extremist' groups but on a diffuse scale. In many cases, constructions erected during the Fascist era still bear its effigies and display heroic depictions of its leader and of Italy's colonial 'empire', having escaped the (sometimes violent) iconoclasm that followed the fall of the regime. A monumental M-shaped building – an obvious homage to the *Duce*, complete with marble bas-reliefs celebrating his feats – still hosts the town hall today. The state offices building (Palazzo degli Uffici Statali), in whose courtyard a large white-marble slab depicts Africa and Europe, with Italy and its overseas colonies (as of 1939) painted black, an eagle resting on a pedestal at its feet, have also maintained their original function. On 25 April 2022, a few representatives of left-wing party Sinistra Italiana, on the occasion of the celebrations of the official anniversary of Italy's liberation from Nazi Fascism, plastered handwritten notes on street names and plaques commemorating prominent Fascist figures ('L'Attacco TG' 2022), listing their responsibilities during the regime – for which action its promoters later received a fine from Foggia's municipal police.

Besides remnants from the *ventennio*, more or less overt official homages to Fascism have been inscribed on the urban landscape even in very

recent times. In 1998, in Foggia's central Piazza Italia, under the direction of the then post-fascist mayor, two pillars, standing a dozen metres tall, were installed, at whose top a semi-circular extension is attached. Among many others, the left-wing university students' union Link, in a Facebook post published on 25 April 2021, noted that this urban décor recalls the shape of the lictorian fasces (Link Foggia 2021). Presumably, the poles were meant to evoke the much taller 'victory antennas' (*antenne della vittoria*) erected in 1936 to commemorate Italy's alleged 'success' in the First World War,⁹ in the square that most evidently bears the mark of the Fascist intervention on the urban fabric in a plan to create a 'Grande Foggia' (Corvaglia and Scionti 1985; Cucciolla 2006), and taken down in 1961. Despite the town administration's denial of any connection to Fascist symbolism at the time of their construction, the pillars proved sufficiently embarrassing that the subsequent, centre-left municipal council (which took office in 2004) applied several coloured plaques to some of their component parts, but never embarrassing enough to be removed.

Both in the city of Foggia and in the *borgate* built during Fascism, nostalgia also materializes in the form of calendars dedicated to Mussolini (or other images of the *Duce*) hanging behind the bars of cafés or otherwise on display; commemorative posters dating to the foundation of the *borgate*, depicting the first settlers and bearing the symbols of the regime, proudly framed and exposed in local stores; and graffiti and stickers featuring fasces, swastikas, Celtic crosses or other F/fascist icons (also of recent creation) disseminated on walls, lamp posts, monuments and street signs, sometimes accompanied by slogans – which are habitually also repeated by many supporters of the local football teams and by members of the student organizations affiliated to far-right groups.

However, as already noted, the nostalgic penchant for citation, its spatial and more broadly material attachments and its often covert or ambivalent character are not the prerogative of the ultra-right, being common among a wider cohort of right-wing party affiliates and sympathizers, but also surfacing in even more unexpected contexts. Such inklings, furthermore, have often invested the spaces and symbolics of *bonifica*. The pension reform implemented in Italy in 2019 bore the eerily familiar appellation Quota 100, a possible homage to Mussolini's economic measure Quota 90 – a policy against currency devaluation and inflation that pegged a fixed exchange rate between the Italian *lira* and the pound sterling. While the reference might seem spurious, a closer look at the author of the reform's credentials may lead one to conclude otherwise. Claudio Durigon, a member of the xenophobic right-wing Lega party (in whose ranks Luca Traini, the perpetrator of the Macerata shootings, had been running for local elections) and of post-fascist union UGL, defined himself as 'a child of the *bonifica*' (Telese

2019) by virtue of his grandparents' having resettled from Veneto to the Fascist-redeemed Pontine Marshes. In *Agro Pontino*, the Fascist regime implemented its apparently most successful and widely acclaimed feat of land reclamation and peasant resettlement. In August 2021, Durigon was forced to resign from his position as assistant secretary at the Ministry of Economy and Finances, due to a controversy that vividly captures the imbrication of nostalgic affects and spatial symbols, and the importance of the memorialization of *bonifica* in such attachments. The setting for this political drama, Latina, is the district capital of Agro Pontino and historical Fascism's only example of a fully fledged 'New City' (originally called 'Littoria'). Not coincidentally, in 1998 it was also the stage for the national launch of Forza Nuova. On 6 August 2021, during a public rally preceding the mayoral election, Durigon proposed that Latina's central park be renamed in honour of Mussolini's younger brother, Arnaldo, as it allegedly had been on its inauguration in 1932 (which coincided with that of the city itself), until its renaming in 2017. As a matter of fact, before being christened after the iconic martyred anti-mafia magistrates Falcone and Borsellino in 2017, the park's toponym underwent several changes: renamed 'Parco Comunale' after Benito Mussolini's fall in 1943, its original title was unofficially restored by a neofascist mayor in 1996 alongside other symbols of Fascism (Fuller 2020), while most citizens simply referred to it as the *giardinetti*.¹⁰

BONIFICA AND THE SPECTRALITY OF ORDINARY F/FASCISM

As many of the (spectral or overt) citations mentioned above testify, the affective and symbolic importance of *bonifica* and of its spatial-material settings in contemporary Italian political discourse cannot be overstated. But if *bonifiche* have acted as a *lieu de mémoire* throughout Italy's contemporary history (Bevilacqua 1996), today's imaginaries almost invariably anchor them to the Fascist era. Attempts to rehabilitate, more or less surreptitiously, the figure of Mussolini and the regime more generally summon the alleged 'successes' of *bonifica* as one of their common refrains almost without fail (for a debunking of this and other myths of and about Fascism, see Filippi 2019; cf. Mariani 1976). Furthermore, *bonifica* also pops up in less explicit or canonical discourses that specifically relate to the socio-material landscapes of Tavoliere. In this context frequent recourse to the trope of reclamation and purification has been made in relation to the presence of migrants in Mezzanone, Foggia and Tavoliere more generally, striking particularly evocative chords.

Applied to conjure a need to 'cleanse' locales frequented and inhabited by migrants, as it was during the demonstrations sponsored by Forza Nuova,

this idiom has been repeatedly mobilized by a number of other subjects to refer to measures adopted to address the ‘degradation’ of the neighbourhood skirting Foggia’s train station. In recent decades and concomitantly with the arrival of high numbers of migrants (mostly employed as casual farm workers), a series of dedicated stores have flourished there, selling specialty food from West Africa, Eastern Europe and South Asia, as well as *halal* meat and electronic goods, or providing money transfer, communication and betting services. While migrant farm workers these days are for the most part relegated to slums, labour camps or dispersed, derelict dwellings outside or in the outskirts of cities and towns (cf. Peano 2021b), these commercial and recreational facilities – located in an easily accessible part of the district capital – have attracted large clienteles from those peripheries, in turn fostering the development of parallel economies, especially for commercial sex and informal second-hand goods.

Complaints from local residents about the rise of crime and the presence of an unruly, drunken, foreign ‘rabble’ (in several instances accused of violence against Italian women), and their bad effects on business, real estate prices and ‘perceived insecurity’, have been a constant and rising feature of public discourse. Anxieties about impurity, crime and degradation have also led first to the formation of vigilante squads and neighbourhood watch-type organizations among Italian residents (including Forza Nuova’s, as well as others that are more or less explicitly tied to different right-wing organizations, such as the tellingly named ‘Italexit’ party, which advocates the country’s abandonment of the euro and the EU). Such calls for increased security also resulted in the establishment of a permanent (yet never used) local police post in the square immediately facing the train station and to increasingly frequent and aggressive police raids that lead for the most part to the identification and banishment of undocumented (and sometimes wanted) subjects, street peddlers or migrant sex workers. On 6 December 2017, a local city council representative from the Lega party, Joseph Splendido, claimed that ‘In order to actually cleanse [*bonificare*] the Quartiere Ferrovia all local police must be equipped with a service weapon’ (‘Armiamo Tutti gli Agenti’ 2017). The politician’s comments came in the wake of the municipal anti-loitering by-law, enforced a few days before, that in turn reflected the nationwide provisions of the latest Security Bill, which had come into force earlier the same year. Both legislative measures, as well as public discourse, responded to a heavily racialized, criminalizing logic, in a climate of growing and ever more institutionalized intolerance that fuelled hatred campaigns, lynching parties and terrorist attacks against migrants, and especially against Black migrants, some of which I have mentioned earlier in this chapter.¹¹ All those deemed to undermine the city’s *decoro* (‘decorum’, a recently popularized, strongly moralizing, if extremely ephemeral concept), according to

arbitrary standards, are issued with expulsion orders. Indeed, the disturbing alien elements ruining the *decoro* of the once prestigious Quartiere Ferrovia, formerly known as Foggia's 'parlour' (*salotto buono*) – developed by agrarian capitalist money in the late nineteenth century and then during the Fascist era – are thought to come, among other encampments, from Borgo Mezzanone. The alleged robbery and sexual assault with which the chapter opened was immediately relayed by local and national media, which periodically run reports on the 'degradation' (*degrado*) of the slum that surrounds the reception centre, where, it is constantly and obsessively repeated, prostitution and drug dealing are rife; workers are recruited for daily farm labour by ruthless (and, it is implied, always foreign) gangmasters; rubbish piles up and no proper sanitation is in place. Just like the rhetoric of *bonifica*, at once a process of reclamation and of cleansing, *degrado* (a central rhetorical and political trope in contemporary Italy) belongs to the constellation of biopolitical discourses used to justify repressive measures against all kinds of undesirables, who mar the image of (wannabe) showcase cities that must be fit for tourist consumption and who, more generally, are symptomatic of a decay in the body of the community and the nation, which must be repaired by expelling its bearers.

The notion of *bonifica* has also been used in more abstract terms by former Minister for Internal Affairs Luciana Lamorgese, who referred to the need for a 'cleansing of immigration' ('*bonifica dell'immigrazione*') by way of an amnesty for the undocumented ('23-12-2019 Lamorgese' 2019; see Peano 2021a). Since the statement came during a visit to Tavoliere, where the security issues plaguing the district were under discussion, the Minister (a 'technocratic' figure unaffiliated to any party) was presumably seeking to appease what is considered an anti-immigration audience by gesturing towards heavily charged pasts and their politics. The very term employed to indicate such a measure of mass regularization, *sanatoria*, inscribes it into a biopolitical discourse impregnated with cleansing and sanitation undertones.

The 'unruliness' and biopolitical dangers represented by contemporary migration, pitted against the imagined past of purity brought forth by *bonifica integrale*, also surfaced during a conversation I held with Vito (not his real name), an unmarried and childless farmer now in his seventies whom I had the chance to meet in 2021 in another of Tavoliere's Fascist-era *borgate*, Borgo Inconronata. The son of settlers from the northern Veneto region, today he cultivates rented land and employs migrant workers in the harvest of tomatoes. Like dozens of other families, his parents and grandparents had been recruited in the early 1930s to work as sharecroppers at the experimental farm of S. Chiara, located in Tavoliere's Margherita di Savoia, on the Adriatic coast. Some of the colonists, as they were referred to in official rhetoric, were veterans demobilized from the African wars of conquest (the

brutal ‘pacification’ of Libya completed in 1934 and the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935), or migrants enlisted for the agrarian colonization of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, who subsequently returned to their homeland only to find that their entire family had relocated to Apulia, and thus joined them. This latter was the case for Vito’s father. After the end of the Second World War, Vito and his family were transferred to Incoronata, and became employees of ONC (Opera Nazionale Combattenti), the veterans’ organization founded after the First World War, which was in charge of *bonifica integrale* across many patches of Tavoliere.

Discussing the continuities and breaches between past and present, Vito was emphatic in nostalgically remarking that his family’s had been an ‘organized’ migration, unlike those of the present. Here and elsewhere in our conversations, his depiction of the contemporary farm workforce oscillated between the image of the dubiously moral and that of the thoroughly subjugated migrant, conjuring the common Janus-faced icon of a criminal-victim, associated with the idea of unruly and unrulled flows. In our discussion, reflecting back on his family’s experience, Vito also quipped: ‘People were resettled in ways that were designed to “improve the race” [*migliorare la razza*].’ Following my critical remarks regarding such a project, as if to justify his statement, he offered: ‘Perhaps I chose the wrong word [referring to ‘race’]. I meant to say that they were installed alongside those from different villages and parts of the country, to avoid inbreeding.’ His sequestered lifestyle and anxieties about talking to strangers are possibly a reflection of his unease with a world in which the biopolitical control of flows no longer explicitly follows eugenic blueprints. After the war, many of Vito’s fellow settlers from S. Chiara preferred to move back up north and find employment in the factories of Lombardy and Veneto. All were defrauded of their right, postulated by the agrarian reform, to become owners of the land they had farmed as sharecroppers. Among their last remaining descendants, those who continued to work the land and live on the farm of S. Chiara were finally expelled in the spring of 2021, to be replaced by African migrants.

The new wave of poverty criminalization, today in full swing, bears the echoes of an endlessly haunting past and feeds off long-lasting, heavily racialized tropes. The control of mobility and access to space is one of its central instruments and preoccupations, just as it has been since the nineteenth century, when the battle against urbanization by means of ruralizing projects took hold across Italy. Indeed, *bonifica integrale* and its prehistory were also conceived as a direct response to peasant struggles, which had their centres of organization in ‘agro-’ or ‘company towns’. Such (often slum-like) settlements had grown with the expansion of capitalist investment in farmland after the abolition of the feudal system that began in the early nineteenth century (but reached completion after Italy’s unification in 1861). From the

close of the eighteenth century, southern intellectuals and ‘enlightened’ administrators had progressively come to see the organization and use of the Neapolitan crown’s estates in Tavoliere as highly inefficient and unproductive. Since early modernity, the largest portion of the vast feudal demesne had been allocated to seasonal sheep-grazing pastures (one of the principal sources of revenue for the Kingdom) alternating with extensive wheat cultivation, and administered through byzantine codes by a ‘sheep customs force’ (*dogana delle pecore*). The need to reform the state, homogenizing its practices and hold and abolishing the customs system, was deemed essential to the establishment of private property and thus of efficient, profitable forms of extractive cultivation through the sale of common land.

In this process, the swampy, malaria-bearing parts of Tavoliere were recast as desolate, semi-desert and dangerous spaces, populated by brigands, outlaws and uncivilized, nomadic shepherds. At the same time, the purported need to reclaim wetlands for capitalist agriculture through state-led projects began to be associated with a project of moral reform for different sectors of the displaced, urbanizing underclass, attracted from nearby Appenine villages to urban centres by the conversion of pastures for the cultivation of labour-intensive wheat (Bevilacqua 1988; Mercurio 1988; Snowden 1986). Increasingly, the newly discovered backwardness of transhumant pastoralism and of southern peasants, which went hand-in-hand with the consolidation of ideas of modernity and progress, began to be associated with those subjects’ putative ‘Africanness’, in the context of the development of ‘racial science’. The proletarianization of landless peasants coincided with their racialization. Also, as Welch (2016: 6) has noted, in post-Unitary ‘liberal’ Italy ‘a major point of articulation for Italian racial discourse is at the intersection of primarily agricultural labor productivity and biological reproduction’.

While the idea of reclaiming land through projects that involved the organized resettlement of dispossessed and often criminalized peasants had developed since the late eighteenth century, Fascist rule certainly invested more than any previous governments had, either before or after the proclamation of the unified (if ‘incomplete’) Kingdom of Italy in 1861. Not only was this an unparalleled economic and infrastructural effort; it was also couched in partially new ideological garb, and certainly copiously elaborated on what in previous decades had only been summarily sketched. Projects for the reclamation of swampy lands and the irrigation of arid soils, located mostly along the Italian coastline as well as in the overseas African colonies, were coupled with increasingly ‘organic’ visions in which demographics, politics and ‘racial science’ converged (Bevilacqua and Rossi-Doria 1984; Poidimani 2009; Protasi and Sonnino 2003).

Fascism’s ‘integral’ vision progressively inserted such plans into a wider project that included eugenic, racial cleansing, which tellingly went under

the label of *bonifica umana* and would be achieved by reconnecting the peasantry and the urban poor to a mythicized, healthy rural milieu by means of mass resettlements from supposedly overpopulated areas where unemployment was rife, thereby finally ridding the racial build of southern peasants of its more bastardized (i.e. still essentially 'African' and 'Semitic') elements (Ben-Ghiat 2001; Poidimani 2009). The idealized connection between 'blood and soil' materialized in very concrete forms through such projects. In Ben-Ghiat's (2001: 4) words,

land reclamation merely constituted the most concrete manifestation of the fascists' desire to purify the nation of all social and cultural pathology. The campaigns for agricultural reclamation (*bonifica agricola*), human reclamation (*bonifica umana*), and cultural reclamation (*bonifica della cultura*), together with the anti-Jewish laws, are . . . different facets and phases of a comprehensive project to combat degeneration and radically renew Italian society by 'pulling up the bad weeds and cleaning up the soil'.

The vicissitudes of Borgo Mezzanone since its foundation, and of Tavoliere more generally, provide some illuminating clues as to how old refrains have come to the surface again, if refracted. The upward social mobility of once landless settler families has determined processes of substitution that have altered the composition and organization of labour, but reproduced the racial categories that have sustained its control since the very beginning of the project of national formation and the concomitant development of agriculture and industry. Other processes of displacement and emplacement, of command and abandonment, have taken shape in Mezzanone at the same time as those involving migrants. Across from the original buildings erected by the Fascist regime for the initial settlers of the *borgata*, new houses were constructed in the 1990s by a powerful entrepreneur from Foggia, who obtained kickbacks from local administrations. Locally known as *case gialle* (yellow houses), they are occupied by those who previously lived in precarious, shack-like places or illegally squatted council houses in the district capital, and received the support of groups such as Forza Nuova. The most recent settlers of the *borgata* are known to the original nucleus of inhabitants in Mezzanone as 'Cheyenne', for their reputation as 'savages'. Unlike the founders' descendants that still live in the *borgata*, who prosper thanks to the small family businesses established after the Second World War, the 'Cheyenne' are sub-proletarian clients of local entrepreneurs and politicians, unemployed or with precarious, badly paid informal (and in some cases illegal) jobs and free (but poorly maintained) housing guaranteed by their attachment to a patron.

CONCLUSION

The presence of a local underclass, hit by waves of crisis, outmigration and endemic unemployment, further reinforces a mechanism of racialized fragmentation that operates by way of a fractal mirror game of othering, finding in the F/fascist repertoire and its materializations a ready-made, prefabricated script and scaffolding on which to feed. Yet deployments of such a repertoire widely exceed the perimeters of contemporary neofascism. The dehumanization and criminalization of faceless and nameless farm labourers, despised for their 'African' origins; the rejection of bodies perceived as invading and foreign based on recursive articulations of the paradigm of 'blood' and descent; the demonization of old and new urban and slum-like concentrations of workers; and the recurring failures and disavowals of projects of resettlement and redistribution are examples of imperial 'Möbius strip' recursions (Hom 2019) that cut across established ideological divides.

Yet the catalysing function of F/fascist tropes, symbolics, affects and materialities also works to circumscribe what are made to appear as isolated, exceptional attitudes – both historically and synchronously. On the other hand, the longer genealogy of, and wide recourse to, notions of *bonifica* and their biopolitical implications point to much more pervasive mechanisms that F/fascist references occlude. Historical Fascism's ideology has been famously characterized as a nonsynchronous philosophy (Bloch 1977), one in which unfulfilled and mythical pasts (of rural attachment to 'blood and soil', and of imperial grandeur, pure identities and solid values) became the bases for active history-making in the present (Fogu 2015). Today, nonsynchronicity itself recurs in the nostalgia for an imagined Fascist golden era, in which *bonifiche* play an important symbolic and material role, especially in a context such as that of Tavoliere, which was heavily impacted by them. However, more than explicit attachments, nostalgia for a mythicized but contested and repressed past surfaces in ambivalent, indirect, uncanny ways, pointing to the need to account for the presence of the past in more complex ways than simple continuities, returns or flat analogies. Indeed, even an exclusive focus on F/fascism as political nemesis partakes of that same nonsynchronicity and myth-making. To counter F/fascist discourse, its occlusions and spectral hauntings, de-fetishizing and decentring its primacy and supposed uniqueness vis-à-vis both its pasts and futures, but recognizing its import, anthropologically grounded analysis must sharpen its tools to critically interrogate such assemblages.

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NOTES

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1. <http://www.norbaonline.it/od.asp?i=27457&puntata=Borgo%20Mezzanone:%20leader%20Forza%20Nuova%20incontra%20cittadini&pr=SERVIZI%20TG>, retrieved 14 March 2018.
2. The bill, that excluded the children of migrants who fell below a certain income level, was subsequently scrapped, boycotted by the vast majority of MPs who felt it was unsavoury to pass what was widely perceived as an unpopular law just before the general elections.
3. Apart from the numbers of people taking part in demonstrations, in local and national elections neither Forza Nuova nor the other post-fascist organization, Casa-Pound (cf. Cammelli, this volume), obtained large numbers of votes. In the general elections that took place on 4 March 2018, in Borgo Mezzanone the two parties were voted for by four people out of four hundred in total, which amounts to less than their national average, while across the district of Foggia they gained just above 1.18 per cent, a little below the national average. The Lega, on the other hand, reached 6.34 per cent of votes in Mezzanone, in line with the district’s average.
4. Forza Nuova’s denialist attitude towards its own fascist sympathies and racist orientations was made evident also in its pressing defamation charges against two journalists at *Corriere della Sera*, one of Italy’s leading newspapers, who in 2006 had quoted the vice-president of the Province of Rome defining Forza Nuova ‘an evidently fascist organisation and bearer of values such as racism, xenophobia, violence and anti-semitism’ (‘La Cassazione’ 2011). Italy’s highest tribunal, the Court of Cassation, acquitted the defendants, arguing that Forza Nuova is a nazifascist party and thus necessarily racist too.
5. See Biondani et al. (2017).
6. In 2006, the Military Court of La Spezia, in their pronouncement at the end of the trial against an alleged war criminal, sub lieutenant Heinrich Nordhorn (judged guilty for two separate instances of reprisals against civilians), dedicated a whole paragraph to the matter, titled ‘Dieci italiani per ogni tedesco’ (‘Ten Italians for each German’). In it, the court refutes the widespread belief according to which this was in fact the unwritten rule of the Wehrmacht Command, and yet cites copious evidence that

- Nazi-Fascist troops did indeed carry out reprisals against civilians and partisans in which for the death or wounding of one German soldier (or even without this or any threat of it ever occurring) several Italians (but also partisans of other nationalities), in variable numbers, would be massacred. See Ministero della Difesa (n.d.).
7. *Camere del Lavoro*, or labour chambers, were local manifestations of the socialist party, which had the function of organizing workers and conducting negotiations with employers and their organizations. They later became the headquarters of the communist-leaning CGdL (Confederazione Generale del Lavoro) union, renamed CGIL after the end of the Second World War (cf. Milanese 2001).
 8. For an oral history of the mythicization of the figure of Giuseppe Di Vittorio by landless peasants in Tavoliere, and most especially in Cerignola, Di Vittorio's home town, see Rinaldi and Sobrero (2004).
 9. Cf. Inserra (2022).
 10. For an analysis of the affective charge of multiple histories and temporalities in contemporary Latina, particularly in relation to the Fascist period, see Miltiadis (2020).
 11. These have mirrored and intersected with the daily war against women waged across the country and counting almost one victim every day, as well as innumerable and diverse acts of physical and symbolic violence.

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CHAPTER 8

DEMONIZING FAKE NEWS IN A POST-TRUTH POLITICAL WORLD

Noelle Molé Liston



INTRODUCTION

In 2017, Laura Boldrini, president of the lower house of the Italian Parliament, likened fake news (*notizie false*) to edible ‘poison’ that Italians ingested unknowingly. Parliament then announced a plan to implement educational programmes training children to discern real news from fake news. In 2018, Pope Francis, in his ‘Message of His Holiness on World Communications Day’, called the serpent in the tree of life in the Book of Genesis the world’s ‘first fake news’. In 2022, some studies estimate that 17 per cent of Italians encounter fake news every day (Scorza 2022). Why did Italy demonize and quickly mobilize against fake news in the 2010s? In national efforts to patrol fake news, what is the average reader-citizen prompted to do, and, implicitly, value and disregard? In this chapter, I mine the fake news legislation initiatives, guidebooks and policies for what and where they cast the attention and desire of citizens, and what remains hidden and obscured.

Certainly the broadest relevant context is the information age, and, in particular, a cultural and historical context in which scientific knowledge and objective fact have been simultaneously exalted and mystified, and disinformation and conspiracy have been easily and readily disseminated (Molé Liston 2020). Moreover, Italian cynicism regarding news media was reshaped during former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi’s years of televised masterminding, he himself being the media mogul of companies Mediaset and Mondadori and news publications *Il Giornale* and *Panorama* (Castellano 2020; Molé Liston 2020). In this chapter, I interrogate how media literacy programmes mount a unique moral universe complete with trusted heroes

and fearful antagonists. I theorize the unexpected political effects of sceptical media literacy regimes aiming to transform lazy scrollers into vigilant reader-citizens. And while Italy's efforts to curtail fake news have, unsurprisingly, mostly failed, they represent an opportunity to dissect digital-age citizens' political resocialization under the guise of digital media literacy.

ITALY'S TIMELINE AGAINST FAKE NEWS

As a whole, Italians have a heightened and public sense of politics undergirding news production (Molé Liston 2020). In a system called *lottizzazione*, Italian televised news channels have been divided politically since the 1970s, with each network openly associated with a particular political party. Italian print media is owned by a few powerful families or corporations. Several leading newspapers including *La Repubblica*, the leading paper in the central-south regions, as well as *L'Espresso*, *HuffPost Italia* and *La Stampa*, are controlled by the Agnelli family (Castellano 2020). Meanwhile, the *Corriere della Sera*, the leading paper of Italy's north, is under the control of Rizzoli (RCS Media Group), some of whose owners worked with Berlusconi's company Mediaset (Castellano 2020).

Beginning in the early 2010s, national mobilization, especially at the state level, was aimed at tackling the problem of fake news and disinformation. In 2013, Italy's Fact-Checking Factory (TFCF Srl) was founded and the Communications Regulatory Authority (AGCOM, or *Autorità per le garanzie nelle comunicazioni*) created a Communications Observatory to patrol journalism and online information ('FACTA: Chi Siamo' n.d.; Pasulo 2022). In 2017, the Communications Observatory issued the 'technical table for the guarantee of pluralism and correct information on digital platforms' (Pasulo 2022: 65). In 2017, Law 2688 was proposed to prevent manipulation of online media, guarantee web transparency, incentivize media literacy and punish fake news with fines of up to EUR 5,000 (ibid.: 57). Though a notable attempt to curtail fake news, Law 2688 did not pass because it is neither a civil or penal crime to spread disinformation (ibid.: 62; Candido 2020: 116).¹ In December 2017, Democratic Party (Partito Democratico, PD) senators Luigi Zanda and Rosanna Filippin proposed a law, which also did not pass, focusing on fake news and illicit content on social networks (Pasulo 2022: 65).

In 2018, a special team of experts was formed in the National Centre of Anticrime Information for the Protection of Critical Infrastructures (CNAIPIC) of the Ministry of the Interior, and sponsored a website for reporting fake news to the Postal Police Force (Polizia Postale) (Comandini 2018: 208). The measure, also known as the 'Red Button' plan, was designed

to safeguard the March 2018 elections but was discontinued, due especially to concerns that it had no legal basis (Pasulo 2022: 67). In April 2020, the then undersecretary of the Prime Minister Andre Martella proposed that the government create a monitoring organ for fake news on COVID-19 online and on social networks called the ‘Monitoring Unit to Stop Spreading COVID-19 Fake News Online and on Social Networks’ (Candido 2020: 108, 119). The never-formed group would have representation from the Prime Minister’s office, the Ministry of Health, the Department of Civil Protection and eight government and AGCOM-nominated experts (Pasulo 2022: 69). There have also been recent discussions on how to mobilize around deep-fake videos and apps like FakeYou that distribute easily usable services with which to produce them (Scorza 2022).

In this decade of mobilizations, many of the proposed laws were false starts, failed attempts to try to contain and patrol fake news. The efforts operated on two overlapping fronts: policy and law, and citizen-based education. One could surmise that the subsequent shift towards increasing citizens’ awareness and literacy skills seemed so urgent precisely because of the failure of national law and policy. That said, in the wake of absent legislation, there remains a fairly articulated network of organizations now responsible for producing and regulating fake news. Before I turn to take a closer look at these programmes, I first examine insights from scholarship on fake news.

Anthropologists have examined journalism and fake news (Greenhouse 2019; Storey-Nagy 2021; Özkan 2021; Polleri 2022) with an ethos of caution in terms of unexamined assumptions and premises of both the disciplinary approach and, more broadly, the American political left. Scholars have also tried to overwrite the binary frames of true versus false, free versus censored, in studying fake news. Angelique Haugerud (2018) warns, ‘Today the fake news moniker embodies profound anxieties about the present: science under attack, weaponized information, and possible risks to electoral democracy and national sovereignty for some, or antipathy to liberal elites for others.’ Indeed fake news seems to be symptomatic of deeper problems of democracy, knowledge and science. Adam Hodges offers a capacious framing of fake news as ‘a particular way of participating in a public’ and scrutinizes ‘post-trust’ over ‘post-truth’ (Graan et al. 2020). By ‘post-trust’, Hodges highlights how the core crisis stems from a widespread mistrust in sources of information (ibid.).

Fewer researchers have approached the question of news media literacy, though there are notable exceptions (Hodges 2018). Andrew Graan, for example, frames fake news as ‘the result of professional practices that seek to shape the public circulation of discourse’ (Graan et al. 2020). Jonah Rubin (2021), moreover, examines literacy education efforts in the United States and reveals how ‘varying understandings of democratic governance leads

to remarkably different interpretations of our allegedly singular, objective, factual universe.’ Rubin (*ibid.*: 1) examines how forensic scientists in Spain mobilize a similar epistemological notion of ‘objectively verified facts’ to ‘challenge the foundational arrangements of post-fascist democracy’. Put differently, Rubin shows us the process by which only certain kinds of ‘truth tellers’ become trusted and reliable sources, in ways that rely on often simplified understandings of science. Who becomes a ‘truth teller’ has deep political implications whereby ‘the legitimacy of political participation [is grounded] in the scientific certainty of cold hard facts’ (*ibid.*: 5). Rubin fulfils the demand that Ho and Cavanaugh (2019: 163) lay out in regard to our approach to truth and post-truth that we ‘recognize the extent of the roles [that] faith, authority, and power play in constructing scientific legitimacy’, or, as Karen-Sue Taussig (2019: 1999) puts it, the mandate to ‘illuminate the situated nature of scientific knowledge and the ways it naturalizes power’. In what follows, I track how Italy’s fake news prevention programmes empower only certain kinds of truth tellers, who simultaneously reify both scientific rationality and the notion of truth.

Hesham Shafick (2021: 45) also draws out the nuances of fake news in Egypt by analysing how even fake news considered overtly false might still reshape public discourse, thus dismantling the presumption that ‘corrective information . . . essentially disempowers fake news’. More specifically, he takes up the way that the estimated number of protests in Egypt in 2013, while discredited as fake news, nevertheless ‘enacted the epistemic conditions that facilitated the military coup’ (*ibid.*: 45). Shafick, then, prompts us to ask how the disinformation in circulation might be deeply consequential, rather than whether and how the public judge its truth. Michel Croce and Tommaso Piazza (2021) also scrutinize the epistemological effects of fake news in the broader context of post-truth, that is, one ‘fostered by a lack of concern for the truth – and other epistemically relevant factors – of the shared content’ (*ibid.*: 50). In this way, for Shafick (2021) and Croce and Piazza (2021), the veracity of fake news is beside the point. Studying fake news is more about analysing how a particular epistemological deck gets stacked, a means through which social actors come to know social and political possibilities.

While anthropologists have examined disinformation and media extensively (Boyer 2013; Ho and Cavanaugh 2019; Molé Liston 2020; Rubin 2021; Graan 2022), we also find a new paradoxical tension in studying ‘fake news’ in academe. Carolyn M. Rouse (2019: 172) argues: ‘Sincere liberals get two things wrong: first, that fake news and facts are diametrically opposed, and second, that goals like absolute free speech and or objectivity in journalism are achievable.’ In the context of American Trumpism, David Flood (2019) aptly points out: ‘Poststructuralist arguments about the created-ness of facts

are now weaponized common sense.’ Our sights, Flood argues, should proceed with ‘renewed skepticism of “the media”’ and focus on the ‘relentless expansion of capitalized digital media’. Like Flood, I highlight how the crisis of fake news is based on the infrastructure of websites – social media and otherwise – that monetize disinformation, first and foremost, but also how it is one effect of a technological system based on algorithmic customization (Comandini 2018; Croce and Piazza 2021; Scarpanti 2021; Shafick 2021; Ruffo and Tambuscio 2022), as well as a highly diminished field of journalism (Haugerud 2018). Prioritizing ‘the epistemic limits of conceivable possibilities,’ I examine the discourse of fake news and attempts to produce fake news literacy, in order to track ‘continuous reproductions of inherited epistemic biases’ (Shafick 2021: 47, 53).

Italian scholars of fake news have focused on legal underpinnings (Magnani 2019; Monti 2019), its psychological trappings (Gili and Maddalena 2018) and literacy practices (Comandini 2021). Domenico Laera et al. (2022: 21) position fake news in Italy as capable of causing ‘damage to society’ and ‘making society collectively victimized’. Moreover, Laera et al. (ibid.: 19) find that users’ experience of heightened emotions, most likely anger, correlates with more shared disinformation, whereas anxious and apprehensive users tend not to share information. Similarly, Croce and Piazza (2021: 50) find that sharing fake news is ultimately fuelled by ‘a hunger for social recognition’. In their analysis of post-truth and fake news, Guido Gili and Giovanni Maddalena (2018: 11–12) argue that most computer users find and share news rooted in a ‘confirmation of their own ideas, opinions, and beliefs’. Thus news that echoes users’ personal values increases their likelihood of both believing and disseminating fake news. Moreover, ‘in-group members’ are likely to see out-group members as vulnerable to disinformation, and hold less scepticism towards materials disseminated by ‘friends’ on their social media accounts (ibid.: 13). As a whole, Italian scholars have been attentive to the affective and psychological mechanisms of fake news circulation.

Laera et al. (2022: 19) argue that the process of sharing fake news hinges on the users’ ‘*perception* of the virtual public’s needs’ (emphasis mine). My work is informed by this model insofar as my attention is captured by how these epistemological circuits – between the user and the online collective sources – rely on perception. But I also imagine ‘perception’ as malleable and culturally and historically particular, shaped by broader public discourses on reading, fake news and the dangers of digital media.

DIGITAL AGE LITERATI: VIGILANT LITERACY AS REMEDY

Perhaps the reason that fake news became nearly synonymous with literacy programmes was because of high rates of functional illiteracy (*analfabeti funzionali*) in Europe and Italy. According to the Institute for Workers' Professional Development (ISFOL, Istituto per lo sviluppo della formazione professionale dei lavoratori), an overwhelming number of Italians are functionally illiterate: over 41 per cent of citizens over the age of 55, 26 per cent of 35–54-year-olds and 20 per cent of young people (aged 16–24) (Grillo 2020). A study by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OCSE) in 2013 positioned Italy as one of the lowest-ranked countries for literacy rates in a multi-country study of literacy and comprehension of online texts (Comandini 2018: 198). In their study of adolescents and fake news, education studies researchers Giuseppa Cappuccio and Giuseppa Campagno (2020) surveyed 290 adolescents (14–17-year-olds) on their critical thinking and their capacity to identify fake news. They found that only 29 per cent verified the source of information they read and 43 per cent did not know how to recognize fake news (ibid.: 229). Interested in literacy as a kind of meta-discursive critical awareness, they argue that users need knowledge and awareness of the 'reasoning system' and the regulating 'criteria' in order to recognize fake news (ibid.: 214). Finally, Andrea Bellavita (2022: 216) agrees that the problem of fake news emerges from an impoverished reading practice whereby most users bear a 'colossal cognitive deficit' due to which they are 'incapable of discerning, comprehending, stabilizing the difference, or even simply recognizing: not only and not just what is true and what is false, but every single semantic and linguistic element that contributes to the construction of texts.' One might presume that the literacy crisis would compel the Italian state to address fake news through legal or technological means, as some scholars have proposed. However, in reality, we find the very opposite pattern: a drive towards resolving the problem of fake news by instituting more elaborate literacy practices.

In 2016, Laura Boldrini, then president of the house, announced a plan for debunking fake news by partnering with leading debunkers and their websites: Paolo Attivissimo (*Il Disinformatico*), Michelangelo Coltelli (BUTAC, or 'Buffaloes: A Lot per Kilo'), David Puente (Davidpuente.it) and Walter Quattrociocchi (Barcellona 2016). She framed the problem as both rights-based, concerning the 'right to be informed correctly', as well as affective: '[Fake news] invent[s] things and never-said phrases to rouse hate' (ibid.). After having been a victim of fake news rhetoric, she proposed a literacy-oriented pedagogy for a projected 4.2 million Italian high school students, captured by her 'decatalogue' (*decalogo*) (Scardigno and Mininni 2020: 96):

1. 'Only share news you have verified;
2. Use online instruments to verify the news;
3. Ask about the source and the evidence;
4. Ask for help from an expert or a very competent source;
5. Remember the internet and social network are manipulable;
6. Recognize the various types and styles of fake news;
7. You have enormous power: use it well;
8. Be a good example: don't whine about darkness, just turn on the lights ('Fake News' 2017).

Boldrini's decalogue sets an authoritative tone for a literacy-forward solution to fake news, in which the new generation are fashioned as a kind of digital age literati. The decalogue sets up quite a robust form of reading labour and vigilance, positioned as a moral requirement for all news reading and sharing. In many ways, rational individualism remains at the apex: the singular mind that must 'verify' and reason through information by discerning underlying motives ('manipulable') and genre ('types and styles'). Proper verification relies on smart exploitation of the internet's resources: not only discerning the reliability of evidence but also knowing how to triangulate sources online. Just as television news relied on trusted newscasters, Boldrini's decalogue encourages user-readers to rely on trusted 'experts' if one's own mental resources are lacking.

The digital literati model has been reproduced and further codified among fake news experts like Michelangelo Coltelli, founder of debunking website BUTAC, and collaborator and chief editor (*caporedattrice*) Noemi Urso. For example, Coltelli and Urso's (2019) *Fake News: How to Recognize and Learn How to Recognize Fake News* also encourages attentive readership in media environments. One YouTube book reviewer emphasizes their key intervention: 'Train yourself to reflect, read all the articles with attention, examine the images, sign up for several news sources, and when in doubt, don't "share" news' (Racconti 2019).

Similarly, the Digital Transformation Institute holds that the danger of fake news is 'inversely proportional to the digital literacy of the user' (Gili and Maddalena 2018: 14). Like Boldrini's decalogue, the Digital Transformation Institute offers '10 reflections' on fake news ('Infografica Fake News' n.d.), including:

- 1) Censorship of Fake News is not effective but would be dangerous to users; 2) Fake News is a business first of all: the economic dimension is almost always prevalent with respect to the political-conspiratorial dimensions; 3) Any mechanism of control must be based on transparent, open and iterative dynamics. It cannot be the responsibility of the platform; 4) One rule won't resolve the problem alone. Above all, we need culture, education and knowledge of users.

While the Digital Transformation Institute recognizes the structural underpinnings of fake news (its commodification as a ‘business’), it nevertheless doubles down on the notion that the attentive and educated reader, not the platform or censorship, is the remedy. In her theorization of surveillance society, Shoshanna Zuboff (2021) has proposed taxing data precisely because data-mining allows for fake news to be more successfully and effectively targeted to users. Yet as these fake news programmes illustrate, the ‘reflections’ shift the responsibility to the user-reader and away from the underlying technological mechanisms and infrastructure.

Literacy practices demand the cultivation of discerning reading skills, but also vigilance for intentional deception and malice. Italy’s Communications Regulatory Authority (AGCOM) is a national source promoting media and digital literacy, as evidenced by their ‘D Group’ on literacy, which has a mandate to ‘promote digital and media culture furnishing instruments for citizens for the knowledgeable and critical use of media’ (‘Gruppo D’ n.d.). With the headline ‘Watch out for traps!’ they advise: ‘You must pay attention. . . . It may cause confusion, in the worst cases, risk and danger for society, influencing important choices on matters like health and politics, instigate hate, [or] destroy someone’s reputation’ (ibid.). They advise examining seven parts of a source: checking the URL, author, source, graphic layout and title, verifying the information on search engines and looking for a blue checkmark, which indicates a ‘verification badge’ of a credible profile or webpage (ibid.). In socializing Italy’s user-citizenry towards high-stakes literacy practices, they train emergent readers to be ever defensive: warrior readers in the information jungle, trained to anticipate the fake news ambush.

In Guido Saraceni’s 2018 TEDx talk in Vicenza, ‘Fake News and Post-Truth: A Call to Arms’, the professor of legal philosophy at the University of Teramo encourages user-readers to hone their reading skills, but also reminds them that ‘fake news’ appeals because of its proximity to truth. He offers an example of a site name playing on the name of one of Italy’s leading newspapers – ‘La Repubblica’ rather than ‘La Repubblica’ – in order to entice viewers. The play on the newspaper name, font and spelling makes the fake news more compelling, a signal that the headlines exploit the reliability of adjacent symbols. Saraceni also encourages his audience towards active fact-checking and constant vigilance: reading the URL with attention, staying attentive, practising community responsibility, debunking and reporting fake news (ibid.). In a YouTube video directed at high school and college students, a twenty-something-year-old woman encourages mindfulness: ‘You must always exercise critical thinking’ (‘Fake News: Cosa Sono’ 2020: 4:56). She goes further to encourage user-readers to evaluate the source and the author, ‘cross-reference’ the information by checking other sites (5:11), verify the date, ask experts and ‘check your preconceptions’ (5:22) (ibid.).

Digital literacy is thus fundamentally defensive, and it incites vigilance that is both internal and psychological, as well as external, viewing every source of information as a possible trick. Citing users' regular disregard of warnings on news media, Comandini (2018: 206) argues that fact-checking campaigns 'assume the consumer is rational and willing to be re-educated'. Here, too, digital literacy programmes are based upon a rational subject who morally desires reliable information. Fine-tuning proper reading skills assumes that fake news circulates because the poor reader has been duped. Just as they create ideal and improper digital readers, fake news programmes also create their own origin stories for fake news producers.

DEMONIZING THE FAKE NEWS MAKERS

In this discourse of spotting fake news in Italy, the user is incrementally habituated to consider the malicious intentions of fake news creators. Certainly, a quintessential framing of fake news begins a 'Message of His Holiness on World Communications Day' in which Pope Francis argues:

Yet preventing and identifying the way disinformation works also calls for a profound and careful process of discernment. We need to unmask what could be called the 'snake-tactics' used by those who disguise themselves in order to strike at any time and place. This was the strategy employed by the 'crafty serpent' in the Book of Genesis, who, at the dawn of humanity, created the first fake news (cf. *Gen* 3:1–15), which began the tragic history of human sin, beginning with the first fratricide (cf. *Gen* 4) and issuing in the countless other evils committed against God, neighbour, society and creation. The strategy of this skilled 'Father of Lies' (*Jn* 8:44) is precisely *mimicry*, that sly and dangerous form of seduction that worms its way into the heart with false and alluring arguments. ('Message of His Holiness' 2018)

If fake news is genuinely satanic, the deception of a malevolent actor, then fake news sharers are vulnerable to the 'snake-tactics', but also, like Eve, innocent. Further, Pope Francis argues that fake news makes us victims of 'the deceptive power of evil that moves from one lie to another in order to rob us of our interior freedom' (ibid.). While aligned with defensive digital literacy, the Vatican's rhetoric builds the ultimate metaphor for the devilish creators of fake news as maleficent individuals (Scardigno and Mininni 2020: 82).

The rhetoric of the devilish disinformers extends far beyond the Vatican. In scholarly research, fake news creators are framed as emotionally and psychologically manipulative of their victims: 'In the era of digital information, any fake can take form, feeding on collective fear to be believed and guided towards manipulating consciences' (Cappuccio and Campagno

2020: 216). In their *Democracy and Fake News*, Serena Giusti and Elisa Piras (2021: 4) suggest that fake news and social media are ‘particularly fit for producing subliminal effects that can reach the deepest and most emotional strata of people’s minds’. In both cases, fake news is attributed the power of mind control.

We find a similar pattern in a 2022 video with over 68,000 views by journalist Fabio Duranti. Duranti questions why a televised news programme on TG1 headlined with a story about the Russian bombing of a Ukrainian nuclear site only to reveal that this was fake news (‘Disinformazione di Stato’ 2022). Why, Duranti wonders, would they report on fake news to viewers, as doing so keeps this kind of information in circulation? He elaborates on their possible motives: ‘Everything has a logic. We don’t realize it because we don’t know the techniques used by these social engineers who study the behaviour of our minds for many years. But this is one of the methods to make us believe and digest these things that otherwise, if we reasoned without all of this input, we would come to a totally different understanding, maybe reasoning a bit better’ (ibid.: 1:38–2:16).

Cappuccio and Campagno’s (2020) ‘manipulated consciences’ and Duranti’s ‘social engineers’ are, in some ways, the left-wing, secular version of Pope Francis’s snake, but the objective is shared: fake news preys on the weak for control and domination. Villifying and individualizing news may also be an example of the ‘backfire effect’ whereby fact-checking actually generates greater suspicion and confusion in the public (Ruffo and Tambuscio 2022: 186). Media scholars Rosa Scardigno and Giuseppe Mininni (2020: 86) argue that fake news is ‘founded on rhetoric that produce[s] rumors and construct[s] alternative narratives [and] act[s] as a source for un-knowledge and misinformation.’ As a whole, we find a familiar discursive narrative that channels a collective fear of something invisible into a single individual, a trope present in narratives of witches, body snatchers and zombies. It is hard to discern an enemy in an era of massive shifts: the political manipulation of fact and fiction, information overload, digital media addiction and alienation. So a power-hungry fake news maker becomes the receptacle for these very legitimate anxieties and fears. I now turn to unpacking an adjacent metaphor in the field of Italian fake news that further complicates this seemingly cogent myth of the golden literati versus the dark serpent.

FAKE NEWS AS BUFFALO, DEBUNKERS AS ANTI-BUFFALO

The buffalo’s head, the sloping, wide nose and characteristic curved horns, are crossed by a red slashed circle, the classic symbol of something prohibited. The buffalo (*la bufala*) has become a symbol of fake news in Italy,

and its red strikethrough indicates a space of debunking and fact-checking. The word ‘buffaloes’ (*bufale*) dominates the discourse on fake news (*notizie false*) as a catch-all term for intentionally created lies or false claims, ‘deliberately and knowingly communicated false information’ (‘Bufala’ n.d.; Cappuccio and Campagno 2020: 220). The term appears to veer closer to the English term ‘hoax’ as it implies intentionality in the fake news, and it is occasionally used alongside the more literal term ‘fake news’, which is often used in English, or in Italian as ‘false notizie’ (‘FACTA: Chi Siamo’ n.d.).² One website graphic on the Wikipedia page for buffaloes shows a spectrum labelled ‘Types of False Information’, running from the left, ‘Disinformation (Lies meant to confuse)’ to the right, ‘Misinformation (Errors made in good faith)’. Buffaloes are positioned in the centre and captioned: ‘Deliberately created lies masked as truth’ (‘Bufala’ n.d.).

‘Buffaloes’, therefore, is often used interchangeably with misinformation broadly, and fake news specifically (Damiani 2004; Grillo 2015; Scarpanti 2018). In 2016, Boldrini promoted leading debunkers as ‘unmasking the buffaloes’ (Barcellona 2016). Similarly, many websites identify fact-checking as anti-buffalo, such as the Antibufala group page on Facebook, as well as Hoax.it with its tagline ‘Stop the Buffaloes’ (*Stop alle Bufale*), Butac.it with the motto ‘Buffaloes: A lot per kilo’ (*Bufale un tanto al chilo*), Bufale.net, and Bufaleedintorni.it, or ‘Buffaloes and surroundings’ (*Bufale e dintorni*), with the motto ‘Spreading buffaloes is useless, irrational, and in some cases, dangerous’ (Scarpanti 2018: 14). Taken together, the metaphor of fake news as buffaloes and debunkers as anti-buffalo (*antibufale*) represents a fake news in which the news-believer or sharer becomes a victim of malicious trickery, domesticated and led by the horns by the domesticating fooler. The term ‘buffaloes’ has become code for malicious and deliberate disinformation, so it also relies on the figure of an evil producer.

Edoardo Scarpanti’s (2018) *Buffaloes: Post-Truth, Language and Fascination with Fake Stories on the Web* refers to fake news (*la bufala*) as ‘post-truth’s favourite child’, and ‘an expired product, definitely spoiled and most of the time even toxic’ (ibid.: 10). The related agent here is the ‘fake news spreader’ (*bufalaro*) who ‘deliberately spreads fake news –well aware of its complete unreliability – with the goal of gaining personal benefit’ (ibid.). The gain to the *bufalaro*, he contends, might be economic, based on deceptively diverted clicks, or political, reshaping views or undermining people, beliefs or practices, especially as a way to ‘stimulate hate’ (ibid.: 13). Ultimately, the buffalo-fake news metaphor circulates a similar narrative of the innocent duped versus the vile duper. And, whether bovine or Biblical, the malicious disinformers have an implied saviour: the debunkers.

HEROIZING THE FACT-CHECKERS

Whether literacy or buffalo-based, fake news information situates a clear mandate for user-readers to refer to debunkers as information gurus. FACTA, with its tagline ‘Choose whom not to believe’, is a debunking website, targeting fake news and its dissemination in Italy, launched in March 2020 (‘FACTA: Chi Siamo’ n.d.). FACTA belongs to Italy’s The Fact-Checking Factory (TFCF Srl) and the International Fact-Checking Network (ibid.). TFCF, founded in 2013 and originally called Pagella Politica Srls, was originally a political watchdog website. While Pagella Politica (n.d.) fact-checks Italy’s political world, FACTA is dedicated to any kind of disinformation. The International Fact-Checking Network at Poynter was established in 2015 to ‘enable fact-checkers through networking, capacity building, and collaboration’ (IFCN: Empowering’ n.d.). Naturally, the FACTA website invites users to report ‘suspect news’ by WhatsApp, QR code-enabled private chat function or email (‘FACTA: Segnalazioni’ n.d.). Fact-checkers and debunkers are emergent new figures in this landscape and frame their work as transparent, politically engaged, global and moral.

Paolo Attivissimo, a self-defined ‘information technology journalist and buffalo catcher’ and author of the guidebook *How to Be an Anti-Buffalo Detective (Come Diventare Detective AntiBufala)*, is an iconic example of the heroic debunker (Attivissimo n.d.). He ran a course via the Italian Committee for the Control of Pseudoscientific Affirmations (CICAP) in April 2022 with the tagline: ‘Even you can be an anti-buffalo detective!’ (‘Anche tu detective’ 2022). One of his YouTube videos, ‘True or False? The Truth Crisis in the Age of Digital Media’, which boasts only a meagre 6,553 views, allows him to embody the persona of the ultimate literate media reader and decrier of fake news (Attivissimo 2018). Attivissimo (ibid.) instructs viewers that the underlying system of internet advertising encourages the creation of fake news by monetizing it. Yet this oeuvre of deception allows for a kind of capitalist technique in becoming a debunker who still relies on monetized views and clicks.

So, here, too, the story ends as one might anticipate: bad individuals beget the need for good ones. The calls for critical literacy, the moral warnings of ‘snake-tactics’, the playful ‘no buffalo’ memes condition the desire for a clear-headed, rational individual. It is not, furthermore, particularly surprising that many famed debunkers, like Attivissimo, the Venezuelan-born Davide Puente, raised in Italy, BUTAC founder Michelangelo Coltelli and Sapienza University of Rome researcher Walter Quattrociocchi, are white men. In fact, the top-tier expert readers in the digital age replicate the social structures familiar from newscasters of the television and radio age (Scardigno and Mininni 2020: 83). In other words, the technological form of

information may change, but citizens must still defer to a small, elite group of proper information gatekeepers: the powerful white men become key epistemological labourers in the digital age.

MIRRORED WINDOW READERS

The anti-fake news mobilization has yet to produce sceptical literacy-savvy citizens, and more vitally, keeps public gaze off the algorithmic infrastructure of filter bubbles that undergirds fake news (Pariser 2011; Bozdag 2013; Ruffo and Tambuscio 2022). Put differently, the technological infrastructure of algorithmic silo-ification and data-sharing remains in the shadows. Citizen-users' digital media consumption is largely structured by customization algorithms, that is, their demographics, past likes, Google searches and Gmail keywords, thus mirroring back to the user a view of the world pre-aligned with their preferences. The citizen-user experiences their digital consumption as outward-looking, as if it were a window onto online knowledge and free-flowing information. Yet, in actuality, the information they consume is more like a mirror than a window, reflecting their own idiosyncratic preferences, beliefs and views back to them in what I have called a mirrored window world (Molé Liston 2020). As fake news becomes tied to malevolent actors with insidious motives, citizens are primed to hunt for maligned actors when, in fact, they fail to scrutinize their 'friends' as demonic fake news spreaders. Moreover, their very social media feeds have already been algorithmically tailored to show the 'friends' and content already aligned with their political ideologies and beliefs. Indeed, online customization augments the confirmation bias effect whereby users are already primed to agree with materials engaged with (Ruffo and Tambuscio 2022: 185; Bellavita 2022: 214).

Gili and Maddalena (2018: 14) conclude their study of media literacy with a concept that echoes the mirrored window world: 'It is long notable that the isolation of the individual is the principal factor that renders one vulnerable to manipulative influences and projects.' Indeed, what results, they argue, is a 'naked society' (*società nuda*), a 'mass of individuals deprived of significant relationships among them' (ibid.). In a metaphor that predates the actual 'lockdowns' of COVID-19 in which genuine physical silo-ification materialized, the 'naked society' finds vulnerable individuals digitally and physically alone, unprotected against harmful influences. In both cases, isolation, whether sociopolitical isolation or algorithmically customized bubbles, characterizes the digital media world.

In a digital world with increasingly isolated citizens, why do so many media plans treat social actors as if truth is their ideal? For many scholars,

these atomized citizens are beginning to lose trust in people, institutions and even a notion of reliable truth. Summarizing key insights of post-truth politics, Giusti and Piras (2021: 5) suggest that ‘people are inclined to accept arguments based on their own consonance to their own emotions and beliefs rather than based on facts’ (see also Scardigno and Mininni 2020: 83). Croce and Piazza (2021: 56) propose that fake news actually ‘fosters our disinterestedness [*sic*] in the truth’. Hodges argues that a ‘baseline level of trust is missing’, that is, trust in public institutions, science or, more broadly, reliable sources of information (Graan et al. 2020). Similarly, Federica Merenda (2021: 27) suggests that ‘we lose trust in each other as epistemic sources’; this is a trust dip that might be exacerbated among specialists, something Vincent Ialenti (2020: 6) calls a ‘deflation of expertise’. Scrutinizing sources and vigilance over content becomes so laborious that users are actually coaxed into becoming less discerning and less trusting of any information or person not already aligned with their digital doppelganger. The complex demands on the digital reader may, in fact, produce apathetic disengagement and distrust. What is more, the media regime incites citizens’ desires for emotionally salient messaging with clear, not opaque, messages.

POST-TRUTH POLITICS: FROM ZOMBIES TO MELONS

Renowned left-wing journalist Marco Travaglio quipped that Italy was the ‘cradle and homeland’ of post-truth ‘at least 22 years thanks to Mr. B[erlusconi] who camped out undisturbed from 1994 to 2011’ (Orecchia and Preatoni 2022: 11). Masterminding print and television media like political clay to mould his career, Silvio Berlusconi was exceptionally capable of fashioning a brand for himself as a political outsider, garnering public trust as he ushered through his right-wing neoliberalizing policies in the early 2000s. Beppe Grillo, on the other hand, comedian-cum-politician and founder of the centre-left populist Five Star Movement, reshaped the Italian political landscape in the late 2000s and through the 2010s (Molé Liston 2020). In order to galvanize faith in digital media, upon which his emerging populist movement was based, Grillo positioned print and televised media as the cancer of Berlusconi governance, instead glorifying internet-based media as grassroots democracy: information for all.

Grillo had coined the term ‘ItaloZombie’ to represent the Italian citizen braindead from deceptive news and information; the ItaloZombie was ‘the metastasizing of the Country and free information is the cure’ (Grillo 2010). Foundational to the populism of the Five Star Movement were web-based communications and a vision of grassroots direct democracy, in addition to a populist vision distrustful of institutions, including the European Union,

and political insiders (Angelucci and Vittori 2021). Thus, Grillo's ItaloZombie was actually quite a pointed critique of the Berlusconi telenews media empire in which the remedy of 'free information' was structural, not individualized. The Five Star populist movement disseminated a clear message: online communication and information could collectively liberate Italians from the prison of party-driven television media. Grillo, naturally, framed the Five Star Movement's entrenchment in web-based communications as uniquely able to de-zombify the television-fed citizenry (Grillo 2020a).

In a relatively short period, Berlusconi's TV zombies and Grillo's utopian vision of the internet as democratized liberator were followed by Giorgia Meloni's September 2022 election win for the right-wing Brothers of Italy party (Fratelli d'Italia or FDL) (Chiaramonte et al. 2023).³ The Brothers of Italy's 'normalisation and mainstreaming of nativist ideas' began in Berlusconi's first decade on the political scene, particularly in two parties' inclusion in his coalition: the neofascist Italian Social Movement (MSI) and the then right-wing Northern League (LN, now redubbed just 'the League') (Zulianello 2022: 21). In fact, Meloni was active in MSI's youth organizations as a teenager. For example, she organized the 'Atreju' festival, with nods to fantasy culture and Nordic mythology, as a kind of white fascist nostalgia and mythology (Baldini et al. 2023: 7).⁴ The MSI slowly shifted from a conservative right-wing party to the populist radical right FDL, whose 'Italy-first' ideology promotes nativism, economic protectionism, euroscepticism, increasing regional autonomy and conservative, anti-LGBTQIA social policies (Zulianello 2022: 22–23; Pasquino and Valbruzzi 2023: 3; Baldini et al. 2023: 1, 14; Puleo and Piccolino 2022: 12–14).

In addition to providing Italy's first ever female Prime Minister, Meloni's win represented one of the lowest voter turnouts in Italian republican history, but also the greatest parliamentary majority of any coalition since Berlusconi's 1994 Go Italy (Forza Italy) win (Chiaramonte et al. 2023: 2).⁵ While 'il Presidente' (Mr President) Meloni and FDL members deny fascist ties, their party adopts neofascist iconography such as the tricolour flame logo of the MSI (Zulianello 2022: 22). Many scholars argue that they have 'ideologically rebrand[ed]' to embody the populist radical right (Baldini et al. 2023: 16; Puleo and Piccolino 2022: 21). In many ways, the populism of Grillo's Five Star Movement was based on a democratization of media literacy and online engagement, while Meloni's right-wing populism benefits from certain failures of Grillo's techno-populism. It is as if the television-based disease poisoning Grillo's 'ItaloZombies' has mutated to an algorithm-controlled social media disease, where the mind-numbing effects on consumer-citizens persist.

In 2022, *La Repubblica* declared that Meloni had 'won' social media, estimating that she had climbed from 42 per cent in 2021 to 91 per cent of

performance and owed this to a ‘transformation in communication: more institutional and informative’ (Sangermano 2022). *Il Tempo* characterizes her social media style as ‘informal language, occasionally aggressive, profoundly explicit, and not at all conventional’ (Giordano 2022). Baldini et al. (2023: 7, 9) credit her ‘successful populist style of communication’, including her well-crafted viral and ‘memefied’ messages (see also Ventura 2022).⁶ Accordingly, with social media central to Meloni’s strategy, debunking website Bufale.net have had their hands full with debunking posts about Meloni. Fake news stories about Meloni include her picture with Mussolini framed in the background (Mastinu 2021) or wearing a masonic pendant (‘Giorgia Meloni col Ciondolo Massonico’ 2022). Yet even the ‘buffaloes’ keep her in circulation.

At times, Meloni has ignited polemics and high Twitter view counts, for example by reposting a video of a rape that occurred in Piacenza in August 2022 (‘Meloni Posta’ 2022). A Ukrainian woman was raped by an asylum-seeking man from Guinea; the crime tapped into Meloni’s xenophobic and heavily anti-immigrant policy plans. In her post, she added the words: ‘I will do everything possible to give back safety to our cities’ (ibid.). When criticized, especially regarding the ways that the video disrespected the privacy of the victim, she retorted: ‘I’m ashamed of political leaders using a rape to attack me’ and ‘I won’t stand for Enrico Letta [leader of the Democratic Party] spreading lies about me and using this most terrible rape in Piacenza for the purposes of sinister propaganda’ (ibid.). Meloni repositioned sexual violence as something that male politicians were audacious to ‘use’ against her, skilfully casting attention away from her own ‘use’ of the video to incite anti-immigrant outrage. In a viral video on the eve of the election, she garnered 5.3 million views for her TikTok in which she held up two melons and said: ‘September 25. I have said it all’ (Abraham 2022). The joke played on her name, Meloni, which means ‘melons’, and the double entendre of ‘melons’ as a slang term for breasts. Meloni’s rhetoric is simultaneously coy yet elementary: people don’t need lofty literacy skills to get a boob joke. Finally, she exhibited no hesitation in suing famed anti-mafia critic and filmmaker Roberto Saviano for defamation for calling her a ‘bastard’ regarding her response to shipwrecked migrants’ suffering and death (Poggioli 2022). Just as Berlusconi did, Meloni mounts a mediatized political regime in which defamation suits flex her legal muscle in the hopes of silencing or, in some cases, overtly censoring critics.

What we might notice here is how the ‘informative’ and ‘profoundly explicit’ language of Meloni performs affective immediacy: it is political language that obviates the rhetorical scrutiny demanded in fake news prevention (Sangermano 2022; Giordano 2022). The language of Meloni’s newly successful right-wing populism arrives as an antidote – visually rich,

provocative and salacious content – to the information fatigue of the average Italian citizen. Weary screen-readers, asked to be hypervigilant towards all digital information, are simultaneously moulded to desire ‘explicit’ media. After all, the very nature of ‘explicit’ discourse implies the suspension of doubt: Meloni’s power, and that of her authoritarian seduction, lies in satisfying the citizen-user’s desire to escape ambiguity.

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NOTES

1. Pasulo (2022: 62) explains that disinformation is only a crime when it is meant to harm or create a disadvantage for others.
2. There are several theories on the etymology of this usage of buffalo: (1) the idiomatic phrase ‘lead by the nose like a buffalo’; (2) Roman dialect, in which ‘bufala’ means rude, and later, referencing bad cinema, represents a ‘rip-off’ (*fregatura*); (3) a seventeenth-century Siennese or Florentine festival of the ‘bufalata’ or running of the buffalo in which butchers often deceptively sold buffalo meat as beef; and (4) a risky fishing practice known as ‘buffalo fishing’ (*pescare a bufala*) in which a sailboat unifies its sails into a single one (‘Bufala’ n.d.).
3. Even though Giuseppe Conte of the Five Star Movement has served as Prime Minister twice since 2018, the party has become fractured and precipitously declined since Conte’s replacement by Mario Draghi in 2021 (Pasquino and Valbruzzi 2023: 5).
4. Atreju is the name of the protagonist of the 1984 fantasy film *The NeverEnding Story*. The Atreju festival has since become a more adult-oriented event with visitors including Steve Bannon in 2018 and Viktor Orban in 2019 (Baldini et al. 2023: 7). MSI has also borrowed from J. R. R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*, including ‘Hobbit camps’ for MSI youth (ibid.).
5. A few scholars, however, suggest that Meloni should not be defined as populist as opposed to ‘nationalist [and] sovereigntist’ (Pasquino and Valbruzzi 2023: 17).
6. Meloni gave a groundbreaking speech in October 2019 that included the words: ‘I am Giorgia, I am a woman, I am a mother, I am Christian, and no one is going to take this away from me!’ After the clip went viral, DJ Mem and DJ J created a rap from her speech. The refrain was also featured in her 2021 autobiography *Io Sono Giorgia*.

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PART III

MAFIA



CHAPTER 9

OMERTÀ

Violence and Cultural Practices

Jane Schneider and Peter Schneider



INTRODUCTION

This chapter is a reflection on *omertà*, very roughly translated as a code of ‘silence before the law’. It is based on our mid-1960s fieldwork in a rural town in the western Sicilian interior that we call Villamaura, our subsequent experiences in rural Sicily during the 1970s and our shift of field sites to Palermo, the regional capital, in the 1980s and 1990s. This long arc of both time and geography will enable us to assess the changing status of *omertà* for both the mafia and the society surrounding it. Regarding the 1960s and 1970s, we analyse both why *omertà* was second nature to mafiosi, and the practices that influenced its presence in the wider society. For the 1980s and 1990s, we dwell on changes brought on by both anti-mafia prosecutions and an anti-mafia social movement. Spectacularly, some mafiosi followed justice collaborator Tommaso Buscetta who, in 1984, revealed his secrets to the prosecutor, Giovanni Falcone. Deborah Puccio-Den dedicated her recent book, *Mafiacraft: An Ethnography of Deadly Silence*, to Judge Falcone, ‘the first anthropologist of the mafia’, for his ‘unprecedented dialog’ with Buscetta (Puccio-Den 2021: 31). In a concluding section, we attempt to speculate on *omertà* today.

THE CODE OF OMERTÀ

As we said in our first book, based on 1960s fieldwork in Villamaura, *omertà* conveys the sense that justice is a private, and not a public matter. As such, a

respected person will handle his own affairs without recourse to legally constituted authority. Quoting political theorist Gaetano Mosca, we acknowledged that among mafiosi ‘it is a sign of weakness and cowardice to obtain satisfaction for an offense through courts of law’ (Mosca 1949: 228). Letizia Paoli, who wrote a dissertation on mafia brotherhoods, which she then published as a book in both Italian and English, declared that

[t]he core of this code consists in the categorical prohibition of cooperation with state authorities or reliance on their services, even when one has been victim of a crime. Such is the force of this prohibition that even if somebody is condemned for a crime that he has not committed, he is supposed to serve the sentence without giving the police any information about the real criminal. (Paoli 2003: 109)

Mosca and Paoli emphasize how *omertà* serves the purposes of mafiosi. In the 1960s and earlier, it was common to paint the mafia in a much more essentialized way. According to the ethnologist and physician Giuseppe Pitré, who wrote his understanding of mafiosi around the turn of the twentieth century, *omertà* was based on the word *omu*, defined as a true man. A collector of folklore, Pitré wrote that members of the mafia incapsulated ‘beauty, grace, perfection and excellence of its kind . . . the idea of . . . superiority and skill in the best meaning of the word’ (quoted in Lupo 1993: 6). Defining themselves as ‘men of honour’, mafiosi boasted of being superior at resolving their problems without resort to the institutions of criminal justice. A mafioso ‘does not bear a fly on his nose . . . If he is offended, he does not resort to Justice, he does not rely on the Law’ (quoted in Paoli 1997: 31). To do so, in his view, would be *schifusu* (disreputable) or *nfame* (unworthy). Puccio-Den (2021: 152) lists positive meanings that Pitré attached to the word ‘mafia’; they have to do with ‘courage, pride, the capacity to assure protection of one’s relatives without restoration to state justice’.

HOW MAFIOSI ENFORCED THE CODE OF *OMERTÀ*

Obviously, given the mafia’s reputation for violence, if one of their number was known to collaborate with the police or judiciary, that member was likely to endure a painful revenge against himself or his family. A leader of the mafia might order that he be killed, leaving the actual execution of the murder to one or more loyal underlings, thereby obfuscating the trail of evidence that could lead to the crime. His corpse might also disappear according to one of the techniques in which mafiosi specialized. Or his body might be left, as it were, on display, possibly with the tongue cut out, symbolically conveying his ‘talking’ as the reason for his murder. *Omertà* also prevailed in the case of fugitives from the law. Mafiosi were renowned for their capacity

to hide for extended periods of time – up to more than two decades in the best-known cases. It was well understood that the hideout would be familiar to the fugitive, replete with ample networks of support. Anyone who revealed where he was hiding, thus breaking the code of *omertà*, would do so under the penalty of death.

But *omertà* was not exclusively enforced by violence; certain features of mafia culture lent legitimacy to the concept. Although the word ‘mafia’ is widely used to label many kinds of criminal organization, historically it referred to fraternal sodalities whose respective local ‘chapters’ or ‘families’ (in Italian, *cosche*, singular *cosca*, after the tightly bundled leaves of the artichoke) laid claim to territories – urban neighbourhoods, entire rural villages and towns – in which, thanks to a reputation for violence made credible by episodic violent acts, they imposed a kind of order, extorting a fee (in Italian, the *pizzo* – a ‘beak-full’) for their services. Rapid capitalist development fostered by new political regimes created considerable disorder in each of the situations where mafias emerged. Amid the resulting mayhem, mafiosi presented themselves as self-anointed vigilantes and ‘problem-solvers’ for beleaguered businesses and landowners (J. Schneider 2016).

Each such mafia ‘family’ was transgenerational. For the Sicilian mafia, kinship mattered to recruitment, but so too did aptitude. Leaders (*capi*), older and charismatic, typically sought to avoid or resolve internal conflicts that could draw the attention of state authorities, in part through continuous negotiation and gossip, in part through episodically constructing trans-local power structures. Members of mafia groups also engaged in smuggling enterprises, but this illegal activity initially took second place to territorially grounded extortion and racketeering (Blok 1974; Catino 2019; Gambetta 1993; La Spina 2008; J. Schneider 2016; Varese 2001, 2011).

Mafias worthy of the name demanded discipline, loyalty and *omertà* from their members – values reinforced, obviously, through the threat of violence, but also through cultural practices, such as initiation rites. Historical research on the mafia in Sicily, and the testimony of turncoats who have broken the rule of silence – about which more below – have described the initiations. Presumably inspired by masonic rituals – mafiosi often shared jail time with Freemasons during the second half of the nineteenth century – a sponsor would command a novice to hold the burning paper image of a saint, presumably the Virgin of Annunciation, who was the patron saint of the mafia, while pricking his finger and, mixing the ashes with his blood, would lead him to swear an oath to a life of discipline, loyalty and *omertà* (Fentress 2000: 26, 217; Lodato 1999: 32–35; Lupo 1993: 182; Pezzino 1995: 5–7, 71–72, 89–119; Recupero 1987: 313–14).

Mafiosi apparently had a charter myth to back up their vision that they were *uomini di onore* – ‘men of honor’. In the mid-1960s, we were told by

a Villamaura mafioso that to comprehend the ‘true spirit’ of the mafia, we should read a book titled *The Blessed Paolists (I Beati Paoli)*, authored by Luigi Natoli and published in 239 instalments in a main Palermo daily, *Il Giornale di Sicilia*, in 1909–10. Natoli, who used the pen name William Galt, narrates the adventures of an eighteenth-century secret society whose members, dressed in sack cloths and with heads hooded, ventured out of their meeting place, a warren of tunnels under Palermo, to administer justice to rich and poor families alike, addressing unfairness, not only among the brothers of a ducal house, but also between ordinary folks and the aristocracy. Justice is possible thanks to these *beati paoli*, driven by spiritual forces and totally disregarding the accumulation of power and wealth on their own. Significantly, Flaccovio republished *I Beati Paoli* in 1984.

Besides intimidation, initiation rituals and a charter myth, there is one other practice that lured mafiosi into commitment to *omertà*. Mafia *capi* prepared for the possible arrest and imprisonment of their members, setting aside funds exacted from followers and from the *pizzo* to cover the lawyers’ fees of incarcerated colleagues. There was also attention paid to the families of those in prison, looking out for their healthcare needs and even a daughter’s dowry. Alessandro Colletti describes this as a ‘welfare system’ of the Italian mafias – Calabrian ‘Ndrangheta and Neapolitan Camorra as well as the Sicilian mafia. To quote Colletti, the knowledge that ‘protection is extended and guaranteed to their relatives [is] an additional factor which strengthens loyalty to the group’. Or again, ‘all mafia leaders know that it is fundamental for them to protect their members in order to maintain secrecy and internal *omertà* which will allow the organization to survive despite judicial investigations and police arrest’ (Colletti 2019: 111–12; see also Jacquemet 1996).

OMERTÀ AND THE SURROUNDING SOCIETY

Over many years, *omertà* sealed the lips of potential witnesses in court proceedings as ‘insufficient evidence’ led to the release of accused perpetrators. This was not only true of mafiosi, but also of others in the surrounding society. In the mid-1960s, when our initial fieldwork took place, we frequently encountered the following dialect phrase: ‘Unn’ sacciu niente, ne oggi ne ieri’ – ‘I don’t know anything about it, and never did.’ Anton Blok, whose fieldwork overlapped with ours during the 1960s, recorded phrases of a similar kind, for example, ‘anyone who is deaf, blind and mute will live a hundred years in peace.’ Blok (2010: 64) comments in his reporting that the ‘*habitus* of reserve, secrecy and reticence’ transcends a ‘mere statement of fact’ to exhibit a speech act, a normative prescription to guide behaviour.

‘Speech acts [are] also called “performatives”: by *saying* something they are also *doing* something’ (ibid.: 58).

Both Blok in ‘Genuardo’ and we in ‘Villamaura’ discovered that, at least in the rural towns, Sicilians lived by the rule that it was important ‘not [to] mention what you may have seen by chance. Do not answer questions. When people insist, just say “Unn’ sacciu” (“I do not know”)’ (Blok 2010: 64). A norm to live by dictated that what one did was one’s own business, expressed in the frequently heard expression: ‘fa i fatti suoi’ (‘mind one’s own business’). One should not ‘embroil’ oneself in the affairs of others. As a friend of ours explained, ‘when you see two people fighting, you turn away quickly, pretending not to notice. Should you witness a theft, you do the same. Anyone who betrays a thief does it not from conscience, but to get himself embroiled with the thief or the victim.’ Additional proverbs expressed the same idea: ‘to talk little is a beautiful art’; ‘the mouth is a betrayer of the heart’; ‘the ideal man has long steps and a short tongue’ (Schneider and Schneider 1976: 193; 2003: 83–84).

As was true of mafiosi, *omertà* involved a positive commitment to the idea of a personal vendetta, according to which an honourable man would avenge his own grievances and those of his family without resorting to courts of law or lawyers. For ordinary people, given the presence of mafiosi in their midst, it was also a way to avoid the morass of role conflicts inherent in situations where uncertainty reigned in relationships to the parties involved – a socially approved way, even for school children, of withdrawing from conflict without losing friends or face. Vulnerability to being extorted was an effect. One can rationalize extortion as a protective cover or realize that one succumbs to it out of intimidation. In effect, fear and protection were two sides of the same coin. In any case, the victims of extortion most often maintained their silence (Puccio-Den 2021: 187).

During our stays in Sicily in the mid-1960s and 1970s, people also made use of the categories *furbo* and *fesso*, the former meaning wily and astute (‘smart, astute, vigilant and inventive’ in the words of Blok 2010: 64), while *fesso* was an insult, describing the fool – someone easily taken for a ride. Clearly, the *furbo* was respected, even as he took advantage of others. Based on our fieldwork and reading, we linked the words we were learning – *omu*, *omertà*, *furbo* and *fesso* – to the kind of society we encountered. To us, two features of this society stood out. It was highly patriarchal, to the point that ‘crimes of honour’ were still considered legitimate, and clientelism loomed large – having a friend was better than having a [legal] right.

This cultural system – extreme patriarchy and pervasive patron–client relations – was certainly wider than the geographical area that gave rise to the mafia – historically, the western provinces of Sicily. It was wider, even, than the geographies of the two other powerful mafias of Italy, concentrated

in Campagna and Calabria. Indeed, patriarchal and clientelist values have been written about extensively for both the north and the south littorals of the Mediterranean, and other societies as well. Perhaps this has something to do, historically, with the values stressed in a rural society heavily influenced by transhumant pastoralism. Abusive grazing and animal rustling were among the practices that rural dwellers confronted regularly, and which they had to resolve by themselves because the countryside was impossible to police. Many rural mafiosi had such a pastoral background (Schneider and Schneider 1976: 65–66, 178–79).

OMERTÀ AS HEGEMONIC

For the code of *omertà* to be this influential in the wider society, there had to be some hegemonic strategies on the part of mafiosi – some manipulation of the patronage system – starting with the mafia's clout in electoral politics. The post-war Italian government, founded on the principles of universal suffrage and proportional representation, gave rise to an array of 'mass' political parties. Governments formed and reformed but in each case, the new prime minister and the cabinet were drawn from an alliance of centrist parties that, for several decades, pivoted around the Christian Democratic Party and, given the Cold War, excluded the Communists. At election time mafiosi were among the party hustlers (*galloppini*) who rounded up voters, in part by promising favours or threatening punishments. (In Villamaura of the 1960s, a voter deemed untrustworthy would be assigned an idiosyncratic combination of preference votes that could be identified when the votes were counted – a public event at which mafiosi discovered voters who did not do what they were told.) According to one of the earliest justice collaborators, Antonino Calderone, between friends and kin a single mafioso in Sicily could count on forty to fifty persons, adding up to one hundred thousand 'friendly' votes in the Province of Palermo alone (Schneider and Schneider 2003: 52).

As a consequence, mafiosi strengthened their alliance with the state. Scholars of the Sicilian mafia use the word *intreccio* to describe the relation. The word literally means a tightly woven or plaited braid of hair. In its broader implications, it references an 'organic interweaving', an imbrication, to describe the mafia–state relation. Umberto Santino (2000: 381), for one, considers the *intreccio* the key to the mafia's economy and system of power (see also Catanzaro 1992; Chubb 1982, Schneider and Schneider 2003; Sciarrone 2011, 2019). This does not mean that the totality of the state is implicated; on the contrary, scholars have also embraced the phrase *pezzi dello stato* – pieces of the state – noting that, since the mafia's inception in

the nineteenth century, there have always existed anti-mafia ‘pieces’ as well (see Lupo 1993).

The ‘pieces of the state’ that are *intrecciato* (intertwined with the mafia) are first and foremost the politicians who play a critical role in staffing the criminal justice system – the system that historically proclaimed that accused mafiosi could not be prosecuted for ‘lack of proof’. Mafia-mediated rewards and punishments to ordinary Sicilians extended well beyond the courts and police to take in employment in the public sector, successful bidding on government contracts, healthcare, relief on taxes, acquisition of licenses, resolution of disputes with neighbours or competing businesses, and recommendations to help children pass exams in school – all of which added up to a host of ways to reward and punish citizens besides menacing them with violence. Of course, there was the menace of violence, too, especially for businesses and landowners who would dare to denounce the *pizzo*. Spectacular cases are widely known of a businessman or a journalist or an anti-mafia activist who ended up dead for breaking the code of *omertà*. The *intreccio*, however, enabled mafiosi to exercise hegemony without such violent acts.

Extending beyond the state, mafiosi greased the wheels with lawyers, teachers, bankers, doctors, priests and bureaucrats as well as with collaborating politicians, police officers and judges, the more so as these persons occupied positions of authority in key institutions. Calderone likened the mafioso to a spider as he ‘builds his web of friends, acquaintances, obligations’ (Arlacchi 1993: 20). During our first years in Sicily, mafiosi typically invited local and regional notables – the mayor, the local parliamentary deputy, clerics, lawyers, bankers and owners of land and enterprises – to their weddings and baptisms. They often also asked such persons to serve in the role of witness to a wedding, or godparent to a child, this being a way to establish a lifelong mutual obligation. As a rule, the invitations were not refused. Although they surely elicited varying degrees of apprehension about eventual requests for reciprocity, it was considered flattering and possibly auspicious to be asked. Significantly, mafia funerals were notorious for the large number of notables and professionals who joined the procession of mourners.

In the interior of the island, sheep-shearing festivities were staged with similar fanfare. We participated in several of these events in the 1960s and 1970s, at which the local priest, veterinarian, politicians and officers of the Carabinieri joined shepherds, mafiosi and their families in awesome feasts of roasted goat and stewed innards. Generally, mafioso wives prepared the pasta for such events, but the men, in a gendered division of labour, roasted the goats and stewed the innards (Schneider and Schneider 2011).

In addition to the life-cycle celebrations of the mafioso and his family, a strategic occasion for nurturing relationships with notables and

professionals was the rustic banquet or *schiticchia*, often following a hunt. In contrast to the above celebrations, where women participated, these affairs tended to be exclusively male; indeed many mafiosi were excellent cooks. Peter Schneider had the unforgettable opportunity to experience five such feasts, held over three months in a succession of towns to celebrate an accord between a meat wholesaler and local butchers who had been at odds. At each of the banquets, three entertainers disappeared into a back room, eventually to reappear with a beach umbrella and what resembled priestly vestments, ringing a bell. They then performed a profane and ribald parody of the Catholic mass, in which they wove comments about the absent wives and daughters, repeated odes to friendship and chanted '*a mincchia*' (prick) instead of 'amen'. The ritual became known as the *messa mincchiata*.

The banquets, which generally took place in country houses or rural restaurants, grew in size from around twenty men to around eighty, as mafiosi invited non-mafiosi to the feasts – for example politicians, notables, priests and two veterinarians (normally charged with inspecting butcher shops for sanitation and the circulation of stolen meat). At one of the events, hoses with spigots attached descended over the banquet table from an attic above where the hosts had installed a barrel of wine. On this and one other occasion, there were fireworks after the meal. During all five evenings, a few men performed erotic strip dances. The last banquet featured one entertainer who dressed in a black cape and pink satin nightgown, into which he had stuffed two breast-like oranges. Everyone present greatly enjoyed the transgressive character of the 'horsing around', not to mention the commensality of their hosts (see Schneider and Schneider 1984; Schneider and Schneider n.d.).

These references to rustic banquets should not give the impression that past occasions for amicable encounters between mafiosi and elites were only small-town affairs, however. Upper-crust members of Palermo society were welcome guests at hunting parties in country settings. They also had at their disposal any number of urban locales well suited for privileged encounters. Nino Salvo, the powerful tax collector for all of Sicily and a 'made' mafioso, owned the Hotel Zagarella, on the coast just east of Palermo. Here, he played poker with Salvo Lima, then the Christian Democratic mayor of Palermo (Arlacchi 1993: 175). In 1995 this hotel became a centrepiece in the dramatic trial of former Christian Democratic prime minister of Italy, Giulio Andreotti, accused (but finally acquitted) of having colluded with the mafia. Photographs taken in 1979 by renowned photographer Letizia Battaglia were introduced into evidence. One of them shows Andreotti at Zagarella with Nino Salvo, Salvo Lima and other regional DC leaders (Arlacchi 1995: 105).

In wining, dining and entertaining politicians, notables and professionals, mafiosi were less concerned to establish quid pro quo transactions than to

cultivate relationships of interest and affect. The outrageously good times converted potentially useful elites into an open-ended resource – persons perhaps never approached for favours, but who were always approachable – ‘a disposizione’, as the saying goes. ‘Cu avemmo da?’ – ‘who do we have there?’ – is a typical question that a mafioso asked on approaching an institution on behalf of himself or a client. The hegemony of *omertà* owed a great deal to the resulting ‘spiderweb of friends, acquaintances and obligations’, as well as to threatened punishments. This continues to be true today. For a recent ethnographic study conducted in a rural town of the west Sicilian interior see Theodoros Rakopoulos (2018), who describes the persistence of *omertà*, in part backed up by the possibility of violence, but also in part because of the patronage system, enhanced by the sociability of mafiosi (see also Ben-Yehoyada 2017; Palumbo 2009).

THE SICILIAN MAFIA DISCOVERS AMERICA

Such was the system that supported *omertà* in the general population, but a devastating conflict was brewing below the surface – one that would greatly complicate the patronage system and, more broadly, the *intreccio*. We follow historian Salvatore Lupo (1993, 2008) in delineating two powerful networks of mafia formation in western Sicily, already evident in the late nineteenth century. Lupo argued that the orchard zone in and around Palermo, and Palermo city itself, were well positioned to engage with the US, whereas the mafiosi of the great estates of the interior, whose primary activity was associated with rustling and banditry, were less so. To fully appreciate this difference, it is useful to understand the potency of prohibitionism in American history – the outcome of the particular trajectory of white settler colonialism, slavery and immigration. The colonizing settlers and their descendants corralled, squeezed and exterminated the Indigenous population; appropriated their land to ‘improve’ its use; and imported wave after wave of labour from abroad. First were the African slaves who, after 1808, when the trans-Atlantic traffic was deemed illegal, were made to become ‘breeders’ of slave labour for expanding plantations. After the Civil War, as the US became a colossal industrial power, factory workers came from Ireland and Germany, Eastern and Southern Europe – fourteen and a half million between 1900 and 1917, including one million Sicilians and southern Italians. Immigrant Chinese mined for gold and built the railroads that tied it all together.

White settler colonialists and their descendants perceived imported laborers not only as dangerous but also as ‘alien’ – less than civilized, sexually aggressive, vengeful and rebellious. Psychoactive substances and experiences only intensified the imagined threats, causing workers to reach for

euphoria, engage in superhuman violence or simply dissipate. Prohibitions were a way to criminalize both the feared substances *and* the ‘dangerous’ immigrant groups with whom they were associated (see Booth 1996; Gootenberg 1999; Musto 1987). With the arrival of Southern and Eastern Europeans, saloons came under attack; industrial employers viewed them not only as a breeding ground for crime and corruption, but also as a protected space for agitators to stir up ‘communist’ trouble. They were joined by the moralistic, puritanical Women’s Christian Temperance Union to agitate for the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which from 1920 to 1933, when it was repealed, prohibited the production, transport and sale of intoxicating liquors. Simultaneous with this was the energy devoted to international agreements banning the circulation of non-medicinal drugs, and to the policy shift from the medical treatment of (middle-class) addicts to a definition of working-class addicts as criminals, in need of draconian punishment. Fast forward to the present, when the ‘war on drugs’ (in proportion to population) has landed more persons behind bars than in any other country (Musto 1987: 184–85, 346–47 n. 9). According to Michelle Alexander, who published *The New Jim Crow* in 2010, roughly 25 per cent of the imprisoned population is there for drug offenses and of them, Blacks are ten times more likely than whites to be so charged, even though whites’ consumption of drugs is comparable (Alexander 2010).

In *Quando la Mafia Trovò l’America*, Lupo shows how United States alcohol prohibition upended the mafia ‘families’ that had earlier been established in New York, Chicago, Detroit, New Orleans and other cities by members of the first wave of Sicilian immigrants. Some in this wave had arrived as children, becoming mafiosi in America. Some others were already experienced mafia ‘enforcers’ upon arrival. Whatever their level of skill and experience, US-based mafiosi were initially marginal to bootlegging operations when compared to members of other immigrant groups. Soon, however, they invested in clandestine stills and vehicles for smuggling, provided armed guards to truckloads filled with contraband, set up protected places for buyers and sellers to meet and acted as brokers between dealers and clients.

This leap of scale reverberated in Sicily. Lupo’s careful research reveals that in the 1920s, a ‘second wave’ of migration, this time many of them already established mafiosi in their twenties or older – many of them also from Castellammare del Golfo – set off across the Atlantic. Whereas US sources attribute this movement to the fascist repression of the mafia under Mussolini’s ‘iron prefect’, Cesare Mori, Lupo argues that pull factors were more decisive – namely, the opportunity, communicated by migrant relatives, to profit from the prohibited traffic in alcohol. His case is strengthened both by the embrace of bootlegging on the part of the second-wave migrants and by chronology: Mori did not assume his position in Sicily until after

these players had already left the island. We see yet again, writes Lupo, ‘how forbidding an activity considered legitimate can determine perverse effects that are singularly grave’ (Lupo 2008: 65–66).

There occurred another scalar leap: networking and interethnic collaborations across territories, thereby facilitating the formation of powerful business enterprises for transporting and distributing alcohol; the militarization of weaponry, including, by the mid-1920s, the ‘Tommy’ submachine gun, capable of penetrating automobiles; and the addition to the arsenal of bombs, designed to sow terror and destabilize state authorities. Throughout, there was a drastic escalation of conflict, in part for market share between businesses, in part to pursue vendettas against treacherous colleagues, or imagined traitors, accused of having ‘loose lips’. Conflict in turn led to rounds and rounds of meetings, ostensibly to negotiate a de-escalation of violence, but often provoking more killings. In popular culture, the conflicts are represented as ‘wars’ – ‘beer wars’ in this case.

THE SICILIAN MAFIA AND NARCO-TRAFFICKING

The prohibition of alcohol by constitutional amendment was short-lived, as was the vast and lucrative market, so attractive to mafiosi, for contraband liquor, beer and wine. Prohibitionist US drug policy commands a much bigger place in history, dating to the turn of the twentieth century and continuing. More than this, whereas alcohol prohibitionists tried, but failed, to gain the cooperation of other countries, US drug laws are reinforced through international treaties, negotiated with noteworthy input from American authorities (Musto 1987; Nadelmann 1990). The result has been a smugglers’ bonanza, even more tempting to mafiosi than bootlegging. As Lupo shows, already before the First World War, members of mafia families in Palermo’s orchard hinterland obtained morphine from pharmaceutical industries in Germany and Milan, where manufacture was legal, and smuggled it in crates of citrus fruit, sardines and anchovies. Destined for partners in the Sicilian immigrant community in New York, many of the crates were shipped from Castellammare (Lupo 2008).

During the 1930s, as alcohol prohibition came to an end, mafiosi poured their accumulated capital into supplying and expanding the US market not only for morphine, but also for opium, heroin, cocaine and casino gambling. First-wave immigrant from Lercara Friddi Charles ‘Lucky’ Luciano became a leading entrepreneur in these fields until his arrest on pandering prostitution charges in 1936. It is likely that a strategic meeting, held in Havana in 1946, at which he was present, paved the way for heroin, refined in Marseilles by Corsican gangsters, to be transported through Cuba to a number

of US cities (see P. Schneider 2016). Additional arrangements were forged in October of 1957, when Joseph Bonanno, a 'second-wave' migrant from Castellammare and head of the Bonanno family in New York, presided over a four-day meeting in Palermo, whose agenda included ways to protect the drug trade should the Cuban government fall to the Castro revolution, which it did in 1959. (A famed meeting in Apalachin, New York, one month later, saw some one hundred mafiosi, drawn from cities across the US, and also from Italy and Cuba, dealing with similar issues.) Subsequently, a 'third wave' of mafia migrants, nicknamed 'zips' after an earlier moniker for Sicilian Americans, created the famed 'pizza connection' – a drug delivery network remarkable for its social and geographic expanse.

In the early 1970s, with the break-up of the French connection and the retreat of Marseilles as a strategic hub for the refinement of imported heroin, Sicily took its place in that commerce (McCoy 2003). With help from Marseilles chemists, mafiosi set up clandestine labs and experienced the same turmoil that characterized the American mafia during alcohol prohibition: spreading treachery and paranoia; arsenals of Kalashnikovs and bombs displacing the old, less destructive *lupara*; new approaches to state authority in which the murder of uncooperative officials became, suddenly, imaginable; increasingly sophisticated strategies for money laundering and capital investment; and endless meetings that, in the end, stoked rather than calmed disputes.

'War' was again the word most often used to characterize the crisis. The second mafia 'war', which spanned the 'long 1980s', was characterized by an unprecedented number of homicides and disappearances – over five hundred by 1983 (Lupo 1993: 212–14) – by bombings and, new for the mafia, by assaults on government officials. This 'war' pitted interior mafia groups, centred in Corleone, against mafiosi in the Palermo region. Tensions surrounding a range of business opportunities, above all in construction, were rife, but the fuse was lit by issues surrounding narcotics. The conflict pitted the Corleonesi groups, historically marginal to drug trafficking but now becoming aggressive investors, against groups that were historically advantaged by their access to orchards, ports and the airport in the Palermo hinterland. In Lupo's (ibid.) words, the Corleone-centred faction had on its agenda 'cutting out the Sicilian-American axis and taking over the narcotics profits for itself'. The two historic factions of mafiosi were identified by the press as the 'winners' (*vincenti*) and the 'losers' (*perdenti*).

Under their brutal leader, Salvatore (Totò) Riina, the Corleonesi ('winners') were responsible for most of the 'excellent cadavers' – state officials killed by the mafia from the late 1970s until the early 1990s (see Stille 1995). Lupo also has memorable words to describe how heroin trafficking upended the relationship between the mafia and the state. He and a coauthor, legal

scholar Giovanni Fiandaca, in a book titled *Non Ha Vinto la Mafia*, argue that formerly both mafia and state institutions had oscillated toward convergence, their leaders speaking the same ‘language of order’. Once this pattern was broken, each mafia-instigated massacre triggered waves of anti-mafia mobilization, in which ‘pieces of the state’, bolstered by an anti-mafia citizens’ social movement and by new laws, pursued police and judicial repression – which in turn provoked more violence against state officials. That this unfolding dialectic between mafia and anti-mafia resulted in immense suffering needs to be acknowledged and redressed (Fiandaca and Lupo 2014; see also Coco 2022).

A CRACK IN OMERTÀ

Among other dramatic transformations, the terror of the late 1970s through the early 1990s produced the phenomenon of the justice collaborator. In the early 1980s, the US Justice Department’s Witness Protection Program and the Pizza Connection prosecutors, who were both Sicilian and American, began to cultivate mafiosi who would turn state’s witness. Ironically called *pentiti* by the Italian press, such justice collaborators were initially drawn from the losing mafia faction, tempted by sentiments of revenge and fear (but hardly repentant – Dino 2006; Schneider and Schneider 2003: 132–35). A famous *pentito*, Tommaso Buscetta, lost close relatives to the carnage of the drug wars, including two sons. Accusing the Corleonesi of corrupting the mafia, he helped the prosecutor Giovanni Falcone construct a sociogram of mafia organization. Falcone and other prosecutors of the anti-mafia ‘pool’ indicted 475 mafiosi, most of whom were convicted and sentenced to prison in Palermo’s extraordinary ‘Maxi-Trial’ of 1986–87. So dramatic was this outcome that, in the 1987 elections, *cosche* leaders went out of their way to mobilize votes for the Socialist Party, in effect to send a warning to Christian Democrats, Lima and Andreotti.

On 31 January 1992, Italy’s Supreme Court upheld the vast majority of the Maxi-Trial convictions, certainly an unexpected result that led to the assassination of Lima (Caselli et al. 1995). On 23 May 1992, Magistrate Falcone, his wife, also a magistrate, and three members of their police escort were massacred by bombs that exploded under the highway from the airport to Palermo, and the following 19 July, Falcone’s close friend and successor, Magistrate Paolo Borsellino, together with his police bodyguards, were killed by another explosion in Palermo city. Riina, arrested in 1993, was accused a few years later of ordering the murder of Lima and both of these assaults. Theodoros Rakopoulos (this volume) illuminates the complexities of the annual events that commemorate the tragic massacres of Falcone and

Borsellino. (Just recently, there was great ceremonial attention to the thirtieth anniversaries of those sad events.)

The capture of mafia members from the ‘winning’ Corleonese faction, and ‘turning’ some of them into *pentiti*, meant that Sicily ceased to be a hub of drug trafficking, passing that role on to other regions, for example Calabria, where the ‘Ndrangheta holds sway. But all was not over for the mafia, as the other two chapters on Sicily in this volume illustrate. For one thing, as a consequence of the Maxi-Trial, the number of mafiosi who had to hire lawyers, and the number whose families required financial support because they were in prison, grew exponentially, pressuring mafiosi who remained free to double down on exacting the *pizzo*. Moreover, the dynamics surrounding justice collaborators changed. As mafiosi learned that they could modify their harsh prison terms only by offering to become state’s witnesses, they manipulated the system to their own ends. Mafia leaders, to take one example, began to offer ‘amnesty’ to mafiosi who had broken *omertà* but were willing to recant their testimony (see Dino 2011: 2019).

The legacy of the anti-mafia process of the 1980s and 1990s is uncertain, at best. On the discouraging side, the world that ex-prisoners are joining offers new possibilities for criminal activity, among them waste management, banking, healthcare and even wind farms. At the same time, however, the levy of the *pizzo* is not as straightforward as it used to be. As a consequence of public pressure, new legislation penalizes the victims of extortion and usury if they follow the code of *omertà* and do not file a police complaint. By 2007, the Italian organization representing manufacturers – an organization that had earlier turned its back on Libero Grassi, a clothing producer in Palermo who, in 1991, had denounced the *pizzo* and was then killed by the mafia – declared that they would deny membership to entrepreneurs who did not denounce their extortionists. Two years earlier, student activists in Palermo created an organization, Addiopizzo, which, with help from various national NGOs, now campaigns on behalf of businesses that refuse to pay the *pizzo* (Gunnarson 2014; La Spina 2019; Orlando 2012). Most important of all, from the point of view of *omertà*, are the efforts of the anti-mafia movement to establish the ‘rule of law’, banish patron–client relations and elevate the status of women in society (see Schneider and Schneider 2003). These efforts are fraught with uncertainty, especially in rural areas – witness Rakopoulos’s chapter, which details the moralizing tendencies of anti-mafia workers from Palermo who fire otherwise well-meaning persons of San Giovanni because they were seen talking to a mafioso. But in Sicily, today, many more people speak out, defying the code of *omertà*, sometimes at considerable cost to themselves – witness Ben-Yehoyada’s chapter, which describes the work of courageous journalists and how they navigate their craft.

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CHAPTER 10

ANTI-MAFIA, UNSCRIPTED

On Discourse, Moral Borders and the Public Space

Theodoros Rakopoulos



INTRODUCTION

Let us, as a mental exercise, consider the role of the anti-mafia in Italy as akin to that of a sculptor, carving the shape of the mafia out of the thin air of social interaction. The mafia's 'being', its ontology, is the outcome of the anti-mafia's discursive constructs, which take legal form ('mafia') drawing from sociological realities (exchange, violence, control and so on – see Ben-Yehoyada 2018). To locate how this takes place, we need to inquire about the nature and formation of a public space in which such discourse develops (Carrithers 2005) – a dynamic area where consensus on content ('mafia is bad') lags behind conflict on shape (the normative acts that identify how 'mafia' 'is bad'). The space of the anti-mafia has been institutional and discursive for decades – but of late (Rakopoulos 2017a) it also includes material aspects, most obviously in the form of a micro-economy of anti-mafia cooperatives.

Here, I will show how it can become a game of uncomfortable developments, almost of smoke and mirrors. This condition reflects the constitution of the modern Sicilian public space, its local *territorio*, where forces identified with often obscure actors like the mafia dominate, to think with one Sicilian author we will meet below (Sciascia and Padovani 1979). What seem like contradictions in this territory might well just be the unscripted events that expectedly spring up in an otherwise often rigid, definitely normative and in some occasions 'scripted' scenario of anti-mafia discourse: one that attempts to separate the moral universes of mafia and (the right version of) anti-mafia.

The anti-mafia public space is mainly formed around mafia-related events, especially those of a spectacular nature, like the assassinations of famous people – ‘excellent cadavers’ (see Stille 1995). The factuality of that part of the public space is undisputed, as people do not contest, for instance, that the assassination of Paolo Borsellino and his *scorta* took place.¹ Beyond agreeing on the mere fact, though, ‘the anti-mafia’ (a collective set of institutions and educational actors that give shape and – negative – visibility to the mafia) is an internally conflicted area in which multiple interpretations and even bitter contestation dominate.

The ways that people and institutions with an anti-mafia standing choose to recall mafia violence can thus be heated and even potentially eerie, while anti-mafia narratives and their ensuing historicities (Stewart 2016) can be contradictory and even antithetical to each other. This circumstance introduces a play of differentiation: in the institutional anti-mafia, some people identify with this or that narrative, while, importantly, the representations of narratives can lead to unintended micro-events in accounting for historical mafia violence (say, the Borsellino assassination). At the same time, the sphere in which the mafia is identified as a historical or synchronic actor works very differently among the ‘institutional’ anti-mafia versus the ‘practical’ one, the hands-on material experience that reshapes areas of the economy away from mafia influence (such as co-ops working on confiscated land; see Rakopoulos 2017b, 2020a). The urban, civil society anti-mafia (Schneider and Schneider 1997, 2003), despite a number of jobs associated with it, is still different from the anti-mafia that relates to forces of production. This material, second sphere of public discourse on the mafia opens a second field of knowledge around it: gossip and rumours, as well as the discontent that this informal discourse can cause.

With this twofold scheme in mind, I present stories coming from both the Sicilian capital Palermo and from rural – but adjacent to Palermo – western Sicily. Describing the vibrancy of these two spheres serves two goals. Firstly, I wish to show the power of specific types of discourse to muddle, not just clarify, the agents and actors in the field between mafia and anti-mafia. Secondly, I also want to account for the normativities of the public space in Italy, a public space that is underpinned by a strong historicity of moral discourse and ‘moral distinctiveness’ (Valentini 1987; Moss 2000). Rhetoric, ritual expression, rumour and gossip in public spaces can help us understand moralized discourse’s limits (understood both as borders and limitations). This reflects back to thinking critically with Italian intellectuals like Leonardo Sciascia, who, despite their own limitations, both inspired and critiqued ‘the anti-mafia’ through defining ‘the mafia’ – sculpting it out of thin air (Lupo 2007).

My overall aim is to discuss the Italian public sphere as a political formation where talk and silence criss-cross each other; where the normativities of talk affect the talking or non-talking subjects; and where, in effect, the very idea of what is (the) public becomes a matter of public contestation. The public sphere is not a unified dominant ethical or normative space. Words and different rhythms of uttering and sharing or networking can contribute to 'the creation of various publics and the (im)possibility of a shared public urban space' (ibid.: 147). In this way, paying attention to a particularly Italian antithesis (mafia/anti-mafia) and specifically to the polemical public sphere of 'the anti-mafia' (Schneider and Schneider 2006) allows us to delve into the contradictions, micro-normativities and internal conflicts that emerge in the process of separating the virtuous from the non-virtuous.

A RITUAL IN PALERMO

It is a scorching day in the Palermitan July of 2017. I am pursuing new ethnographic research in the Sicilian capital, accompanied by a political scientist friend, also interested in the island's public space. In the evening, we are planning to attend two complementary and contradictory events that commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of 17 July 1992, the so-called *strage di Via D'Amelio* (the Via D'Amelio massacre) in the heart of the historical centre. We are all enthusiastic about the possibilities of the evening: My political scientist research companion, myself the social anthropologist and the couple who are hosting us, two young professionals who live in central Palermo. Our friends, Nadia (38) and Michele (44), are newlyweds who have been leading middle-class lives in the city for a few years now. I first met them while doing fieldwork in the Palermitan agrarian hinterland, a few years back, where Nadia was navigating mafia–anti-mafia dipoles while working with an 'anti-mafia' cooperative (Rakopoulos 2018).

We are particularly interested in one event, called 'Bonds of Memory: Rights and Hospitality in Lands of the Mafia', which is scheduled for 19.00 in Casa Professa, a Jesuit church in Sicilian baroque style that also hosts the city's public library. We also hope that we shall still find time to attend the other event, a seemingly competing occasion, as it is on a very similar theme and is located less than 300 metres away, in the building of the Law Faculty, in the vicinities of the magnificent Santa Maria dell'Amaraglio church. The two events are separated by the semantics of the architectural richness of Palermo: on the one hand, the Church of the Gesù (Church of Jesus) is a building of great historical importance, a magnificent palace with an inner open space of ongoing use value for the public life of Palermo. Casa Professa, the secular area hosted in the premises, is a glorious late medieval building, with



Figure 10.1. Casa Professa, Palermo. © Theodoros Rakopoulos.

an internal patio, of the hybrid Arabo-Norman style. On the other hand, the Law Faculty is, in typical Western European style, a building separate from the University of Palermo campus, and located in the heart of the city. The choice of the locations for the events is characteristic of their importance for public debate in Sicily – they are both central, historical landmarks. They are unmissable, magnificently occupying urban space, which accentuates the gravity of the events they will host.

As we enter Casa Professa we encounter several policemen and guards standing across the corridor leading to the courtyard where the main event is held. The beautiful hall leads to the patio, and there we see about a hundred seats – all taken, occupied almost entirely by people over 50. The seats are facing a small stage, arranged for the occasion. A number of younger people are scattered around the patio, standing. It is an arrangement arguably symbolic of both respect for older generations *and* of Italian gerontocracy: the older already sat, the younger respectfully leaving the seats for the more senior (or just too late to find a chair). On stage are some of the most recognizable figures of the ‘institutional anti-mafia’: Rita Borsellino, Gian Carlo Caselli and Leoluca Orlando among them. Borsellino, who is now holding the mic, is giving a passionate speech about her brother, Paolo, assassinated exactly twenty-five years ago. Rita has been a candidate for the presidency

of the Sicilian region and an MP in the Sicilian parliament, and is a classic figure of the Italian Centre-Left.² Caselli has been a major magistrate; during the years that he was State's Attorney, Cosa Nostra suffered some major arrests (see Caselli and Ingroia 2013). Orlando, then Palermo's mayor, originally a Christian Democrat (and thus allied with the – often mafia-friendly – Sicilian Centre-Right), has been a central anti-mafia voice in mainstream politics since the late 1980s (see Orlando 2001). For at least the last twenty years he has been a symbol of the Centre-Left as well.

Illustrious guests, all above 70 years of age, are seated in the front row, and eventually gather on stage, with the mic passing from one to the other in a free flow. These recognizable public figures engage in a dialogue about remembering Borsellino, and the current challenges of 'the anti-mafia project'. In this, they are accompanied by other, less recognizable but equally political figures, including Vittorio Teresi, magistrate, and Maurizio Landini, General Secretary of the famous FIOM, the historically most militant, but also embourgeoised, mass trade union in Italy. The discussion goes on for two hours. The age of the participants as well as their long, rich record of accomplishment in anti-mafia engagement allows for a fervent, although at times aloof and moralistic discussion.

Slowly and respectfully, like the other spectators, we roam around the large patio as we follow the event, admiring the space, but also taken aback by the gimmicks of the occasion. At the gates, as well as around the site, there are life-sized pin-up models of people assassinated by the mafia: excellent cadavers (Stille 1995). In an aura combining illustrious survivors and illustrious fallen, an almost necrophilic yet vibrant atmosphere emanates. The installation is adorned with the figures of Borsellino and his *scorta*, who stand in solemn silence as spectators, witnesses to words spoken about them twenty-five years after their passing. Rita Borsellino, who looks aged and exhausted, poignantly says at some point: 'we are watched by those who left us.'

When the discussion finishes, it is time for a play written precisely for this occasion. Young actors take their places on stage. What follows for the next forty minutes is a passionate and exuberant performance. It is not always easy to follow, but the plot is about Sicily's purity being violated by mafia violence.

The play culminates with immense movement on stage, with the young actors gesticulating in a fierce and violent manner, while the protagonist, a beautiful young woman symbolizing a resistant Sicily, screams against her potential violators. Eventually, everyone on stage starts screaming loudly, at the top of their voices, in what looks like a Grotowski-inspired crescendo. The accompanying music has generally been eclectic but is by now hysterical: after a long passage through various works of Wim Mertens, with his



Figure 10.2. Paolo Borsellino and his *scorta*, figures. © Theodoros Rakopoulos.

atmospheric minimalism, the crescendo scene is orchestrated according to the famous theme by Clint Mansell and the Kronos Quartet in the original soundtrack of *Requiem for a Dream*. The aim, as an actor told me afterwards, was to fine-tune the dream of a Sicily with no mafia to that of the tragedy described in the film by Daren Aronofsky – drug-dependency, death and hopeful human salvation. The conjuring of themes of drug addiction, personal collapse and, eventually, death was seen as fitting to play with, especially in the light of Cosa Nostra's own heroin trafficking.

By now, four minutes into the screaming, the audience looks stunned, in the tradition of Artaudian theatre of cruelty. While the audience was visibly taken with the culmination of the screaming event, one interesting if uninvited incident took place that reshuffled the severity and solemnity of this enduring moment.

The unexpected, trickster invitee came in the shape of a dog. Palermo is filled with packs of alley dogs, stray animals that live off rubbish in the waste-laden streets of working-class neighbourhoods in downtown corners. The dog, a lone adult male animal of huge proportions and greyish pelt, was resting by some members of the audience throughout the event. Eventually, it became visibly agitated by the increasing noise and started attracting sidelong looks and passing glances from audience members, and, after a few minutes, performers on stage as well. The security guards were puzzled, but did not do anything, in order to make sure that the event was not disrupted and the solemn atmosphere jeopardized. But the dog was getting more and more pissed off.

The animal raised itself as the music and screaming noises intensified, and started barking, quietly at the beginning. As if to attract more attention, the dog walked further towards the actors and eventually literally took centre stage, facing the audience, as it joined the chorus of screaming performers with its barking. The manic dance that was taking place invited further movement, so the dog started following the dancers on stage and moving around with them. The performers, initially visibly shocked, started to warm up to the unexpected visitor once they noticed that the huge canine was actually harmless. They made sure, as the dance was evolving further, that the dog's pacing, running and barking on stage was included in the overexcited movement taking place, as the symbolism of a violent Sicily needing to shake off violence was coming to a peak. The dog was not aggressive in any way, but the intensity of both its own barking and the passionate exchange that was taking place on stage were increasing in an aggravated manner.

People started smirking and even laughing in the audience. While the illustrious guests remained silent throughout the barking and then the dog-on-stage moments, they joined the audience in laughter after a while. Rita Borsellino, in particular, was originally stunned by the event, but became visibly more sympathetic to the way it was being treated.

My research companion and I were actively taking note of everything taking place, while our hosts were laughing loudly. At the end, with the actors and performers bowing, the dog took centre stage among them, and the audience applauded fervently. The solemn sense of the play was now lost in translation, and people joined their hands in clapping the absurd turn of events, as much as the effort of the performers. When the performers left, after the third round of applause, the dog established itself alone at the centre of the stage (and of attention). The audience then got up from their seats and gave the animal a standing ovation, with a sentiment, by then unequivocal and shared by arguably everyone, of celebration, irony and vitality.

The eerie event provokes what the uncanny, according to Freud, can often inspire: at once a sense of shared discomfort and a sensation of the absurd, even the ridiculous side of the violence of history (Stewart 2017). I will return to approaching the odd phenomenology of violence in its narration of mafia history in a little while, but first I would like to present a glimpse from the other, neighbouring anti-mafia event of the evening.

OTHER WOR(L)DS IN THE PUBLIC SPACE

One block away, there was another happening, where siblings of the arguably three most celebrated anti-mafia heroes of recent times were the main



Figure 10.3. Poster, downtown Palermo. © Theodoros Rakopoulos.

speakers. These were the sister of magistrate Giovanni Falcone and the brother of magistrate Paolo Borsellino, the assassinated Dioscuri of the historical Sicilian prosecution system, as well as the brother of Giuseppe Impastato, the assassinated political activist from Cinisi, a mafia stronghold close to Palermo. Interestingly, in the course of the event Borsellino's brother mentioned his befuddlement over why Rita (his and Paolo's sister) would join 'the others'.

This event was more militant in essence, as witnessed in its title: 'In What State is the Mafia?', a play on words equally effective and disturbing in Italian or English. Despite its militancy, though, in some ways this was a more intellectual event, as evidenced by its guests: Saverio Lodato is a figure of national importance in all issues related to mafia and anti-mafia, a journalist whose books are cited by scholars working on these issues (including the undersigned) (see Lodato 2001, 2006). The director of Antimafia Duemila Giorgio Bongiovanni was also present, and so was Antonio Ingroia, the author and former investigative magistrate for Palermo, a public intellectual who – especially in earlier years – represented what in Italy is often seen as a 'red gown'.³ Also present were Nino Di Matteo, substitute national procurator for anti-mafia affairs,⁴ and two jurists active in the anti-mafia of southern Italy: Giuseppe Lombardo, adjunct procurator for the mafia-ridden Reggio Calabria, as well as Gianfranco Donadio, another magistrate with a long anti-mafia CV, mainly working in Basilicata. The regional president, Governor of Sicily Rosario Crocetta, also passed by – and it is important to point out that

Crocetta was the first – and possibly the only thus far – governor who has been consistently and insistently anti-mafia.

Unlike those present at the other event, this one was peopled by intellectual activists, many of whom might accept the idea of a conspiracy between state and mafia. Specifically, in the public discussions and books that some of these intellectuals and public orators have produced, as well as in this event, a case is often made that there has been a *trattativa tra stato e mafia*: a ‘treaty’ between state and mafia. Most crucially, Salvatore Borsellino was also present and was very dramatic in his delivery. The founder of the movement ‘Agende Rosse’ and Paolo Borsellino’s brother, Salvatore made a dramatic plea to the authorities to stop dealing with mafia.

The intellectual and public stature of the figures discussed, as well as of the anti-mafia as a project at large, is not without contestation within Sicily itself. Of course, much of this contestation comes from right-wing politicians, often colluding with mafia (such as Totò Cuffaro, the region’s governor while I did eighteen months of fieldwork there, in 2008–9). Cuffaro famously, for example, debated and clashed with Giovanni Falcone, Borsellino’s friend and colleague, on TV. Eventually, Cuffaro, as well as the Centre-Right governor that followed him, Raffaele Lombardo, also a doctor, were condemned to prison for collusion with the mafia (although later acquitted), and so was Marcello Dell’Utri, the all-powerful Centre-Right MP from Palermo, cofounder of Forza Italia and friend of ex-prime minister Silvio Berlusconi.

However, some contesting of this public intellectual work comes from the Left, too. My friends and informants in the squat-based collective *onda anomala* (‘anomalous wave’) in Palermo vehemently oppose any institutional anti-mafia events. These informants, young (median age 28–30), underemployed and often from working-class backgrounds, are politically inspired by the long Italian tradition of *autonomia* and, through a squat in downtown Palermo, are doing what they call ‘real work in the neighbourhood’. In their squat, they offer a series of social and solidarity economy services to poor locals and immigrants, reclaiming public urban space. They consider the events described above incredibly and annoyingly bourgeois, and part of a self-celebratory series of rituals that reproduces a certain Palermitan milieu, the class-based *Palermo per bene*. This ‘part’ of the city consists of ‘the same people that pat themselves on the back’, as Mimmo, a leading figure in *onda anomala*, told me. On another occasion, he commented that ‘if this is the anti-mafia, better stand with the mafia than with the anti-mafia’.

This discontent with the anti-mafia has a long, left-wing intellectual history as well. Leonardo Sciascia, the aforementioned internationally acclaimed author (and humble schoolteacher from the outback town of Racalmuto), is a case in point. He had a huge impact on the Italian public sphere with his expressed suspicion of the anti-mafia social milieu, which he saw through

an acute analytical lens: that of *professionalism*. In the claimed expertise gradually built into ‘doing anti-mafia’, he saw a growing professionalization and condemned the process of bureaucratization that accompanied it, some years after the escalation of mafia violence and anti-mafia backlash (Sciascia 1987).⁵ Soon after the publication of his article ‘The Professionals of the Anti-Mafia’, Sciascia passed away, leaving a misunderstanding hanging, especially in the light of his previously held and expressed views on Sicily being condemned to endemic corruption – views expressed in the metaphor of the geographical ‘rise of the palm tree’ (Blim 1998) that bordered on essentialism (Rosengarten 1998). Sicily and its civil society and modern public space, in his view, are engulfed by the corrosive encroachment of the rising palm tree line that moves from Africa into Europe (Camilleri and Lodato 2002) – a poignant, prophetic metaphor of climate change with orientalist undertones. Such essentialisms in representing Sicily were not rare among some of the most prominent anti-mafia activists, including magistrate Falcone himself (Falcone 1993).

Sciascia the intellectual was at the forefront of the anti-mafia struggle for decades and contributed a conceptual shape that influenced how we all see the mafia (especially through the novel *The Day of the Owl*). At the same time, he unwittingly coined a term now often used by corrupt conservative politicians – including Cuffaro: ‘*i professionisti dell’antimafia*’. Life trajectories like Sciascia’s suggest how the anti-mafia discursive terrain is itself laden with normative contradictions (Schneider and Schneider 1998). This is more evident in the island’s hinterland, an area that Sciascia knew all too well.

While the institutional anti-mafia and the scripted social life it suggests develop within clear-cut boundaries of talk in Palermo’s public debates, in the hills of Spicco Vallata, on which we will focus in the coming section, the flow of ‘anti-mafia’ information kept a low profile. My comparative ethnographic attention shifts just 32 kilometres away from Palermo, and into the rural areas of western Sicily, while maintaining an interest in excavating the normative mishaps of an anti-mafia public space that cannot stay scripted at all times.

IN THE VALLEY: SIGNALLING AND METATALK

Spicco Vallata is a viticulture-based valley where four cooperatives cultivate land that the state confiscated from mafiosi. These four ‘anti-mafia’ cooperatives eventually sparked a constellation of similar initiatives across southern Italy, which ranks first among the major material wins of the contemporary anti-mafia movement over the mafia (Santino 2000, 2022). The main offices and now headquarters of this Italian phenomenon are in the village of San

Giovanni, where I did fieldwork in 2008 and 2009 and have paid visits since. The village was part of eight villages united in assigning confiscated land to agrarian cooperatives.

Among anti-mafia cooperatives' members, many, especially the co-op managers, as well as Spicco Vallata politicians involved in the anti-mafia project, frequently used the term 'mafia' alongside idioms of insidious growth and contamination. They characterized flows and networks deploying interests of people thought to belong to mafia clans as 'mafia diffusion'. Public officials, such as judges or mayors of local villages, shared a charged lexicon that compared mafia to disease and indeed to cancer. Reale's mayor talked to me of the 'need to isolate the contaminated cells in our society'. The mayor of Fonte, another involved village, characterized influences of the San Giovanni mafia clans in his community as a 'metastasis' (invoking the spread of cancer cells to other parts of the body), a term also used by sociologists in Italy (Sciarrone 2009). Another local mayor named Malva, despite his friendship with a young mafioso I name Baffi (Rakopoulos 2015), told me in an interview that the '[mafia] lump had to be removed from the body of our community'.

In the midst of all this, there were the anti-mafia cooperative members, especially the office-based administrators, whose middle-class and Palermitan background differentiated them from the local coop workers. They also employed metaphors of diffusion spreading throughout the community's body to conceptualize mafiosi as contaminators of social networks and the public sphere. Any nexus with mafia links was seen as morally challenging and permanently risky until 'the lump is removed', as Gianpiero underlined to me. Gianpiero, a Borsellino administrator and the head of the NGO Libera Palermo, reflected the association's views. Pamphlets of anti-mafia civil society associations spoke of the perils of mafias as 'the disease of the South' (Libera 2009; Addiopizzo 2009). Libera construed this paradigm in terms of mafia as a nucleus that conveyed its corrupting influence to the political and economic order – to the public space of Sicilian and Italian society. Nico, a member of the Borsellino cooperative, compared the members' anxiety about becoming exposed to 'contamination' with the fear of clean water becoming polluted: a social network was like a river with a dead body lying in its stream; when the clean waters passed over it, the stream became polluted from that point onwards. In that way, anti-mafia cooperative administrators saw the public space as 'impure' when a mafioso occupied a broker position in it. The contamination imagery was constantly evoked in documents and informal discourses among the cooperatives' administration, local policy actors such as mayors, and civil society agents such as Libera activists. Some of this discourse incorporates the flow of gossip and informal information gathered in bars as public spaces in the valley of the Palermo hinterland.

Contamination calls for containment, an idea that underpinned the administrators' tendency to form 'moral borders' while underlining the 'cleanliness' of the cooperatives with their strictly demarcated moral universe. These borders extended to kinship (see Rakopoulos 2017b), friendship (2018), discourse (2019) and, of course, land (2020a). Overall, these moral borders were an attempt to create a scripted version of everyday life. Through gossip, the anti-mafia experts – administrators of co-ops and Libera agents – knew, or claimed they knew, what was said and who said it. In this way they were trying to form discursive moral borders around the cooperatives. This form of gossip in San Giovanni was constructed as what I call 'metatalk' (Rakopoulos 2019), because to track gossip was to talk about talking. A person was 'clean' not only when they were not a mafioso or a mafioso's relative, but when it was proved that they did not speak with mafiosi or relatives of mafiosi, as this could be contaminating for the cooperatives.

Palermitan anti-mafia co-op administrators performed this by tracing information, consulting the Prefecture and the police, but also by following informal means of gathering information. The police provided an outline of a person's relationships with the authorities, as documented in their official archives. On top of this, the co-op administrators paid attention to random local gossip, especially the 'whispering' (*sussuri*) that took place in bars.

This tacit flow of discourse was actually very powerful. The state's gossip-tracking could lead to a situation called 'signalling' (*segnalazione*), a sort of documentation confirming a person's contacts with mafiosi. A law enforcement entity (the Carabinieri or the police) wrote down the person's name as a 'mafia contact' and informed the cooperatives that the person was to be avoided. As demands for labour intensified with the development of the cooperatives, this situation dramatically influenced the anti-mafia cooperatives' recruitment, as the cooperatives could not hire 'signalled' people. What is more, they would have to fire people who were signalled.

Once, Piero, entering a bar in San Cipiriddu for his morning espresso, saw the local Carabinieri marshal having a coffee with young Aiola, the first cousin of a San Giovanni mafia clan leader. Piero ignored this and had a brief trivial chat with both men. The next day, he had the police at his door: he was advised not to approach that person again, as he was a mafioso. The police officers told him that they were obliged to communicate this information to the president of the cooperative and that after that 'it was the cooperative's own issue' to decide on Piero's future. When Piero went to the police department, he complained that he had approached Aiola only because the marshal was there, and that the marshal introduced him to Aiola. The police replied that they often spent time with known mafiosi and 'it was not his business imitating that conduct'.

The case of Pino, another co-op member, is similar to Piero's: he underwent a *segnalazione* as he 'contacted' his village's mafia boss. Informants confirmed, however, that what the police meant by 'contact' was that he had simply stopped to say hello when he and local mafioso Netti met on the street. In a small village like San Cipiriddu it was difficult to avoid meeting anyone, and Pino's private engineering office was on the main road, some 30 metres from the stairs to the main church and to local bar Circolo, Netti's hangout. In fact, Pino introduced Netti to me, as we met him by chance at Circolo one day.⁶

The above events took place in 2009. Things were even more difficult with the passing of years. In 2016 and 2017, on visits to San Giovanni, I found out about how the signalling situation came to a standstill in defining the public space and its rigid borders for the anti-mafia cooperatives. Two people, founding members of the Borsellino anti-mafia cooperative, were fired in early 2016 because of the gossip around them regarding meeting a mafioso.

Pasquale and Peppe were fired for having attended a mafioso's celebration in the village. Pasquale, 42, married a woman who was the cousin of the nephew of Balduccio Di Maggio, a San Giovanni mafioso central to Sicilian history (see Rakopoulos 2020b). Pasquale was thus deemed *mezzo imparentato* (almost kin⁷) to the mafioso. Di Maggio had served many years in prison since the late 1990s for belonging to a mafia organization and for having assassinated three people. At some point, after many years in *carcere duro* (hard prison regime) under the fierce 41bis article of the Italian Criminal Code, he was allowed one exit from jail for three days. As is custom in San Giovanni (but also in some Palermo areas), the neighbourhood around his house celebrated the event. Local kids detonated dozens of firecrackers that evening, while the family engaged in what is known locally as 'open house': people are allowed and indeed encouraged to come to salute their imprisoned compatriot (the 'hosted of the state', as he is ironically called locally) and pay their due respects to him. Not doing this when one is in the mafioso's circle is considered an act of dishonour, and one that could have repercussions of all sorts, from social isolation to actual threats.

Pasquale's hands were tied. He felt he had to visit his imprisoned kin; out of honesty and courtesy to his co-op, he announced his intention to the administrative council of the co-op, when gossip reached them. The leadership told him that his position in the co-op would be imperilled after this. He went to the ritual event nonetheless; the next day, when asked by the co-op administrators, he admitted his attendance. He was fired two days later. Totò, a close informant and a friend of Pasquale, was critical of Pasquale's layoff: 'we all know each other here, what do you do, not say hi?' In his opinion, Pasquale should not have told the co-ops of his contact.

In the case of 45-year-old Peppe, the situation was less incidental, as he kept a loose friendship with a minor Corleone mafioso. The Brancusi brothers, Peppe and Mimmo, were the powerhouse of the Borsellino co-op, controlling the admin council alongside its president, Mario. They eventually split, as Peppe was fired for maintaining his old friendship with the mafioso. The information reached the co-ops through the magistrate.

Soon after, the co-ops' statute was updated in order to tackle future cases like this. Article 10 of the *statuto*, which was introduced in 2011, stipulates clearly that members have to have a *condotta personale* that is in line with the professed ideas and principles of the co-ops. The wording of the statute was strengthened. The public space was tightened for the co-op members and for anti-mafiosi in general. 'The world is shrinking', as Totò eloquently put it to me.

THE LOCUS OF THE SEMI-PUBLIC SPHERE

Schneider and Schneider's (1976) classic monograph proposed that 'control over networks' is the source of the mafia's brokerage power. In a more recent book, they identified (hierarchical) 'reputational networks' as an important means of social cohesion in Sicily, which impacts on production and reproduction patterns, building people's and families' 'respectability' (Schneider and Schneider 1996: 195–96).

In my twofold ethnographic focus here, while in the civil society anti-mafia of the urban middle classes we encounter an open (and openly polemic) field of debate and contestation that can also assume performative forms, the situation is different in the rural anti-mafia of hinterland Sicily. The flows of discourse and reputation there are an expression of the internal differentiation of anti-mafia cooperatives into middle-class managers and local workers, and they carry a normativity that can lead to deleterious effects.

Utilizing reputational networks, administrators of anti-mafia cooperatives render gossip a resource, appropriating it from the local context, to use against mafia. This resource is also a source of threat, to be used to promote a certain understanding of what is 'proper anti-mafia'. Gossip does not produce local everyday politics this way (à la Besnier 2009), but tangibly solidifies abstract normative categories. Such networks in rural Sicily mediate categories of cleanliness in a context of anti-mafia linked to other resources (land and labour) available through the cooperatives. Focusing on the flows of discourse and the modes of communication helps them to construct the binary mafia versus anti-mafia and their conceptual separation in daily discourse.

As noted above, cooperative members instrumentalized information gathered through gossip as often as state actors did, although with more effective penetration and better knowledge of the *territorio*, the public space containing local networks of kinship, friendship and other alignments. The gossipy character of such communication was often seen as a way to ‘know a territory’ and infiltrate those spheres of information considered too intimate for the state to reach. The discourse of ‘cleanliness’ creates a difference from state actors, demarcating the social ambience of the anti-mafia cooperatives. Whereas gossip and rumours blurred the boundaries within which the people of the cooperatives were meant to act, they were also used to register people on one or the other ‘side’.

Gossip in Spicco Vallata meant both to tell stories (gossip with a narrative, e.g. Pasquale’s story of attending an event) and to talk about talking (gossip about who talks with whom, e.g. recording Peppe’s hello to the mafioso). The anti-mafia cooperatives’ administrators mainly utilized this latter form in order to identify who was a mafia proximate – who was, in effect, ‘contaminated’ by ‘mafia’ (see also Rakopoulos 2018, 2019). Gossip thus helps to set the limits of the law’s applicability in that it conveys *meta-information*. In that respect, when a person was established to have contacts with (i.e. speak to, share words with) someone recognized as a mafioso in legal terms, that person would be excluded from the cooperatives. Using gossip to strategize the next moves of the anti-mafia meant identifying people’s location in specific flows of information in their villages. These flows corresponded to networks of acquaintances, affiliations and sympathies.

Gossip consequently entailed controlling channels of cleanliness, as mafia contamination transmits through words, through sharing information and talking with people perceived as contaminated. There was more interest in speech about speech, in knowing who spoke to whom, than in what they said (cf. Ben-Yehoyada, this volume). In that way, words are not dangerous because of their content, but because of their mere existence, addressing someone considered potentially contaminating (Favret-Saada 1980). The use of indirect communication, rumours, whispers, gestures – in short, of platforms evoking and conveying informal information in the form of gossip – was fundamentally important for the cooperatives’ ethical position. Reproducing a clear distinction between ‘the mafia’ and ‘the anti-mafia’, administrators employed gossip to distinguish sharply two ‘moral universes’ of mafia and anti-mafia. This has had impacts on the work relations of the cooperatives, as workers’ everyday lives developed beyond the iron cage that these moral universes constructed – and thus went against the scripted morals of anti-mafia normativity.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: OF TALK, TERRITORY AND OTHER PUBLIC SPACE MATERIAL

The anti-mafia discourse is centred on the idea of knowledge, with all its historical connotations.⁸ It is a terrain in which talking, saying things in an articulated or suggestive fashion, or talking about talking – what I call *metatalk* – creates reality. This reality is in itself, if not opaque, sometimes confused – in ways that sometimes resemble the power of the word in witchcraft (Favret-Saada 1980). It can also emerge as a discursive reality with a flair of humour or unexpected flaw. But overall, it is a terrain where knowledge bears responsibility – and a range of normative orders that often contradict each other.

The gradual move from a rural to an urban, civil-society anti-mafia (Schneider and Schneider 1997) is now giving way to a dynamic, symbiotic relation of anti-mafia milieus in city and village. This public space cannot be fully integrated, and is internally diversified in each of these locations. When accounting for the public space as a domain of and for anthropological knowledge, we should be wary of weaving such sociological realities together and should not stress an empirically doubtful coherence. This volume on Italian social life partly investigates the imaginings of such a public space, with its internal tensions and cultural richness. In this section, said social life, with its ensuing public spaces, becomes a domain that aims to make of the mafia an object of inquiry (Ben-Yehoyada, this volume) – a sphere that sheds light on an impervious phenomenon, that is, however, itself part of Italian public life, with its afforded historical silences (Schneider and Schneider, this volume).

To that avail, the emic idea of the ‘territory’ (*il territorio*, the Italian emic metaphor for social complexity) is central, indeed constitutional, for public and semi-public definitions of mafia and anti-mafia alike. Almost all of the contributors to the public events discussed in my Palermitan ethnographic vignettes dedicated time and interest to the idea of the ‘territory’. During the events described, they pointed out that the staging of these happenings in downtown Palermo was an attempt to reclaim territory for their own: to claim back the city from the mafia. Similarly, the anti-mafia activists of the Spicco Vallata cooperatives also aim to break down the codes of a territory in which they partake but which they also often deem dangerous. In fact, the dangers they engage with are also outcomes of the very anti-mafia normativity they pursue and facilitate in that territory.

When investigating the *territorio* it is important to pay attention to ‘metatalk’: essentially a *talk about talking*, a kind of talk about *who is talking with whom* and about its ensuing normative effects. Controlling the reputational networks (Schneider and Schneider 1996) of the discursive threads that compose the public sphere is central in precisely shaping that territory.

The anti-mafia both carves the mafia into shape and shapes the territory in morally charged universes through talk. The anti-mafia talks (or claims to be talking) when the mafia keeps silent, often by silencing others (see Schneider and Schneider, this volume). We need to be attentive to such speech or lack thereof, as well as the grey zones it shapes (Pine 2012).

Equally important is to pay attention to the micro-events of discourse gone in different directions than intended, as 'a rhetorical perspective requires the ethnographer to attend not just to the structures of culture, but also to the flow of events' (Carrithers 2005: 582), which shapes the public sphere in Sicily and Italy (Alajmo 2005). It takes place in the shape subjects give it, and here is its sociological premise: presenting the self as narrator (and vector) of facts in the social field does not come without strategies and failures (Goffman 1956).

Reading between the lines of writing, or observing the ways that oral communication is perceived, can of course reveal as much about the mafia as the very content of that discourse. The often clumsy normativity of anti-mafia discourse has power: it 'reconstructs' the mafia out of social contact and conduct (as in San Giovanni), and through managing sociohistorical memory (as in Palermo). To underline the incongruities in the formation of the public space where anti-mafia talk is regimented is not to criticize 'the anti-mafia' as a sociological reality, à la Sciascia. Rather, it serves as a reality check to remind us of how the constitutive force of discourse can lead to odd results: an official anti-mafia event gone skewed can lead to a dog as the evening's protagonist; talking to the 'wrong people' can lead to losing one's job. The force of discourse in the frail anti-mafia public space can lead to an innocuous, if uncanny performance, or to layoffs. Maybe the real fault lines within the anti-mafia originate from outside the communicative dimension of that public sphere – in that there might be people accused of being *professionisti* (whose work is associated with institutions) and people who work manually on assets that the state appropriated back from the mafia.

At any rate, if we take our informants seriously, including encountering humour and irony in the public space (Carrithers 2012), such as applauding a dog on stage, and if we think across matters like the mafia and anti-mafia as domains of metaphor (Sciascia and Padovani 1979), we need to see mafia and anti-mafia beyond ontologies. I began this chapter with the working hypothesis that the cultural work of the anti-mafia is to sculpt the existence of the mafia in the territory into a public shape. That work is contextual at all times, and thus open, delicate and contradictory, because it is rooted in a *territory*, which it often attempts to carve into moral universes of good and bad, characterized by scripted discourses and clear-cut borders. The public space (essentially, what *territorio* is) is open at all times to turns of events (an anti-mafia performance going uncannily awry) or to ongoing

social relations that go against the grain (as in the cases of anti-mafia co-op workers getting fired). Affording an ontological category to the social life of anti-mafia as a field always and at all times against and beyond ‘mafia’ would mean taking its discourse on cleanliness and purity at face value. While it is totally understandable that its scripted discourse needs to stand against and beyond mafia at all times, it is also ethnographically expected that on many occasions the script does not work – and that there might be repercussions.

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NOTES

1. It is beyond any doubt that Paolo Borsellino is a major figure in very recent Italian history. It was his work, as well as his life and times, but perhaps mainly his death that inscribed his name in the annals of Italian public life. On 17 July 1992, only one hundred days after his friend and colleague Giovanni Falcone was himself assassinated in Capaci, Borsellino was blown up together with four men of his security (*scorta*).
2. This is despite the fact that both her and her brother were devoted Catholics who at times felt close to a very conservative Right. Borsellino in his youth felt close to the neofascist MSI (Movimento Sociale Italiano).
3. The red gowns or *le tute rosse* are a synecdoche for left-wing magistrates that fight mafia and corruption (as well as Berlusconi’s ‘shadow’ and the legacy the politician has left).
4. Di Matteo took over the so-called *trattativa* team after Ingroia left.
5. For example, the assassination of major magistrate Rocco Chinnici.
6. One cannot help but make associations with the theme of the film *I Cento Passi* here.
7. While this term literally means ‘half-kin’, the translation reflects the interlocutor’s intent to refer to a tacit kin relation rather than a specific one.
8. For instance, ‘I know’ (*Io so*; see Ingroia et al. 2012), the title of an Ingroia book, echoes Pier Paolo Pasolini.

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CHAPTER 11

SPEECH IN GOMMOPOLI

Naor Ben-Yehoyada



WELCOME TO GOMMOPOLI

In the summer of 2013, the Trapanese journalist Rino Giacalone published a piece in the homonymous news outlet of an association called ‘Articolo 21, liberi di . . .’, which promotes the freedom of expression that is enshrined in that article of the Italian Constitution. Article 21 of the constitution opens with the words: ‘Everyone has the right to express their thoughts freely in words, in writing, and in any other means of diffusion. The Press cannot be subject to authorizations or censure.’¹ In its penultimate point, Article 21 specifies what should be the relationship between such postulated liberty and the funding of the press: ‘the Law can establish, with norms of general character, that the means of financing of periodical press should be made known.’

It is exactly this relationship between information, the more or less established means for its divulging and the political economy of those means that Rino Giacalone tried to capture with the nickname he gave to his hometown: Gommopoli, or ‘Rubberville’. His 2013 piece was titled ‘From “Mafiopoli” to “Gommopoli”: The Trapanese Mafia in the Age of Matteo Messina Denaro’ (Giacalone 2013). The use of that nickname for a locality explicitly echoed Peppino Impastato and his comrades’ strategy in calling their town Cinisi ‘Mafiopoli’. Only unlike the 1970s context of Impastato’s Radio Aut, in 2013 the word ‘mafia’ is neither radical nor focalizing any more (Puccio-Den 2021: 196). Giacalone’s piece itself does not elaborate on the inspiration for the name. When I asked him, he told me that it comes from Marco Risi’s 1991 movie *The Rubber Wall* (*Il Muro di Gomma*), which recounts a journalist’s attempts to investigate the ‘Ustica disaster’, the mysterious crash of an Italian

DC 9 plane flying from Bologna to Palermo in 27 June 1980, off the island of Ustica, which lies north of Palermo. ‘In Gommopoli everything bounces back and disappears . . . In the province of Gommopoli it’s the journalists who tarnish the cities’ images, and it’s the mayors who sue them for libel. But this is also the fault of the other journalists who prefer to look the other way, and who recount the trials the way the defence lawyers want them to.’² In contrast to Risi’s film title, the rubber wall in Giacalone’s ‘Gommopoli’ prevents not access to the truth behind it, but the ability to accuse. Where ‘everything bounces back’, anything you write can turn against you. Critical speech – a communicative device that recounts to a certain public certain events – becomes irrelevant.³

This chapter is about the relationship between secrets, publics and the partial criminalization of association in Italy (see Rakopoulos, this volume). Gommopoli opens for us a contemporary window into the predicament of writing about mafia-related things and people in a context in which the official legal construction of the mafia – what it is, and whom and what it includes – leaves certain pieces of the puzzle out of place. Giacalone did not refer to mafia-related murder or other overtly violent events. On the contrary: regarding those, the piece’s opening sentence declares that ‘We know the faces of Trapanese mafiosi, old and new, like we know the names of those who have fought against them.’⁴ Instead, Giacalone’s lament about things and words ‘bouncing back and disappearing’ referred to words about *borghesi*, upstanding citizens. ‘Nowadays the mafia . . . is made also of persons beyond suspicion . . . who move between politics and the economy, and who have also conducted various political campaigns . . . it is made of white collar workers and professionals.’⁵ While silence and its imposition is central to some legal-dependent working definitions of the mafia (e.g. Puccio-Den 2021), Giacalone’s lament reminds us from the outset that the mafia as it is experienced and imagined, at least in the Trapanese, ‘is made of’ more than its legally incriminated members (Rakopoulos 2019), a characteristic of both mafia and *mafialogia* that Salvatore Lupò (2018) identifies as structural for well over a century.

‘Secret’ has three functions in this context. It serves judicial investigations, which can claim to keep things concealed, especially from those investigated, to prevent interference with the course of criminal justice. Secrecy also shapes the professional role of journalists, who sometimes cannot or do not wish to publish what they come to know (Jusionyte 2015), a discretion that interlaces their professional production into the dynamics of public secrets and their always partial revelations regarding the social realities on which these journalists report (Taussig 1999: 57–58). Finally, it plays a crucial role in the definition, criminalization and particular incrimination of the Sicilian Cosa Nostra as based on the concept of *omertà* (see Schneider and

Schneider, this volume). Although the case at hand takes place in 2010s Trapani rather than in 1980s Palermo, and involves mostly online outlets rather than newspapers, it revolves around resonating dynamics (Schneider and Schneider 2003: 199–203). As Jane and Peter Schneider’s piece in this volume shows, and as Maria Pia Di Bella has shown elsewhere, the silence–talk pair is central to mafia and mafilogists’ craft (Di Bella 2008; Rakopoulos 2018b; cf. Puccio-Den 2021).

If we acknowledge that social formations like Cosa Nostra operate beyond their criminalized dimensions, manifestations or parts (Sergi 2017: 77), then we may realize journalists’ predicaments in attempting to inform their readers about things that – at that point at least – are not considered criminal. Ieva Jusionyte’s (2015: 27) anthropology of a criminalized frontier reveals how journalists ‘face decisions about if and how to report on activities that are illegalized yet legitimate’. Here the obverse holds: journalists need to decide how to report on activities and relations that, even if they are not illegalized, they consider to be illegitimate. If we take the construction of the mafia to be controlled by legal procedures, then what counts as the anti-mafia follows, as a more or less stable public – that public which partakes in the successful criminalization of that same mafia, the ‘sculpt[ing of] the existence of the mafia in the territory into a public shape’ (see Rakopoulos, this volume: 214). Rakopoulos shows that public to contain internal polemics and contradictions, even regarding recognizable criminalized events and persons. To complement this perspective, in what follows I consider how the same non-unified, multi-centred construction of the mafia can destabilize who gets to claim to be ‘anti-mafia’ too. ‘We recognize’, Giacalone declares, ‘the faces of the true anti-mafia, whom every now and then someone tries to sully [*mascariare* in Sicilian – ‘taint with charcoal’].’ And to that he counterposes: ‘We would like to, we want to, recognize the faces of those who have in these long years made deals with the mafia, day by day, for things large and small.’⁶

Public secrets in Gommopoli are doubly unstable. Realist treatments of secrets – in the sense that they take the secret to hide something that ‘everybody knows how not to know’ – draw their publics around such secrets (Shryock 2004; Piliavsky 2011). Treatments of public secrets that include more than one public tend to distinguish among the latter following a socially recognizable parameter: local versus foreign, or class and its antecedent relationship to state actions (Jusionyte 2015; Yeh 2012 respectively). Rihan Yeh’s examination of the interaction among publics provides a clue as to the working of speech in Gommopoli. In Tijuana, the counter-public that appears in the gestures of exclusion from ‘informed debate . . . through genres of hearsay ranging from the specificity of “what I heard” to the vast generality of “we all know . . .”’ is ‘literally criminalized’. Together, ‘[t]he

bourgeois-type public and the hearsay [criminalized] public . . . articulate themselves according to very different logics of representation, circulation, evidence, and authority' (Yeh 2012: 716). In Trapani, on the contrary, both Giacalone's followers and those of his counterparts belong more or less to the same social classes. Both sides claim to be anti-mafia, or at least against the mafia (no one claims that they stand or speak for the mafia).⁷ If we imagine with Giacalone that Gommopoli's mafia 'is made of' people beyond suspicion, then we should acknowledge that such persons would be indistinguishable from those who accuse them of partaking in that wider, shadier mafia universe. And why should we assume that such accusations only travel in one direction, rather than bounce back, as if from a rubber wall?

Giacalone's 2013 'From "Mafiopoli" to "Gommopoli"' piece used the rubber nickname while explicitly naming Trapani, the administrative capital of the eponymous province in western Sicily. Meanwhile, Giacalone began to write short messages on his Facebook and Twitter accounts referring only to Gommopoli, also disguising other details behind allusions. These posts appeared in parallel to his journalistic pieces in local outlets and regional and national newspapers. At times they included links to the respective piece.

For example, on 14 January 2016, Giacalone posted the following: 'Gommopoli . . . and that press that works with the mouse-size filter', using his nickname for one of his counterparts, 'the mouse', to suggest that he controls what gets published.⁸ In response, his friend the journalist and photographer Ninni Ravazza wrote: ' . . . could we please stop these subliminal messages and call a spade a spade if we are in the know? These messages that are directed at "those who want to get it" aren't messages . . . they most of all resemble warnings. If you have something to publicize . . . names and surnames and facts . . . for the sake of intellectual honesty and so that everyone could understand what you want to say.'⁹ Someone asked Ravazza rhetorically if he always has the courage to call a spade a spade; 'I don't think so, not in Trapani.'¹⁰ To which Ravazza replied: 'No . . . in fact after they blew up my house I stopped being a journalist. Now I go sailing and I don't send any coded messages.'¹¹ At that point, Giacalone joined the fray: 'for names, surnames and facts, you can read my articles if you want. That's the right home for recounting names and facts. On Facebook there's only the imaginary town of Gommopoli and the facts can be told only this way . . . the warnings that you wrongly spotted are not mine.'¹² After Ravazza told Giacalone that he reads his articles but does not like the coded messages, Giacalone concluded: 'Imagine that the same thing sometimes happens to me . . . though when I read articles in the newspaper!' (Ravazza concurred).¹³

I do not mean to suggest that Giacalone's Gommopoli is unique in its use of pseudonyms in or for the town and its *dramatis personae*. To mention one example, avid readers of the Commissario Montalbano series mentioned to

me Andrea Camilleri's fictional reference in *La Gita a Tindari* to Trapani and to its leading politician as 'senatore Ardoli' (Camilleri 2000, quoted in Bova 2021: 219). Yet this particular social media thread crystalized many conversations of Gialalone with his friends and colleagues I observed and took part in. The Gommopoli posts' nomenclature runs the gamut from easily decipherable nicknames for towns in the province (*Vetrocity* for Castelvetrano and *Satirocity* for Mazara del Vallo, home of the 'dancing satyr' statue) to messages that contain concrete information about unfolding events. It is this latter side of the spectrum that I wish to examine now, specifically regarding a chain of events that became public in mid-January 2016, the same day as Gialalone's exchange with Ravazza, in order to examine the hermetic feel to the hermeneutic economy in Gommopoli.

THE STORM IN THE TEACUP

Later on the same day of his Facebook exchange with Ninni Ravazza and others – 14 January 2016 – Gialalone posted on his Facebook wall: 'Gommopoli . . . il silenzio colorato di bianco Natale.' The reference to silence continued the earlier point about the press's tendency to leave out too much news of public interest. This new thread visualized that 'silence' (it was the dead of winter, but Trapani does not receive much snow) with the image of 'white Christmas' (also the title of a 2010 song by Irene Grandi). Except the holiday's name signified (for those who wished to get it, as Ravazza had pointed out) the name of the person involved in that day's event, a notary called Di Natale, whose brush with the law eluded mention in the news hour and on the website of the town's only TV station.

That same day, Gialalone published a short piece in one of the news outlets that operate in the Province of Trapani about the arrest, two days earlier, of a 36-year-old woman from Marsala, titled 'Drugs: A Minor, Arrested; Perquisition for a Notary'. As the title shows, the text, which informed readers that the woman was put under house arrest, mentioned that her partner was Francesco di Natale, 'a famous Trapanese professional' whose home was searched during the arrest, where 'investigators found a wiretapping detector device' (Gialalone 2016a). Gialalone's piece mentioned that the assistant prosecutor in charge was Andrea Tarondo, who was already known for prosecuting some key corruption and mafia-related trials in the province, and that the investigation was carried out by agents of the State Forestry Corps (the Forestale), an infrequent presence in the judicial investigative panorama (Bova 2021: 223). Yet these details appeared without elaboration or explication, fulfilling Ravazza's 'names and surnames' requirement, but signifying something only to those already familiar with the provincial ground.

Giacalone's piece was not the only one that informed the province's public about the matter. At least two other outlets followed suit the next day, including Marco Bova, whose longer piece, which appeared in *TP24* – a leading outlet in the province – as well as in a geographically wider outlet, *Malitalia*, included more details, spelled out more of the case's implications and suggested some 'preoccupying' dynamics. The 49-year-old notary 'boast[ed] a distinguished curriculum', which included public offices, judicial administrators and some key local magnates. Bova, working from the same news release of the Prosecutor's Office, mentioned that the notary explained his possession of the wiretap detector as a means 'to secure his professional confidentiality'. Bova's piece contextualized the notary's most recent brush with the law in an ongoing trial for tax embezzlement (we will return to that later), as well as in the investigation and trial of Michele Mazzara, a businessman from the province who was accused of false registration of assets' ownership. The original accusation included suspicion of favouring the mafia, which was later dropped in the conviction sentence (Bova 2016a, 2016b). Bova's description combined the three threads of events that, until that moment, seemed to share only their protagonist (Bova 2021: 224–27). But while the protagonist was, as everyone cared to mention, well known in the province, it remained unclear whether mentioning that fact was supposed to suggest that there was more to the story than what the pieces reported. Such a 'something more' could have taken the shape of further detail, interpretation or both. It could have emerged either as additional facts in any of the three threads (arrest for drugs, embezzlement and false registration of assets) or regarding the way to interpret the relationship between them. On social media, Giacalone shared Bova's own post about his *TP24* piece, and the next day lamented the general news outlet silence: 'in Gommopoli-News a solitary parrot counts more than a scoundrel who gave drugs to a kid.'¹⁴

About two weeks later, a chain of texts of a different kind appeared in various outlets in the province. Giacomo di Girolamo, the editor of *TP24*, who had achieved some national renown for a series of books on mafia-related matters, published a report-cum-reflection piece in the same outlet as Bova's (*Malitalia*) as well as on his blog, which updated his readers about the case's ramifications. Di Girolamo's piece, after a confession of his love for his craft and for the frequent and enthralling opportunities that his province provides him to pursue it, told his readers that the latest issue of a local print weekly, *Social*, had published an anonymous three-page piece written against two journalists – Giacalone and Bova – for their pieces on the notary's vicissitudes.

As with secrecy, of which it is a subspecies, anonymity too should be qualified in the case at hand. While no name appeared on the three-page piece in *Social*, the letter's text clarified that its author was Nino Marino. Di Girolamo

explained to his readers that even though the three-page piece was not signed, it was easy to see who had written it. First, because the author called the notary ‘my client’. Everyone knew, Di Girolamo explained, that the notary’s lawyer was Nino Marino, whose son also happened to be the director of the province’s only TV station. Second, Di Girolamo seemed almost gleeful to add, because of the piece’s style – typical of Marino as a signature in his view – which included ‘much rancour and prosopopoeia’. The original issue of *Social* was accessible either in paper form or behind a paywall, so most people heard about the development from pieces like Di Girolamo’s and those that followed.

In essence, Marino’s pseudo-anonymous letter accused the journalists Bova and Giacalone of misrepresenting what had happened to his client, who Marino claimed was an innocent victim of the relevant prosecutor’s doggedness and subterfuge. Marino described a series of inquisitions by law officers (on 4, 11 and 14 January) regarding minor drug possession, which – he deduced from the events – involved ongoing wiretaps of the notary. Since the drug possession did not amount to much, the thrust of the letter suggested, and denounced, persecution of his client (Marino 2016). Marino chose not to name Giacalone, and chose instead various mocking mispronunciations of his outlet, *Alqamah* (he did name Bova). He referred to his own past activity against the mafia (older than the 1982 law) and his decades-long acquaintance with the province’s criminal chronicles – all in coded terms and allusive temporal markers. Marino was not just any penal lawyer. Like various other veteran lawyers, he boasted friendship with important figures like judges Giovanni Falcone and Giangiacomo Ciaccio Montalto and sociologist-journalist Mauro Rostagno, all murdered by mafiosi. In addition, he had been a leading member of the provincial federation of the PCI – the Italian Communist Party – and involved in some of the federation’s most significant attempts to collect, analyse and spread information about the relationship between mafia, politics and the local economy in the 1980s (Marino 2006). It is this role in the town and the province’s past fight against the mafia that provided him with credit that his counterparts needed to acknowledge.

Draped in the cloak of his erstwhile anti-mafia exploits, Marino thus went after two of the journalists who wrote about his client. ‘What’s at stake here is not the right to critique or the freedom of speech of those who don’t think like you. Here the issue is the idea of a newspaper not as a space of reflection, analysis and the production of meaning, but as a washtub of interests, a paid *dazibao* for settling accounts’ (Di Girolamo 2016a, 2016b). The predicament of the notary and that of his partner seemed to drift into the background of the intra-journalistic acrimony. At a certain point, Di Girolamo’s text almost addressed Marino directly, asking why he had not contacted

either outlet to request an interview for his client. Di Girolamo said he did not know the notary. He and the notary's partner shared a common friend, as well as membership of 'a certain milieu in Marsala'. In a personal tone, he added, 'If Rino or Marco made a mistake, which can happen, there are a thousand ways to clarify, incorporate, retort. We're here for that.' The main reason for the pseudo-anonymous note would have been 'to transmit once more an image (of the Trapanese) as a land where turbid things happen, and where those who write have to beware not only of the anonymous letters that arrive in the mail but also of those pseudo-anonymous letters that circulate in the newspapers.'

Days later, the Trapani branch of the Sicilian Press Association (AssoStampa), the unitary labour union of journalists in Sicily, issued a statement against what they labelled a "direct and libelous attack" against Giacalone and Bova' and called the Order of Journalists – the national professional association – to intervene. The statement, signed by the Trapani branch's secretary, Giovanni Ingoglia, described 'a long downward drift' that 'characterized and crushed' journalism in Trapani and its province, ending most recently with the notary's case. An earlier event involved accusations against Trapani's ex-bishop, after which 'more opinion battles among colleagues appeared in the press' than reporting of 'the essence of the severity of the facts for the readers' (Ingoglia 2016). Later, in May 2015 (seven months before the notary's case), the lunchtime news hour of *TeleSud* picked up an earlier nameless reference in *Il Giornale di Sicilia*, and explicitly alleged that Rino Giacalone was – so claimed both a reporter and the TV station's president (the son of the lawyer Marino) – under investigation for attempted extortion and peddling influence (*millantato credito*). *TeleSud* accused Giacalone of attempting to extort a local industrialist by telling him that he could get him off the hook in an investigation against him (they lost in Giacalone's two libel suits – civil and penal – against them in 2019).

Yet these two events had happened months before the imminent trigger for AssoStampa's statement. Recounting the facts of the notary's case, Ingoglia echoed earlier judgements of Marino's letter (which he called 'very long [lunghissimo]'). Marino's anonymous letter included, apart from a clarification of his client's legal situation, 'a very harsh attack against the two journalists . . . who wrote about the event on the basis of the Prosecutor's Office's news release.' If Marino had wanted to clarify his client's position, 'he could have used the tools that the Press Law provides' (Ingoglia 2016). Both *TP24* and the main local site for Giacalone's articles, *Alqamah*, published AssoStampa's statement (Redazione *TP24* 2016; Redazione *Alqamah* 2016), the former followed by a retort from one of the interested parties in the earlier, pre-2015 event, already published in another local outlet, *Trapani Oggi* (Mazzara 2016).

Some of the other outlets in the region, including clearly partisan ones like *Libera Informazione*, tried to explain the situation in depth by articulating the connections to investigations by the Trapani Prosecutor's Office into relationships between the province's hegemonic politician, senator and once deputy minister of the interior Antonio D'Alì and several leading members of the provincial mafia (Frigerio 2016); investigations informed a trial that ended up in a definite guilty sentence by the Court of Cassazione only in December 2022. Yet these reconstructions retold these details as suggested context, not as elements in the facts of the immediate story. As such, they could be and were easily interpreted along the same fault lines. Some saw such mentions as necessary pieces in a mosaic that was only temporarily still hidden. Others saw the same mentions as conspiratorial doggedness, which only served to mark those mentioning them (like *Libera Informazione*) as aligned against them. All along, both sides gladly claimed to be fighting the mafia, and just as gladly accused their adversaries of not really being anti-mafia.

THE NOTARY

Via XXX Gennaio (30 January St.), which commemorates the arrival of anti-Bourbon revolutionary fervour in Trapani in 1848, stretches almost the width of the old town of Trapani. The street passes today where a canal once connected the tramontane coast to the north and the port to the south, a canal that separated the walled old town to its west from its agricultural lands – now modern Trapani – and the rest of the island of Sicily. Nowadays, the Police Headquarters is located on the northern end of the street (together with the Prefecture) and the Courthouse (which includes the Prosecutor's Office) is located on the street's southern end. Right in the middle stands a bar, which is called 'the bar in the middle ('Il bar nel mezzo'), and while the name could also designate the geographical midpoint between that part of town's two shorelines, its patrons – many of whom are journalists and magistrates – underline institutional geography in their exegeses.

In late March, when Giovanni Ingoglia and I met for one of our regular café sessions at the bar, he told me that the Ordine dei Giornalisti was about to come for a hearing. This was already a month and a half after his request as secretary of AssoStampa Sicilia. In those days, I was spending my time scanning the document folders of the murder trial of the notary Craparotta, in 1957. I was studying that trial for two reasons. First, it was one of the criminal cases that Giovanni Falcone dealt with in the province before moving to Palermo (Mugno 2014: 74–88). Second, Giovanni Ingoglia and his friend the lawyer Nino Marino had told me a couple of years earlier about that

trial as an important case to understand dynamics in the province from the 1950s. Notaries played a key role in the post-war agrarian reforms, as they had in earlier moments of political economic change and its related power realignments between landed elites, professionals and mafiosi (Riall 2003: 37). Their intimate knowledge and involvement in economic transactions make them ideal figures for interweaving the politico-legal and sociocultural perspectives on mafia-related things (Fiume 1996: 763–64).

That day, while I was scanning files, I saw that Marino had been the defence lawyer for one of the defendants in the 1969 trial, in which Falcone was the prosecutor who had reopened the case. After telling Giovanni Ingoglia about it at the bar, I asked him for news from Nino Marino. In response, he told me that they had argued regarding Marino's *Social* piece. He recounted the chain of events and told me he imagined that the Ordine dei Giornalisti would suspend the director of *Social* and reprimand all parties for their acrimonious correspondence. In this, Ingoglia was working to position himself as arbiter and mediator, both regarding the specific case and in general. He too was known in town and province for his erstwhile investigative journalistic writing on the mafia and its relationship to local politics and economy, often in collaboration with PCI politicians like Nino Marino, mostly in the PCI newspaper, *L'Unità*, and in the Sicilian paper most identified with anti-mafia writing, *L'Ora* (for example, Ingoglia 1980, 1984). After one of my questions regarding whom I should speak to, he repeated a sentence he had told me several times before: 'You have to talk to everyone!'¹⁵

A couple of days later, I was talking to a journalist I knew from another town in the province who was sitting in a café with a friend, who herself seemed to know the intricacies of the notary's case. The journalist was asking me how my work was going. I replied, telling them about the 1957 Notary Craparotta case that I was reading. In the middle of the agrarian reform of those years, so goes one of the explanations of the murder, mafiosi in the area were trying to figure out whom to kill to make sure that precious land (which had been unmoored by the reform) would remain under their control. The journalist then turned to the friend and said: 'Now they turn notaries into drug addicts.' I added, without thinking much (or enough) about it: 'yes, through their Marsalese girlfriends.' In retrospect, I realize I had assumed my journalist friend was comparing killing with drugging as mafiosi's strategies regarding nodal notaries such as Craparotta in 1957 and the Trapanese notary and his companion, whose ongoing vicissitudes were on everyone's lips. The journalist replied, and seemed to reprimand me, telling me that I should 'keep it in the code'. I was not quick enough to react to her, and managed to reflect about that moment only later. I did not know the friend, so I could not say the same for her, but the journalist was definitely

considered part of the ‘true anti-mafia’ from Gialalone’s description. The journalist knew that I was in regular contact with Giovanni Ingoglia, and that I had spoken in the past with Nino Marino as well. The demand to ‘keep it in the code’ framed the drug arrest in a concrete context of mafia-related investigation, of which it seemed in retrospect that they were both aware. Since they had not told me anything about that wider mafia context previously, my mention of it might have made them suspect that I had heard the same level of detail about the story – and if not from them, then from Nino Marino, either directly or through Giovanni Ingoglia (they did not know that the two had argued). Either way, what my blunder clarified was that the ‘something more’ involved the relationship between the drug arrest story and the mafia-related threads in the context.

BOVA’S PREDICAMENT

The notary’s vicissitudes left the pages of the local news outlets quickly thereafter. About a month after the first news about the drug arrest, in February 2016, Rino Gialalone published a piece following the end of the notary’s tax embezzlement trial, for which the latter was found guilty (Gialalone 2016b). Gialalone referred to some of the January drug arrest details, which now belonged only to the context of the notary’s conviction. In March, the entire affair was generally dropped, and all that remained was the fight among the involved journalists, which occupied ever diminishing space in the various outlets, and then became subsumed by other threads of the same acrimonious alignment.

Marco Bova was working on a book about the failed attempts to arrest Italy’s number one most wanted and the suspected leading figure of the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, Matteo Messina Denaro (a native of the Trapanese town of Castelvetro), for about a year or so until the book’s publication in late autumn of 2021 (Bova 2021). He had been covering various penal affairs for around a decade at that point, first mostly around Trapani and later also in Palermo and throughout the Sicilian capital’s territorial jurisdiction, for local outlets as well as national newspapers like *La Repubblica* and *Il Fatto Quotidiano*. While the book traced various aspects and periods in the chain of failed attempts to capture the mafia boss, the book’s last chapter, ‘I Veleni di Trapani’, focused on Trapani and the poisons (‘veleni’) that permeated its court. We had been in regular contact already for a couple of years at that point and had discussed our understandings regarding various events from that period. When I read the part of the chapter that dealt with Di Natale’s partner’s drug arrest, I recalled, and recounted to him, my March 2016 café conversation with the journalist and her friend.

I asked him to recount to me how he had come to learn what ended up in that chapter of his book. He told me he had heard about the notary during the trial of the entrepreneur Michele Mazzara, which he followed for *TP24*, ending up writing several chronicle pieces as well as a long, four-installment background article. The notary's name emerged as managing ownership operations that were investigated in two anti-mafia operations of the early 2010s: Halloween and Eden, both directed against people suspected of helping Matteo Messina Denaro manage his assets and hide (of which the notary himself was not accused). In early 2014, the notary was investigated (his office was searched), both following some suspected anomalies in the operations regarding one of the province's major companies and, separately, regarding a drug distribution network of which the notary was a client.

A year into the investigations, in July of 2015, the investigators discovered from a wiretap that the notary and his partner were aware of them. The prosecutor in charge then moved that part of the case to the responsibility of the Forestale, in an attempt to avoid further leaks from their operation. Michele Mazzara's trial was going on at the time in court, and during one of the sessions, in March 2015, one of the persons who served as fronts for the entrepreneur said that it was the latter who had pointed the notary to him (together with other names) and who 'perhaps participated in one of the [business] meetings'.¹⁶ These three elements – the suspicion that the notary was aware of being wiretapped, his involvement in the creation of front persons for Mazzara and the extraordinary role of the Forestale – appeared already in Bova's piece immediately after the mid-January 2016 arrest. But, as Bova himself commented in that piece, at the time they seemed only 'a series of very worrying investigative elements'.¹⁷

In retrospect, the thing that the investigators knew already in mid-January 2016, and that Bova told me he had discovered only when he was collecting material for the book a couple of years later, coloured the entire chain of events in the most significant way. A couple of days after Christmas 2015 – eight days before the first perquisition in the notary's office, which Marino recounted – the notary was intercepted saying that he arranged twice the selling of an apartment in which 'it's certain that Matteo Messina Denaro was staying'.¹⁸ For Bova, this information connected what he had known and written about the notary's previous relations to Michele Mazzara with the events that followed that Christmas – the three searches in the notary's home, office and parents' house, as well as the journalistic clash. That he and other journalists had heard about it only later is suggested by the fact that neither Bova nor anyone else writing about the notary's vicissitudes mentioned anywhere the name of the wanted mafia boss. Two of the anti-mafia operations that involved Michele Mazzara – Halloween and Eden – were directed against the boss's collaborators. In other cases where some

relationship to the boss's hiding is suspected, his name is mentioned in the context, and often in the title, even if the facts of the case do not directly involve him.¹⁹

Marco Bova's book came out late in 2021. Most of the threats of libel suits, legal letters to the press that published his book and negotiations regarding demands to change what he had written focus on the chapter involving Trapani and, particularly, the sections involving the notary. Since the summer of 2022, every town in Italy where Marco Bova goes to present his book welcomes him with a piece in one of the local outlets that accuses him of false declarations in the original version of his book, which was changed following a settlement between his publishing house and the people who brought forth that accusation. Since the currently printed versions of the book no longer contain any of this specific bone of contention, it seems to me at least that the chain of local publications is intended to discredit him more generally, not to mention revenge.

CONCLUSION

The events that this chapter has recounted continue to this day, moving between the various traces that we mentioned and others, which for brevity were left out. The notary himself was never prosecuted for anything other than his embezzlement charge. I am certain that if ever officially charged, the notary and his partner would be able to demonstrate their absolute lack of culpability (Palumbo 2013: 147). If I chose to focus this piece on speech in Gommopoli, I did so to outline the mediatic ramifications of the 'sociologically relevant fact' that what is legally describable as partaking in the criminal organization Cosa Nostra, and can therefore be spoken of by journalists and other writers, forms only a part of what those writers know, suspect, consider or construct as mafia-related words, things and people.

It goes without saying that the boundary between those dimensions of the mafia that are criminalized and those that are not can and often does shift. That which was not criminalizable in any practical sense before 1982 became gradually incriminated ever since. Indeed, many accounts of the mafia and anti-mafia begin with a pre-legal battle and show how the Italian criminal justice system assumed it. Yet the arc of such plots of successful criminalization of mafiosi suggests that justice lies in the promise of closing the gap between the social and legal views of the mafia. This is improbable, if we recall the words of Sally Falk Moore (1978: 1), 'that the same social processes that prevent the total regulation of a society also reshape and transform efforts at partial regulation'. Investigative journalists, in any case, operate in that gap, which appears to them as a stable condition of their

practice, as long as they wish to inquire into and write things that have yet to be legally processed.

In their predicament, which they share with anti-mafia agricultural cooperatives (Rakopoulos 2018a), journalists must engage in encounters across the boundaries of mafia and anti-mafia. Cooperatives seek to build a wall to constitute their enclaves of legality and mutuality. Journalists similarly seek to safeguard the bounds of secrecy regarding some of what they know but cannot or would not share with their readers; these are bounds that, as we have seen, shape wider aspects of their social relations. At the same time, journalists seek to partake in publics beyond such epistemic enclaves – to write for the same audiences that they share with the persons ‘beyond suspicion’ whom they accuse – only to have their attempts bounce back at them, as from a rubber wall. It would be tempting to extend the comparison and see such a wall as separating two publics – of mafia and anti-mafia. Yet such a division of publics based on conflict runs into some problems (Fraser 1990: 61–62). First, from Bova’s perspective and from Giacalone’s, some of their counterparts claim to be anti-mafia themselves. Second, both parties see themselves as the counter-public, while they mostly share with each other ‘the speech genres and modes of address that constitute the public’ (Warner 2002: 86). Perhaps what the rubber wall seems to divide is two apparent counter-publics within one shared public: where some people read – quite carefully – their counterparts’ accusations and do their best to ignore or make them bounce back. Consequently, limiting our concept of the public to those people who care to hear successful (if partial) revelations such as Giacalone’s and Bova’s reduces discursive circulation to shared ideology. In other words, it causes publics to resemble communities.

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NOTES

1. ‘Tutti hanno diritto di manifestare liberamente il proprio pensiero con la parola, lo scritto e ogni altro mezzo di diffusione. La stampa non può essere soggetta ad autorizzazioni o censure . . . La legge può stabilire, con norme di carattere generale, che siano resi noti i mezzi di finanziamento della stampa periodica.’
2. ‘A Trapani il tempo sembra essersi fermato, e la Cinisi di Impastato è tornata a

rivivere a Trapani, “Gommopoli” dove tutto rimbalza e sparisce. A Gommopoli non ci sono riflettori accesi. I sindaci dicono che Matteo Messina Denaro non è il primo dei problemi, per il potente *deus ex machina* della città, il senatore D’Alì, non è un mafioso ma un mascalzone, malandrini e non mafiosi per il sindaco Damiano. In provincia di Gommopoli sono i giornalisti che sporcano le immagini delle città e a loro i sindaci chiedono i danni, ma questo è colpa anche di altri giornalisti che preferiscono girare la faccia dall’altra parte, che raccontano i processi come vogliono gli avvocati difensor.’

3. I thank Theo Rakopoulos for suggesting this direction.
4. ‘Conosciamo i volti dei mafiosi trapanesi, vecchi e nuovi, come conosciamo i nomi di chi li ha combattuti e li combatte.’
5. ‘Oggi la mafia di Matteo Messina Denaro è fatta anche da insospettabili, persone apparentemente al di sopra di ogni sospetto, che si muovono tra la politica e l’economia, e hanno fatto tanta campagna elettorale . . . A Trapani c’è la mafia fatta da colletti bianchi e professionisti che parlano di Messina.’
6. ‘Conosciamo i visi dell’antimafia vera, e che per questo ogni tanto qualcuno cerca di “mascariare”, sporcare . . . Vorremmo, vogliamo, conoscere i volti di chi in questi lunghi anni ha trattato con la mafia, ogni giorno, giorno per giorno, per le grandi cose e per le piccole cose.’
7. What follows remains, as I have mostly, nearer one of these publics.
8. ‘Gommopoli . . . e quella informazione che funziona col filtro del topo’, Facebook, 14 January 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/rino.giacalone1/posts/pfbid037m2e6AFoEVrYsJth84dJ56yKkUMtxsby2mfgigTidTqi5wfN4SpebuLd9u3rJfNol> (retrieved 24 January 2024).
9. Ninni Ravazza: ‘Rino . . . ma la vogliamo finire con i messaggi subliminali e diciamo pane al pane se ne siamo a conoscenza? I messaggi lanciati “a chi vuol capire” non sono messaggi . . . somigliano ad avvertimenti piuttosto. Se hai qualcosa da propagandare . . . nomi cognomi e fatti . . . per onestà intellettuale e per fare capire a tutti cosa vuoi dire.’
10. Barbara Meyer: ‘Ma tu hei [*sic*] sempre il coraggio di dire pane al pane? Non ci credo . . . non a Trapani.’
11. Ninni Ravazza: ‘No . . . infatti dopo che mi hanno fatto saltare la casa ho smesso di fare il giornalista. Ora me ne vado a mare e non lancio messaggi cifrati.’
12. Rino Giacalone: ‘Per nomi, cognomi e fatti puoi leggere se vuoi i miei articoli, se ne hai voglia, quella è la casa giusta dove raccontare nomi e fatti, su fb c’è [*sic*] solo il paese immaginario di Gommopoli e i fatti si possono raccontare solo così . . . gli avvertimenti che tu hai mal intravisto non sono cosa mia . . .’
13. Rino Giacalone: ‘Pensa che a me capita la stessa cosa talvolta . . . ma leggendo articoli di giornale!’
14. ‘A Gommopolinews un pappagallo segregato conta di più di una sciagurata che dava droga ad un ragazzino’, Facebook, 16 January 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/rino.giacalone1/posts/pfbid02Cx2G88hm7UP3wBVVc1aTc4bRvhUYdRfYrMwYhUfazaZd1F7yrCA5Wtzmxyxdedaowl> (retrieved 13 December 2023).
15. And true to this, he had originally introduced me to Nino Marino as well as to Rino Giacalone, clear adversaries, among various others.
16. Tribunale di Trapani, trial of Michele Mazzara + 2, hearing of 19 March 2015; quoted by Bova (2021: 227–28).
17. ‘Una sequela di elementi investigativi parecchio preoccupanti’ (Bova 2016b).

18. 'La casa dove Matteo Messina Denaro è certo che è stato ospitato due volte, l'ho venduta due volte quella casa' (Bova 2021: 233, 321n. 45–46).
19. For example, 'Castelvetro, in the Town of Messina Denaro the City Council Auto-Dissolves' and 'Arrests for Freemasonry and Crime in the Town of Matteo Messina Denaro' (respectively *RaiNews* 2019; *La Repubblica* Correspondent 2016).

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PART IV

HERITAGE



CHAPTER 12

JOYOUS POST-POLITICS

Street Art and the Pursuit of Consensus after the Morandi Bridge Collapse

Emanuela Guano



INTRODUCTION

On 14 August 2018, a section of the Morandi highway bridge crumbled, killing forty-three people and causing six hundred residents to lose their homes in one of Genoa's postindustrial outskirts. Almost entirely isolated by the collapse, Certosa bore much of the brunt.¹ Initially, Certosini grieved the loss of lives and property; soon enough, however, they also found themselves struggling with other challenges: the noise and the pollution caused by the demolition, the neighbourhood's inaccessibility and its rapid decline.² On the municipality's website, recently elected Marco Bucci – the first conservative mayor since 1975 – seized the opportunity to lash out at previous left-of-centre administrations and their alliance with Genoa's industrialists: 'The tragedy of the Morandi [bridge] has highlighted the precariousness of life in the . . . Valpolcevera, which in the past [was] affected by a senseless industrialization only to be abandoned by those very same industries that had colonized its territory, distorting its urbanistic layout' (Comune di Genova n.d.). Widely advertising each of his initiatives, he secured reimbursements for those residents who had been expropriated from their homes and promised to rebuild the bridge at record speed.³ Most importantly for the purposes of this chapter, during the summer of 2019 Bucci's team also inaugurated the 'On the Wall' project, which led to the creation of murals on Certosa's walls by artists of national and international renown. The theme of the project was 'Joy'.



Figure 12.1. Certosa's Cupid and Psyche. © Emanuela Guano.

Whether they display the ornate accoutrements of power or the humbler graffiti that challenge it, the walls of Italian cities have long been a public sphere in their own right. Yet at times the images populating Italy's urban public realm may subvert implicit norms. Magnus Course (this volume) shows how some of the Catholic saints painted on Naples's façades eschew religious concerns to advocate for the oppressed; along these lines, I suggest that the traditionally resistive genre of murals can become a tool in the attempt to feign revitalization and anesthetize political consciousness. Certosa's street art, I argue, is a case in point.

Interpreted with considerable license, the 'joy' painted on Certosa's walls has the semblance of a large reproduction of Antonio Canova's statue of Cupid and Psyche. 'This is SITE SPECIFIC', screams the lettering.



Figure 12.2. Free to get lost. © Emanuela Guano.

The murals' joy also looks like an oversize couple eloping in a tiny convertible, featuring the caption 'FREE TO GET LOST', a large vertical tag; and a realistic portrait of film character Fantozzi, played by Genoese actor Paolo Villaggio. Painted on opposite buildings, two gigantic children communicate through tin cans connected by power cables; stylized statues,

rosettes and large windows in red and blue provide a flat geometrical version of a Renaissance façade. In December 2019, I took a sightseeing trip to the Certosa murals under the guidance of Anna Rita, a former resident. Like many other Certosini, Anna Rita too had her home expropriated after the disaster. Braving the cold wind and the rain, Anna Rita and I proceeded from mural to mural till we reached the end of a narrow side street; there, framed by two rows of painted walls, the terrace at the end of the cul-de-sac opened like theatre stalls onto the view of the new bridge under construction. If the cul-de-sac provided the ideal location from which to observe Mayor Bucci's flagship project, the murals on either side of the street framed the viewer's gaze, forcing it to rest on the bridge's construction site. I gasped in surprise: 'This is a gigantic commercial for Mayor Bucci!', I blurted out. Anna Rita nodded and burst into laughter; 'yes, it is', she replied.

Drawing on ethnographic research conducted between 2019 and 2022,⁴ this chapter explores the post-political underpinnings of Certosa's street art. These murals, I suggest, are an attempt to enact a type of aesthetic governance (Grama 2019; Slaby and Bens 2019) that seeks to foreclose political antagonism; it does so, I surmise, through a distribution of the sensible (Rancière 2010: 24–25), striving to shape the residents' sensuous, affective and cognitive experience of their neighbourhood. Certosa's murals are but a sham covering a neglect that continues unabated; as such, they fail to sway an aesthetic community organized around the sensuous and affective perception of its own disenfranchisement. Rather than promoting an allegiance between Genoa's conservative administration and Certosini, the attempt to use street art to negate Certosa's predicament and placate its residents' anger fails to disavow their memory of the disaster and its roots in long-standing class inequalities. As murals sponsored by the municipality continue to celebrate a tone-deaf 'joy', residents are increasingly questioning the effectiveness of Certosa's post-political street art in ameliorating a ruined neighbourhood.

URBAN SPECTACLE AND THE PURSUIT OF CONSENSUS

Post-politics is characterized by a managerial approach to government that, tailored to market requirements, is devoid of a proper (i.e. antagonistic) political dimension (Wilson and Swyngedouw 2014; Mouffe 2005; Swyngedouw 2018; Žižek 2002). Yet proper politics, in Genoa, has lost much of its appeal. Since 1975, Genoese voters have consistently elected mayors from the centre-left of Italy's political spectrum; however, the city's low-income peripheries have rarely benefitted from an increasingly neoliberalized left that has cozied up to developers and corporate capital (Guano



Figure 12.3. Joy. © Emanuela Guano.

2020). The disappointment was such that, in 2017, voters from several of Genoa's postindustrial peripheries (though not Certosa) aligned with the city's conservative bourgeoisie in electing right-wing mayoral candidate Marco Bucci. Bucci is a member of Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia, and his administrative style echoed Berlusconi's habit of turning politics into 'glossy

and sound-bitable nuggets' (Molé Liston 2020: 144); his use of disasters to showcase his own effectiveness (Bock 2022: 44); and his technocratic appreciation for experts (Mudde 2004).

It is by relying on the kind of technocratic expertise that claims to be above politics that Bucci vowed to have the Morandi bridge rebuilt in two years – and so he did, inaugurating the new San Giorgio bridge on 3 August 2020. The rapidity with which the crumbling bridge was demolished and the new one was erected earned Bucci's managerial style the sobriquet of *modello Genova*, the Genoa model. Casting him as an exception in a country where bureaucracies are known to stifle even the most essential projects, the local media drew on Bucci's professional experience in the US to dub him *sindaco americano*: a mayor whose 'Americanness' denoted corporate efficiency and a disregard for Italy's administrative tardiness. Yet Bucci was not just adept at implementing a technocratic style; following Berlusconi's example, he also excelled at modulating political affect through spectacle and theatrics (Ginsborg 2004; Piccardo 2020). Consistent with populism and its appeal to gut feelings (Mudde 2004; Heywood, Liston, Cammelli, this volume), his goal was to establish an affective allegiance between Genoa's administration and the residents of the city's low-income neighbourhoods. The space of the city provided him with an ideal stage for this strategy.

Space, as Lefebvre (1991: 32) suggested, is 'a locus, a medium, and a tool' for the generation of consensus; the power to shape a cityscape can establish 'certain relationships between people in particular places' (ibid.: 56). More specifically, spatial arrangements of urban materialities reappropriate the sensible by assigning what is to be sensed to where it is to be sensed (Rancière 2010: 24–25). Hence, the type of aesthetic experience that this chapter tackles is not – or not just – an abstract contemplation of beauty and art, but rather a process of organizing and perceiving reality that engages the physical senses to mobilize both affective and cognitive processes (Larkin 2013; Stoller 1976; Welsch 1998). If sensing is equivalent to making sense (Howes 2015), exercising control over what is 'available to the senses when making judgements' (Dikeç 2015: 30) means being able to intervene on somebody's perception and conceptualization of the world, as well as of their place in it (Slaby and Von Scheve 2019: 349). The goal of this potentially stultifying process may be the establishment of a passive spectatorship keen to accept whatever is impressed upon its senses (Rancière 2009: 12; see also Debord 1994). Along these lines, in what follows I argue that, for Mayor Bucci, the collapse of the Morandi bridge and its reconstruction presented the opportunity for an aestheticization of the built environment meant to foster consensus.

Disaster sites often become stages for a political theatricality that, in turn, is a tool for the modulation of affect (Dickie and Foot 2002: 12; Massumi

2002: 226); the grand inaugurations of infrastructures, too, are frequently shrouded in propaganda (Coleman 2014; Larkin 2013). The demolition of the Morandi bridge remnants provided a preliminary glimpse into not just the local, but also the national administration's taste for spectacle. Following an intense media campaign, on 28 June 2019 the remainder of the Morandi bridge was exploded in front of television and online audiences. Attended by local and national party and government representatives, the spectacular event was labelled a *demolizione controllata*: a controlled demolition through which politicians and technocrats would stage their attempt to regain control over a situation that had compromised their credibility.⁵ The subsequent inauguration of the new San Giorgio bridge in 2020 was initially expected to be a glitzy event replete with celebrities and fanfare. Yet the promise of pomp failed to impress neighbourhood residents, and it also offended the families of the victims; eventually, the Italian government agreed to tone down the celebrations. The plans for the event were scaled down; however, the new bridge would still be lit with the Italian flag as politicians crossed it to the tune of a symphony. In the meantime, the *frecce tricolori* air force jets would draw the Italian flag in the sky. By parading patriotism, the event sought to offer redemption to the very same political class that, colluding with the Autostrade per l'Italia corporation managing Italy's highways, had allowed the Morandi bridge to deteriorate and collapse in the first place.

Amid the strife over the inauguration, Bucci's focus remained firmly on his constituency: the Genoese who had elected him, and those who had not but whom he may eventually win over. His goal was also to promote the *modello Genova* both locally and internationally. In his own words, '[the building of the new bridge] has been an opportunity to end up on the international radar screen that we need to utilize, because it gives the city visibility' (in Barbieri 2019: 118). In line with his attempt to appeal to local and global publics, Bucci awarded the commission for the design of the new bridge to Renzo Piano, a Genoese architect of international renown whose oratory skills tug at the hearts of his audiences (Guano 2019).⁶ At the time of writing in 2022, Bucci's plans for the area of the disaster also entail the creation of a memorial park (Parco del Polcevera) that, located in the area of the collapse, will commemorate the victims even as it revitalizes this postindustrial area.⁷ As the municipality's website claims, 'it is mandatory to pay new attention to the valley; beauty and art are a compensation that is symbolic aside from urbanistic' (Comune di Genova n.d.). This notion is likely to resonate with Genoese publics, in that it is through 'beauty and art' that, at the end of the twentieth century, rapidly declining postindustrial Genoa was transformed into a destination of cultural tourism (Guano 2017). Yet only this city's bourgeois downtown benefitted from this process; precious

little change took place in its low-income peripheries. The ‘beauty and art’ that Genoa’s municipality is now promising as the tool of Certosa’s revitalization entail the creation of murals on the walls of several of its apartment complexes. Until the collapse, however, beauty and art had hardly been a consideration in how Genoese administrations managed this area.

CERTOSA’S RUINATION

Stemming from an imperial ‘refusal to take notice’ (Stoler 2009: 256), ruination is a ‘corrosive process’ that originates in the predatory practices of capitalism (Stoler 2008: 194). Capitalism reduces workers’ needs ‘to the paltriest minimum necessary to maintain [their] physical existence’ (Marx 1975: 360 in Eagleton 1990: 200); it does so, I suggest, by establishing a ‘distribution of the sensible’ (Rancière 2010: 24–25) whereby what is to be sensed in workers’ neighbourhoods is exclusively industrial utilitarianism. Workers, in this perceptual economy, are only entitled to a “bare life” of servility’ (Holston 2009: 246) whereby their needs for safety and essential services are subordinated to the requirements of capital accumulation. During the industrial era, working-class outskirts in much of Europe had to accommodate cheap housing, support the productive process and enable the mobilization of goods even as they hosted cumbersome infrastructures. This distribution of the sensible assigned sensuous pleasures to wealthy neighbourhoods while dispensing utilitarian rationality – and little comfort – to working-class areas (Lefebvre and Enders 1978). By the end of the twentieth century, even the mild improvements in the living conditions of Western working classes began to be eroded by a deindustrialization and a deregulation that, once again, favoured the wealthy over the poor (Harvey 2007); these processes exacerbated urban inequalities, fostering a simmering resentment that occasionally erupts into anger (Holston 2009; Dikeç 2017).

This worsening of living conditions has been Certosa’s fate, too. In the twentieth century, while Genoa’s bourgeois downtown and its genteel eastern seaside neighbourhoods enjoyed an abundance of amenities as well as the beauty of carefully staged built and natural environments, its peripheries to the north and the west of the city were subjected to the utilitarian urbanism of industrialization – one that juxtaposed a proliferation of factories, infrastructures and low-income housing with a dearth of services such as schools and clinics. As an ancient village that had developed around a Carthusian monastery, in 1926 Certosa was incorporated into Genoa’s industrial outskirts. For much of the industrial era, Certosa and the surrounding Valpolcevera valley hosted factories and workers’ homes. Polluted, congested and devoid of basic services, Certosa was reduced to a state of infrastructural

servitude vis-à-vis the city as it was forced to host, among other things, two toxic waste dumps, a busy railway junction and a waste recycling facility. In the 1960s, the construction of the Morandi highway bridge right at the border between Certosa and Sampierdarena added an additional strain. The bridge was a cumbersome presence hovering above – and in some cases leaning upon – Via Porro's low-income housing; it brought noise and pollution directly into people's homes, occasionally releasing vehicular debris on the streets beneath it. When Italy's highway system was privatized in 1999, the maintenance work on the bridge was drastically reduced. By the early 2000s, this infrastructure began showing a deterioration caused by the increased transit and the action of the elements. The intimacy that residents had developed with the bridge ended abruptly when, on the morning of 14 August 2018, a segment of the Morandi bridge collapsed, killing forty-three motorists and causing six hundred residents to lose their homes. Even though none of the victims were from Certosa, residents grieved at the sight of the bodies being retrieved from the rubble. Shock waves rattled the city and the country, but it was in Certosa that the magnitude of the disaster was to be felt for some time to come.

For days, those who had lost their homes to the wobbly remnant of the bridge waited in the street for a brief chance to go back to their apartments and collect a few essential things. Eventually, some of them received housing from the municipality; others, instead, obtained a lump sum and bought new homes. Several apartment complexes were demolished; as they vanished, they took with them the belongings and the memories of those who had lived there. A few of the evacuees were allowed to return to their apartments; however, soon enough they came to regret what they had regarded as their good fortune. For the following two years, these residents had to put up with the fine dust and the asbestos released by the demolition of the Morandi bridge, as well as the traffic and the noise caused by the new construction site. Shortly after the inauguration, a spray-painted white sheet appeared in the middle of the neighbourhood. Hanging from a local overpass, it screamed 'MA QUALE MODELLO GENOVA? LA STRAGE È DI STATO' – 'Forget about the Genoa model. This is a state massacre.' This resentment had been long brewing. As many of my informants kept reminding me, it was under the state's watch that the Autostrade corporation had been skimping on the bridge's maintenance, thus causing the collapse. Knowing that, upon resigning, the Autostrade CEO had received a golden parachute exacerbated the collective upset. 'Three days after the disaster I was still waiting in the street for a chance to get back into my home and a black car came by. It was the Autostrade CEO! People had died and we had lost our homes, but there he was, sitting in his nice car. I recognized him and started yelling "MURDERER!"' These were the words of a 60-year-old

educator, a mild-mannered woman whose surprisingly explosive anger epitomized a common sentiment in Certosa and beyond.

FROM POLITICS TO ANAESTHETICS

In the twentieth century, murals often channelled grievances about social inequities; gracing mostly the walls of low-income neighbourhoods, they generally expressed the dissent of the subaltern (Ortiz-Loyola and Díaz-Garayúa 2019; Sieber, Cordeiro and Ferro 2012). However, in the twenty-first century the emergence of a global visitability economy (Dicks 2004) brought about a profound transformation in the role of murals. As a cheap strategy meant to inscribe an enjoyable 'streetness' into low-income and often blighted neighbourhoods (Andron 2018; see also Evans 2016), street art has become yet another way of shaping urban ambiances meant to attract young, creative and above all moneyed publics (Campos and Barbio 2021; Guinard and Margier 2017; Pavoni 2019; Salomone 2018; Schacter 2014). This kind of street art is frequently characterized by its failure to assimilate with its contexts (Pavoni 2019: 72). The disconnect is evident in Certosa, too: instead of being volunteered by local artists who know the neighbourhood, its murals came into being through a collaboration between Genoa's administration and an NGO that was overseeing the beautification of the highway pillars in the city's revitalized waterfront.⁸ Mayor Bucci's Cultural Manager, a film-maker by trade, invited this NGO to expand its street art project to Certosa.

In line with neoliberal tenets on government spending, the project was to be sponsored by local businesses and, whenever possible, supported by volunteer work: 'the murals did not cost us a penny', the Cultural Manager proudly informed me during our interview. He then added that, in deciding that the theme of the murals was to be 'Joy', his intention was to avoid any political entanglement. 'Even though this *is* a political operation, I didn't want any political provocation. Usually murals are critical, at times even violent, and they always have a social message; nobody ever thinks of working with positive elements', he told me. Hinting at the kind of aesthetic control over urban space that is seemingly required in the interest of social order (Molnár 2017: 386), he also added that his intention was 'to impart a positive impetus to the neighbourhood'. Yet the Cultural Manager worried about the residents' possible reactions to an intervention in what he defined as a 'blighted and highly sensitive area'. After all, he informed me, in neighbouring Sampierdarena 'a television crew and a group of politicians were recently pelted with stones'. This concern steered the administration towards a top-down use of street art as a traditionally resistive artistic genre. Once stripped

of its resistive potential, the ‘On the Wall’ mural project would use ‘Joy’ to harness local affective energies and soothe the community’s anger. First the Cultural Manager enacted what he defined as a ‘capillary intervention’ meant to inform the citizenry. This entailed putting flyers in residents’ mailboxes and approaching local priests, administrators and small business owners’ associations; the NGO also posted announcements on Facebook to discuss the project in its semi-public forums. The next step was to obtain approval from the residents of the buildings they were targeting. Having achieved these goals, the project was labelled as *partecipato*, that is, inclusive of residents’ participation. None of the latter, however, had a say in what was going to be painted on their walls.

Writing about the shopping malls, the theme parks and the ‘tourist bubbles’ that characterize modern and contemporary cities, Susan Buck Morss (1992: 22) argued that the goal of these visual displays is, in fact, the ‘manipulation of the [onlookers’] synaesthetic system by controlling environmental stimuli’. As phantasmagorias whose role is to bombard the eyes ‘with fragmentary impressions’, so that they may ‘see too much – and register nothing’ (ibid.: 19), these displays strive to provide that ‘simultaneity of overstimulation and numbness’ that, for Buck Morss, is ‘characteristic of the new synaesthetic organization as *anaesthetics*’ (ibid.). Along these lines, I suggest that, in attempting to blunt affective reactions through their ‘compensatory reality’ (ibid.), Certosa’s murals act as a top-down prescription against an anger that, in its quest for culprits, may awaken political antagonism. In so doing, Certosa’s murals seek to enact a ‘stultifying logic’ (Ranci re 2009: 49) meant to seduce their spectators into trading in their upset for a joy that glosses over inequities.

OF WHEAT BUNDLES AND HUMMINGBIRDS

In the fall of 2020, a new mural was planned for the fa ade facing a neighbourhood association. Upon finding out that the mural was supposed to feature a blonde girl holding a wheat bundle, activist Enrico became enraged: ‘the city councillor seems to have forgotten that blonde girls holding bundles were a popular theme in Fascist propaganda; they have the gall to do this in Certosa, a neighbourhood where every single street is named after a partisan! My father, too, was a partisan, and this mural offended me deeply.’ After a battle with the administration, Enrico eventually managed to have the blonde girl turned into an old farmer; the wheat bundle stayed, though.

This compromise was a meagre consolation. Enrico’s association had requested that at least one of the new murals acknowledge the working-class



Figure 12.4. Farmer with wheat bundle. © Emanuela Guano.

history of the neighbourhood; ‘you are a sad bunch’, a conservative city administrator replied, turning a deaf ear on this petition. Weeks later, a famous muralist from Brazil decorated a Certosa façade with two giant hummingbirds, the likes of which have never been seen in Italy.

As it undergoes a process of ‘commodification, co-optation, artification, and institutionalization’ (Campos and Barbio 2021: 121) that is meant to serve merely economic purposes, neoliberal street art often remains ‘perfectly numb to the social realities of its setting, treating public space like a blank canvas, rather than a site already loaded with cultural, historical and personal significance’ (Schacter 2015). Following this global template, Certosa’s street art is driven not by the relevance of its themes to Certosa’s residents but rather by the reputation of individual artists; it thus pursues an aura that, as Walter Benjamin (1969: 5) suggested, is a function of the distance from its context. The NGO chose Certosa’s muralists on the basis of their notoriety, picking them from among artists of national and international renown; in so doing, it also excluded local artists from the project. Along with the abstraction of the proposed theme (‘Joy’) and the administration’s



Figure 12.5. Bang's mural against the backdrop of the new bridge.
© Emanuela Guano.

explicitly post-political intent, these selection criteria contributed to the disconnect between the muralists' work and the neighbourhood.

While visually striking, many of the gigantic tags, the geometrical figures and the naturalistic images that are painted on Certosa's façades may as well be anywhere else in the world. Indeed, some of the artists tried to reduce this distance. If, for example, Bang portrayed a few of the residents he had met during his stay, others painted images that, in their eyes, represented Genoese-ness at large. Rost and Loste, for instance, produced a gigantic portrait of Fantozzi, the popular film character played by Genoese actor Paolo Villaggio; the inspiration for Cactus's and Maria's mural, instead, came from a song by Genoa's famous singer and songwriter Fabrizio De André.

Neither Villaggio nor De André ever lived in Certosa, though. Hence, even as they nod to 'Genoese culture', these murals are also the product of a gaze from outside – one that does not focus on Certosa per se but rather on Genoa as a city whose inequalities and divisions become invisible from afar.⁹

Soon after the 2019 street art festival, the murals' disconnect from residents' lives caused several of my informants to lose interest. Not only were they indifferent to the themes of the murals, but their long-standing disposition towards the sensuous, affective and cognitive perception of local



Figure 12.6. Mural inspired by a Fabrizio De André song. © Emanuela Guano.

inequalities generally overwhelmed the impressions generated by the street art. Indeed, some of the residents expressed appreciation. ‘It’s nice to have some colour!’ a middle-aged woman told me. Several, however, qualified their approval by pointing to what they regard as Certosa’s more pressing needs: in the words of a resident in her sixties, the murals are ‘*belli* [nice]’,

though ‘it would have been better if [the administration] had spent that money on restoring the façades instead’. A local migrant activist – a girl in her twenties – echoed, ‘I like the murals, but it would have been better if they had cleaned up the small park and had painted the neighbourhood’s façades, which are still falling apart.’ She then went on to tell me, ‘if you are young, you might like street art, but people like my mom, who is 50, have no use for it. And there are lots of elderly people in this neighbourhood.’ If, in these residents’ views, the murals failed to remedy the neighbourhood’s blight, for others they even exacerbated Certosa’s marginality vis-à-vis the rest of the city: ‘Genoa has an ancient tradition of [realistic] *trompe l’oeil* façades, why didn’t they do that instead?’ another woman in her sixties contributed. Since the class politics of muralism were not lost on her, she also objected to street art as ‘the kind of stuff you only find in poor neighbourhoods. They would have never put murals in [Genoa’s most upscale neighbourhood]. Now Certosa feels even more blighted’, she concluded. ‘They are horrible’, a man in his fifties volunteered. ‘Some of the façades [in Certosa] are crumbling, why didn’t they fix those instead?’ Like others, the man also expressed concerns about the murals’ lack of connection with Certosa and its residents: ‘Perhaps I am not quite the street art connoisseur, but what does Fantozzi have to do with the neighbourhood? Since [in Italian cinema] Fantozzi represents the quintessential *sfigato* [loser], this mural must symbolize Certosa’s *sfiga* [bad luck].’ Commenting on the mural featuring the old farmer, Anna Rita observed: ‘It’s nice, but what does the countryside have to do with Certosa’s industrial history? Putting splashes of colour on the walls comes across as an attempt to ignore the struggles of Certosa’s workers. There are plenty of topics that are potentially relevant [to Certosa], but the murals do not touch upon any of them.’ Graffiti writer Alessandro, in particular, was critical of the disjunction between the murals and Certosa: ‘[The NGO] should have brought in artists who know how to relate with the territory and its residents . . . Just having them paint their murals and then leave makes little sense.’ What this writer would have preferred for the neighbourhood was a ‘sustained engagement with residents’ to be brought about through the creation of a ‘street art school for younger generations’. However, as local crews were excluded from the project, none of this happened.

A NEIGHBOURHOOD COMING BACK TO LIFE?

At the time of writing in 2022, Certosa’s Memorial Park is still a long way from completion. However, in 2020 the Genoese administration established a plaza known as the *Radura della memoria* (Memorial Clearing).

Built right over the Via Porro’s apartment complexes that had been



Figure 12.7. Radura della Memoria. © Emanuela Guano.

demolished after the disaster, the plaza hosts a circle of forty-three trees in memory of the victims and a playground. The new bridge stretches over it, and a retaining wall surrounds the clearing on one side. On this wall, the association of Via Porro refugees sponsored a mural featuring a quotation by writer Ferzan Ozpetek: ‘Do we ever leave our childhood homes? / Never! For they always remain inside us / Even when they no longer exist.’

Cast against a background comprised of forty-three different colours – one for each of the victims – a nearby mural features two young women gazing in the direction of the collapse. This image, too, was commissioned by an association of evicted residents.

‘[These women] represent the shock at what happened’, Via Porro refugee Mimma told me, expressing regret at the city administration’s failure to memorialize the displacement of six hundred Certosini. In the face of this omission, the refugees’ murals seek to reclaim the area where entire apartment complexes were razed to the ground; however, even this modest memorialization attempt is negated by a children’s park that the city administration installed at the centre of the plaza. The playground’s position is such that the two painted women give the impression of staring at it. Children and their parents do not seem to worry; however, some of the older residents expressed dissatisfaction: as a man in his sixties put it, ‘never before



Figure 12.8. Eyes on the disaster. © Emanuela Guano.



Figure 12.9. Do we ever leave our childhood homes? © Emanuela Guano.

have I seen a playground built on the spot where a tragedy has happened.’ He also pointed out that the playground is exposed to the pollution and the traffic debris falling from the new bridge: ‘how safe is that, really?’ Yet the city administration does not share these concerns: in the words of a councillor, the children playing under the new bridge convey ‘the idea of a neighbourhood coming back to life’ (*‘Inaugurato il nuovo parco giochi’* 2021).

Whether Certosa is coming back to life remains to be seen. At the time of writing in 2022, several new projects are brewing in – though not necessarily for – Certosa: among them is a new railway track destined for freight trains, 10 percent of which will carry hazardous materials: ‘we’ll have forty-two freight trains a day running at a distance of barely 20 feet from people’s windows, and at least four of these trains will carry God knows what’, Enrico told me. A new highway crossing Certosa is also in the works: this construction will last ten years and will require boring through a mountain that contains asbestos. Predicting more dust and construction sites for years to come, Enrico told me, ‘What quality of life can we residents expect? Many of us aren’t even young, is this how we want to live the years that we have left?’ As the Certosini’s anger continues to simmer, ‘For Sale’ signs are becoming a ubiquitous sight in this neighbourhood. In the face of the challenges caused by a century of exploitation and neglect, many are giving up on their hope for a better quality of life. ‘It takes more than murals to fix this. A couple of drawings on the walls won’t change anything’, Enrico concluded.

Even as Certosa’s infrastructural ruination continues unabated, the Memorial Clearing keeps hosting concerts and theatrical events; in the words of Genoa’s administrators, these are all ‘characterized by a . . . dignified profile and by the respect that is due to the place and the victims of the collapse’ (*‘Inaugurato il nuovo parco giochi’* 2021). In the meantime, subsequent waves of joyously irrelevant street art keep erupting on the neighbourhood’s walls. However, in June 2021 a Certosina friend sent me an excited WhatsApp message: a new mural had been inaugurated whose inspiration was, in her words, ‘bottom-up, unlike Certosa’s other “joyous” murals’. By representing firefighters at work on the bridge, this mural was not only pertinent to the neighbourhood, but it had also been volunteered by muralists Drina A12 and Giulilogol: a couple who live just a few miles away from Certosa. The mural, Drina told me, stemmed from their close ties to the territory; their choice to immortalize the firefighters originated from their appreciation for this group’s selfless service. ‘It is the firefighters who risked their lives to pick up the dead bodies from the [bridge’s] rubble’, Drina pointed out. Indeed, many a Certosa resident feels a debt of gratitude to firefighters; this is why the 2021 inauguration turned out to be an emotional event where, in Drina’s words, ‘everybody cried, except for the politicians – but we wouldn’t expect those to shed a tear anyway.’

CONCLUSION: THE FAILURE OF POST-POLITICS

Like Drina, many Certosini are sceptical of politicians; in recent years, this distrust has been exacerbated by the awareness that, despite the promises, their neighbourhood's ruination continues unabated. As residents' hopes for a better future are dashed by plans for a new highway and a freight railway jammed between Certosa's homes, their already tepid appreciation for the joyous street art is growing thinner. 'Mayor: Thank you for the murals, but we don't need them. We need services' is a sign that, displayed during one of the street protests that are becoming increasingly common in Certosa, epitomizes a common sentiment. What Certosa needs, in the eyes of many, is an end to the process of ruination and the infrastructural servitude that has characterized it since the onset of industrialization.

According to the municipality website, the purpose of Certosa's street art is to 'upgrade the streets, the buildings and the municipal and private surfaces through the work of the most famous Italian and international writers', thus turning this area into 'an outdoor museum' (Comune di Genova n.d.). However, as of 2022 Certosa's revitalization remains a chimera. Furthermore, despite the emotional welcome extended by residents to Drina's and Giuliogol's artwork, the city administration continues to have no plans for locally relevant street art. Yet the escapism characterizing most of Certosa's murals has failed to sway an aesthetic community (Rancière 2009: 57) that, emerging out of a nexus of affective energy and sensuous everyday experiences, has remained aware of its own disenfranchisement. The 'splashes of colour' painted on Certosa's walls may look 'nice', in the words of some; however, despite their attempt to promote consensus, the murals have failed to anaesthetize the awareness of a distribution of the sensible whereby Certosa continues to be reduced to the "bare life" of servility' (Holston 2009: 246) that is typical of many postindustrial peripheries. In the experience of Certosini, the collapse of the Morandi bridge; the construction sites that keep cropping up; the incessant encroachment of highways and railways; the ever-present threat of asbestos; the toxic waste buried under the streets; and the crumbling façades constantly reiterate the perception of an 'entrenched regime of citizenship' (ibid.: 249): one that manifests through a distribution of the sensible organized along class lines. What is being sensed and made sense of in post-collapse Certosa is neither the genteel ease of Genoa's bourgeois neighbourhoods nor the post-political 'joy' of hummingbirds and wheat bundles; instead, it is the jarring awareness of an inequality that keeps being reinscribed.

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exploration of the role of aesthetics and infrastructural violence in Genoa's postindustrial peripheries. Dr Guano's previous work has been featured in journals like *Cultural Anthropology*; *City and Society*; *Gender, Place and Culture*; and *Ethnos*; she is also the author of *Creative Urbanity: An Italian Middle Class in the Shade of Revitalization* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017) and *Immaginando Buenos Aires: Ceti Medi e Modernità urbana* (FrancoAngeli, 2016).

NOTES

An early version of this chapter titled "Joy": Murals and the Failure of Post-Politics after the Morandi Bridge Collapse' appeared in *City & Society* 35(1) (2023): 38–61. This article is available at <https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/ciso.12442>.

1. The apartment complexes that had to be evacuated and demolished belonged to Sampierdarena; however, since for all practical purposes their residents regarded themselves as Certosini, this is how I refer to them in this chapter. Here I also follow residents' habit of calling Certosa a 'neighbourhood', even though it is really a unit of the Rivarolo neighbourhood.
2. None of the forty-three victims were from Certosa.
3. The new San Giorgio bridge was inaugurated in August 2020, only two years after the disaster.
4. This project is based on five months of pre-pandemic ethnographic fieldwork in Certosa and twenty-nine semi-structured, in-depth interviews with residents conducted in person and online between 2019 and 2021.
5. Certosa activists sought to oppose the use of explosives in the demolition because of the likely presence of asbestos in the bridge. To their dismay, only one of the pillars was spared.
6. During a 2018 press release, Renzo Piano announced that his new bridge would be 'simple and frugal, a truly Genoese bridge . . . a steel bridge – one that is as shiny and limpid as a boat, and endowed with a clear soul that will support the city in mourning this terrible loss.' These words gained great resonance with Genoese publics, who associate frugality, a rugged simplicity, and a familiarity with the sea that has been honed over the centuries as essential aspects of their city's imaginary and their own identity (Guano 2019: 254).
7. To date, limited funding has been allocated for the creation of the park.
8. Since the 2000s, neoliberal street art has been used in Genoa as a low-cost strategy to beautify areas damaged by neglect such as parts of its historic city centre and the revitalized waterfront.
9. The class-based divisions between Genoa's centre and its low-income peripheries were first observed by sociologist Luciano Cavalli in his 1965 *La città divisa*, where he argued that class inequalities (and political tensions) in industrial Genoa could be neatly mapped onto this city's geography.

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CHAPTER 13

MIGRANT SAINTS

Art, Religion and Activism in Contemporary Naples

Magnus Course



INTRODUCTION

Wandering through the central Naples neighbourhood of Sanità one hot July afternoon, I came face to face with the image that you see in Figure 13.1.

A young woman looks demurely upwards, away from the viewer's gaze. A golden cloak is wrapped around her shoulders, and she holds a bunch of white lilies in her left hand. A small text at the bottom of the image informs the viewer that this is Santa Patrizia, although almost everybody here in Naples would already have recognized this highly beloved of the city's fifty-one patron saints through the lilies in her hand. What the viewer may well have been unaware of until reading the image's text, however, is that Santa Patrizia, like the model representing her in the image before me, was a migrant to Naples, brought here through calamitous circumstances beyond her control.

I walked deeper into Sanità, meandering through the great street market of Via Vergini and its overflowing stalls staffed by Sri Lankans, Ukrainians, Senegalese and those born to this city. Pausing by the ever-popular Sepe bar, I saw another image of a gold-wrapped saint, this time San Marco the Evangelist. Again, a small text revealed that this saint, too, was a migrant, from present-day Palestine to Egypt, and then eventually, posthumously, to Venice. Emerging from the tight streets into the Piazza della Sanità, I was confronted with the golden glare – amplified by the midday sun – of the



Figure 13.1. *Santa Patrizia* by Santi Migranti (Massimo Pastore).
Photo © Magnus Course.

great Basilica della Sanità, known locally as San Vincenzo (after the Catalan saint, yet another patron saint of the city and of this neighbourhood in particular). The front of the basilica had been covered in the same golden wrapping that had embraced the images of Santa Patrizia and San Marco that I had seen earlier, and now its meaning became belatedly clear: the golden cloak was one of the thermal reflective blankets given to those rescued from the Mediterranean, a striking visual index of what has come to be termed in some quarters ‘the migrant crisis’. And inside the basilica, a further image, much like the ones of Santa Patrizia and San Marco, yet this time with the saint looking directly at the viewer, a crook in his hand: San Gaudioso, an early Christian martyr from present-day Tunisia, standing guard over the entrance to the crypt that for centuries held his relics, once again shrouded in gold. Now, finally, these images’ identities emerged more clearly; they were not just saints, they were migrant saints.

This chapter constitutes a brief exploration of how contemporary artists in Naples draw upon religious iconography for their art, and in particular, for their art as activism. As I shall describe, they may do so to very different ends and to ask very different kinds of questions, a diversity matched only by the diversity of viewers’ responses to their images. My interest is not

so much in the political debates in which these artists seek to engage – the place of migrants in Italian society, the rampant consumerism of the modern age, the continuing struggles for gender equality – but in the fact that they are able to draw on and speak through this widely shared repertoire of religious imagery to make their case. This leads to further, open-ended questions about which I can offer little more than speculations: the nature of the relation between art, politics and religion; the particular role of public art in Neapolitan life; and the question of what, if anything, makes a religious image ‘religious’ in the first place. Public space in Naples is saturated with imagery of one kind or another; imagery frequently reaching towards specific social and political ends (see Guano, this volume; Molnar 2017; Pavoni 2019; Salomone 2018). The large proportion of this public imagery that we might classify as ‘religious’ is again highly varied: from notices of memorial masses, to sculptural features of buildings, to the ex-voto shrines built into the city walls, or to adverts in Sinhala for trips to Lourdes or Medjugorje, the religious, and more specifically, the Catholic, is deeply engrained in Naples’s urban environment (cf. Oliphant 2021). My tactic in the space available is to narrow down the scope of this foray into an investigation of the ways in which artists in Naples have utilized the Catholic iconography of the city’s patron saints to widely different ends. Let me start with a fuller account of the project my encounter with which I described at the beginning of this chapter, and which sparked my interest in art as politics in the Neapolitan context: Massimo Pastore’s Santi Migranti project.

SANTI MIGRANTI

I say ‘Massimo Pastore’s project’, but it takes quite a bit of digging to find out who is actually behind these life-sized images of saints that appeared all over Naples, then across small towns in Campania, then in other Italian cities including Rome and Verona, and eventually as far away as the European Parliament in Brussels. None of the images are signed, yet on closer inspection the words ‘Santi Migranti’ appear in the bottom right corner of each image. The S of ‘Santi’ is in such a pale blue that if you look too quickly, it almost reads as ‘anti migranti’. And this, as Massimo explained to me in his Via Foria studio in Naples last year, is precisely the point: to transform something negative into something positive. The negative refers not only to the notoriously anti-migrant stance of the then Minister for the Interior, Matteo Salvini, but also to what Massimo describes as the Italian people’s ‘wobble in their own humanity’ (*a traballare nella propria umanità*) in response to this mainstreamed discourse of anti-migrant sentiment (Cole 1997; Tuckett 2018; Grotti and Brightman 2021). The project was born out of a trip

made by Massimo to Lampedusa in 2015, a trip inspired out of interest in the ‘welcome centres’ for migrants recently recovered from the Mediterranean. Yet he soon realized that these centres were anything but ‘welcoming’ (cf. Quagliariello 2021). Confronted by the sheer scale and depth of human suffering, Massimo initiated the first phase of what was to become the Santi Migranti project, #QuiRiposa. #QuiRiposa consisted of epigraphs of drowned migrants copied from the cemetery in Lampedusa, converted into the familiar death notices that cover the walls of many southern Italian towns and cities, which Massimo then pasted throughout the streets of both Lampedusa and, upon his return, Naples. The idea was to create a kind of equivalent to the Stolperstein ‘stumbling stones’ conceived by the German artist Gunter Demnig as a way of memorializing the Holocaust at the individual level, and thus exercising a shift in both scale and location: from statistics to individuals, from far away to one’s own doorstep.

A poignant example of the #QuiRiposa project is the death notice for Ester Ada, an 18-year-old Nigerian woman who was found dead in 2009 on a boat rescued from the Mediterranean, a boat that was subsequently unable to dock in Lampedusa until four days after its initial rescue due to a diplomatic spat between Italy and Tunisia. Massimo explained to me how he was struck by the parallels between the sad fate of Ester Ada and the story of Santa Patrizia, as mentioned above, one of Naples’s most beloved patron saints. Santa Patrizia was a young woman who, like Ester Ada, was forced to flee from her homeland in present-day Turkey, ended up being shipwrecked in the Mediterranean sea at the entrance to Naples and died shortly afterwards. Massimo started researching the life stories of patron saints, not just of Naples, but throughout Italy, and he soon realized that nearly all of them were migrants whose stories very much reflected the tragedies of contemporary migrants. As he explained: ‘As I began developing this project, I was struck to see how the stories of these men and women – now elevated to places of honour and as objects of praise on altars – are so similar to the stories of those men and women now found dead on boats in the middle of the sea.’ And thus the #QuiRiposa project gave birth to the Santi Migranti project proper.

The Santi Migranti project consists of life-sized images of Catholic saints, each identifiable both by the symbolism of their classic iconography and by a short hagiographic text at the bottom of each image. The images are nearly always displayed in public places, usually pasted up on the street in the early hours of the morning, and with an intended correspondence between the place and the saint, so the latter’s image will usually be displayed in a place of which they are patron. What ties all of these images together, beyond the small Santi Migranti logo, is the golden cloak, an emblem both of holiness and, of course, of survival and rescue from the sea.¹ In most cases, the

models are themselves migrants, and in many cases, migrants from the same place that the saint for whom they are modelling originated. So, for example, my friend Omar, a Palestinian man who runs a Middle Eastern restaurant in the Centro Storico of Naples, modelled for San Pietro, himself a Palestinian. The correspondence is not always exact – a Ukrainian migrant modelled the Swedish Santa Brigida, for example – but the idea is simply to draw attention not only to shared histories of migration, but to shared political contexts of intolerance and oppression, and our obligation to resist them.

The Santi Migranti project has also sought to be highly responsive to current happenings in Italy. For example, when the Brescia striker Mario Balotelli was subject to racist abuse in a match against Verona, Massimo headed straight up to Verona the following week to plaster an image of San Zeno, the patron saint of Verona, around the city to remind the Veronese that their beloved patron was himself a Black African.

And when the parish priest of Sora, a small town in Lazio just across the border from Campania, started emitting increasingly racist, anti-migrant statements, Massimo appeared with an image of the town's (migrant) patron saint, Santa Restituta, and plastered it across the street from the parish office. And closer to home, the far-right organization CasaPound (see Cammelli, this volume) woke up to find the front wall of the building housing its Neapolitan headquarters decorated with a life-sized image of the African San Calogero, modelled by the Senegalese-Neapolitan activist Pierre.

Santi Migranti is, of course, but one of many, many artistic and political responses to the debate about migration in Italian society, and indeed across Europe as a whole. My purpose here is neither to explore the issue of migration, nor directly to understand the motivations for the project itself.² For the artist's intentions alone are clearly but one part of a much broader picture. My interest here is to understand the particular agency of the religious imagery upon which such contemporary activist art can draw as a resource. For my contention is that this relationship is not necessarily as transparent as it might at first seem; the images are neither straightforwardly religious nor unproblematically secular; their very force comes from their ability to merge these categories together (cf. Oliphant 2021). To engage in this exploration, we need to turn away from the artist's intentions and motivations, and towards the way in which the images have been received.

These images, like all images, have afterlives. And their afterlives afford us some clues as to their reception. In some cases they have been immediately torn down, in others covered in racist graffiti, which in turn has been responded to with anti-racist graffiti. Massimo puts up his posters late at night, not only to avoid the physical bustling of passers-by, but primarily to avoid direct confrontation with particularly 'fervent' (*infuocato*) opponents. He then returns the next day to try and gauge people's reactions:



Figure 13.2. *San Zeno* by Santi Migranti (Massimo Pastore). © Massimo Pastore.

It's usually the case that the reactions are very varied: there's indifference, there's those who stop and have read the text at the bottom of the image, because in the place of what is usually a prayer on a saint's prayer card [*santino*], there is written the story of the saint's migration, and people stop and read that and say 'Well, they were

migrants; yes, even they were migrants.' This reaction really struck me, but so, too, did the reaction of scorn. This work clearly touches some aspects of humanity that aren't so pretty, to do with racism, to do with intolerance. So very often the images are ripped down. . . . In many cases, the images become a sort of territory of encounter and conflict, when people have written things against migrants over the image's face, and then somebody else has written something defending migrants, so it becomes a kind of canvas upon which people write their impressions. At first, when I saw that the images had been ripped down with such meanness and stupidity, I felt really bad. I said to myself, 'How is this possible? You're dishonouring the memory of somebody who's done so much for others. How is it possible that you've arrived at such indifference and evil?' But then I realized that in fact this, too, was part of the project, to register the various reactions.

Massimo tells me that nearly all of the images get torn down in the end. Sometimes this is simply part of the ecology of street images: old ones, once faded and weather-damaged, get torn down and new images are pasted in their place. In other instances, as described above, the images are consciously defaced, quite literally in fact, as it is always the saint's face that is the first part of the image to be ripped off or scribbled over. Fragments of the images have remained on Naples's streets for months, and in some cases, years.

ARE THESE 'RELIGIOUS' IMAGES?

The Santi Migranti project has been highly visible, both in the media and in the streets themselves.

It has impact because these images of saints are immediately known, immediately recognized: for some viewers, at least, they index and perhaps even instantiate the holiness of a saint. As Peter Brown's (2014) study on the origin of the cult of saints has shown, proximity to a saint's material presence – either in life through pilgrimage or in death through burial near the saint's tomb – has long been foundational in thinking about Christian materiality more generally. And as Caroline Walker Bynum (2011) has shown, this emphasis on the divine potential within visual materiality came to be further elaborated throughout the Middle Ages into the Renaissance. This complex relationship with materiality and presence continues to characterize Catholic practice today (Mayblin et al. 2017; Orsi 2018). Thus we might surmise that for at least some viewers, each Santi Migranti image of a saint is 'religious' in the sense that its agency emerges as much from the direct connection to the divine as from any intention of the artist. I have witnessed people crossing themselves as they pass by these images, just as they would cross themselves in front of images in a church, or reach out to briefly touch the images with their fingertips before raising those

fingertips to their lips. Yet I think that these images are both more and less than ‘religious’ images; to suggest that their impact comes solely from the piety and devotion of an unproblematically devout and unproblematically Catholic Neapolitan populace would be something of a distortion to say the least. In elaborating this point, let us return briefly to the nature of the religious image.

Many scholars have elaborated how the Reformation marked a distinct shift in the functioning of Christian materiality, one in which Protestantism came to reject and oppose direct access to the divine through sight and touch.³ This devaluation of material mediation eventually came to be one of the hallmarks of ‘modernity’, a modernity freed from the ‘enchantment’ of a tactile and visible divine, and one that in many ways became constitutive of its close bedfellow, the secular (Keane 2007; Weber 1993). To be secular and modern is to keep the material in its appropriate disenchanted place, to recognize all agency as human agency, and thus to see images as simply images (Asad 2003; Taylor 2007).

The relevance of this shift in Christian materiality has been applied to the particular case of images by the art historian Hans Belting (1997). Belting’s highly influential study of the evolution of Christian images suggests that prior to the seismic shifts of the Renaissance and then the Reformation, ‘art’ as we currently imagine it did not exist. Rather, the images indexed not the work of an artist, but the divine presence both represented and embodied in what Belting calls the ‘cult image’. According to Belting, this immanence of divine presence in images was gradually eroded by a growing emphasis on the individual artist as agent, and it is this emphasis that led to the emergence of the ‘art image’ as we currently understand it. There are lots of reasons that we might perhaps hesitate to endorse Belting’s narrative, but it does nevertheless illustrate a particular tension between sources of agency in an image. The art historian James Elkins (2004) has taken this point further in distinguishing the religious from the spiritual in art, suggesting that whereas the spiritual may have a place in contemporary art, the religious (by which he understands the direct presence of the divine) might be understood to disqualify images from counting as art at all. In a sense, then, following Belting and Elkins’s emphasis on the definitive role of the artist’s agency, we might say that ‘religious art’ is an oxymoron. Yet my suspicion is that rather than being resolved chronologically – religious images slowly replaced by artistic ones – this tension between the divine and artistic agency in an image can exist simultaneously; or to use Belting’s terms, the image might be both art image and cult image. So if Massimo Pastore’s *Santi Migranti* project cannot be understood as solely ‘religious’, let us turn now to another project – *Roxy in the Box*’s *Martirni* series – and ask how it might or might not constitute ‘secular’ art.

SANTI MARTIRI

A contrasting use of Catholic iconography can be found in the Martirini series of another Neapolitan artist, Roxy in the Box. Like Massimo, Roxy sees her work as very much belonging to the street and to the Neapolitan people, and not simply for wealthy collectors and galleries. For her, this engagement with the street, this ‘porosity’ between the artist’s studio and the life of the city, is one of the things that differentiates the Neapolitan art scene from art scenes elsewhere in Italy (cf. Benjamin and Lacis 1995). Roxy has drawn upon Catholic iconography at several points in her long artistic trajectory. In 1999 she produced two images of the Madonna, one of the Addolorata (Our Lady of Sorrows) covered in ladybirds, and one of the Immacolata (Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception). The second image is a play on the Neapolitan name for this incarnation of Mary – ‘Mmaculat – which is phonetically close to the Italian word ‘maculata’ meaning ‘stained’, a word known but rarely used in Naples, and graphically represented through her virginal purity being covered by purple blotches. Roxy explains that there was no scandal when these images were displayed, because ‘they’re already a part of Neapolitan culture, not just a religious thing’. A more recent series has focused more specifically on Neapolitan saints, in fact on the two most popular of the city’s many



Figure 13.3. *A' Mmaculata* by Roxy in the Box. Print © Roxy in the Box.



Figure 13.4. *San Gennaro* by Roxy in the Box. Print © Roxy in the Box.

patrons – San Gennaro and Santa Patrizia – the first recognizable by his mitre, the second by her lilies.

San Gennaro's mark on the city is everywhere, from the fact that every other man seems to be named after him to the 'Stai Sciolt' T-shirts beloved by the Neapolitan youth.⁴ In this series, both saints are grafted into the

unmistakeable branding of the alcoholic drink, Martini, but with the exchange of an *r* for the *n* giving ‘Martiri’.

Roxy explains to me in her studio that these are not necessarily religious images in any straightforward way, partly due to the particularities of these particular saints. San Gennaro does not belong to the Church. He belongs to the people of Naples, and on his feast days, the Cardinal must ask permission from a deputation representing the people of the city in order to gain access to the vial containing his miraculous blood.

So we’ve grown up here in Naples with this saint who belongs to us all, who is ours. The treasure of San Gennaro belongs to us, even to those of us who are not religious or drawn to different kinds of spirituality. He belongs even to those who aren’t Catholic. He’s a bit like Maradona; even those people who don’t like football still love Maradona. I care very much for San Gennaro and I believe in him. It’s as if he were a relative, as if he were my grandfather, so I don’t differentiate what is of the Church and what is not of the Church. I’ve used the image of San Gennaro to encourage people to come to my studio, but I’ve not taken advantage of him. Sure, I’ve used him, but with love, in the sense that I very much love San Gennaro. A few years ago, I started a new project, creating a graphic image of San Gennaro. I wanted to see who would buy it: the great collectors of modern art, very rich people, or those people from Quartieri Spagnoli, Sanità, Scampia, who are poor and not involved in the art scene. The project was very successful because my San Gennaro is in the private collections of very rich people, but also in the houses of housewives in Quartieri Spagnoli or Forcella.

For Roxy, then, the images are ‘spiritual’ but not necessarily ‘religious’ in the sense of being encompassed by the institutional power of the Catholic Church. I am not entirely convinced by this distinction given that the Church in Naples has always had a somewhat tenuous hold on religiosity in the city, partly down to the proliferation of powerful religious orders that a millennium of archbishops have failed to control, and partly down to a populace whose religious imagination always seems to exceed the strictures of canon law. But neither are Roxy’s images ‘secular’ in any straightforward way; they could be read simply as secular kitsch, but to do so would be to ignore the fact that they very much depend upon a sense of intimacy, proximity and devotion to the saint portrayed, an affective predisposition with clear roots in a Catholic ontology of the image.

THE UBIQUITY OF CATHOLIC IMAGERY

To place Santi Migranti and Martirni in the broader context of Neapolitan art, I offer up two brief final examples, both by better known artists, but drawing upon the same Catholic iconography. By far the largest image is that produced by the Neapolitan muralist Jorit, an image of San Gennaro that



Figure 13.5. *San Gennaro* by Jorit Agoch. © Jorit Agoch.

occupies the outer wall of an entire apartment building at the entrance to the Forcella quarter.

This is publicly commissioned ‘civil’ art. It is undoubtedly both visually striking and, I think, beautiful, but it perhaps does not share in the street-level immediacy and intimacy of the other works discussed here. In fact, Jorit’s murals have become so widespread in Naples, they are almost like the visual equivalent of McDonalds – wherever we go, we can find one, and it will always be (more or less) the same. And a final work worthy of mention is that of the British street artist Banksy, whose only work in Italy to date can be found in the Centro Storico of Naples. It is a depiction of the Madonna with a pistol over her head.

The fact that a non-Neapolitan artist like Banksy, too, chose to draw upon Catholic iconography shows how deeply intertwined it is with the imagery and indeed the imagination of the city, not just in how it represents itself to itself but how it is represented to others. This use of Catholic iconography in contemporary art clearly has a genealogy that stretches back into the earliest days of Christianity and, some would argue, as far back as pre-Christian ancient Greek thinking about images. Likewise, the role of religious imagery as part of the visual landscape – countless ex-voto shrines built into the city’s walls, churches on every corner – again has a trajectory stretching back centuries.

One feature of these images is that they are immediately recognizable – they constitute terms in a shared frame of visual reference. People might use



Figure 13.6. *Madonna with Pistol* by Banksy. Image © Wikimedia Commons.

them to ‘say’ different things, and they may be ‘read’ in different ways, but their meanings (multiple as they may be) emerge from a shared visual grammar. These elements of Catholic iconography might be said to constitute the visual equivalent of a Wittgensteinian ‘language game’ – all parties have to agree at some level on what they are before they can be brought into disagreement, as ‘there can be no disagreement outside of the game’ (Wittgenstein 2009). And, still following Wittgenstein, we might also see this visual language game constituted by Catholic iconography as occurring within a ‘form of life’, an implicit, even embodied awareness of how the various contexts of meaning within Naples’s narrow streets fit together. Participation in this game does not require any commitment to Catholic belief; it is interesting to note that even those people born and raised beyond the Neapolitan or even Catholic tradition come to recognize and understand the importance of saints, both as indices of religious devotion but also of political potential.⁵ In the remainder of this chapter, I turn to explore how the very ubiquity of Catholic iconography is perhaps what both enables and restricts its political potential.

Elayne Oliphant’s recent exploration of the ubiquity of Catholic art and architecture in Paris offers an intriguing take on how such Catholic materiality blurs the fissures between the religious and the secular, and through

its constitution as an ‘unmarked’ category becomes a site of both privilege and exclusion (Oliphant 2021; see also Muehlebach 2012). She argues that ‘In contrast to the violence of both invisibility and hypervisibility, Catholicism’s banality allows its symbols to move between the background and the foreground, the overlooked and the monumental (but never the hypervisible or the invisible) in the French public sphere’ (Oliphant 2021: 18). In the Neapolitan case, like that of Paris, there is no doubt that the ubiquity of Catholic materiality may also be understood to constitute a form of ‘banal privilege’. For example, during a day I spent with the *Polizia Mortuaria*, who are responsible for the burial of those who die with neither friends nor family to bury them, an officer insisted to me that the cross placed upon each grave was not religious in any way but simply a secular sign of respect (this despite the fact that most of the people he ended up burying were Muslim migrants). Yet while Oliphant might indeed be correct that this ‘Catholic abundance may continue to buttress racial, religious, and class privilege’ (ibid.: 25), what she fails to leave room for in her analysis are the many ways in which Catholicism can simultaneously resist and undo these forms of privilege. The artists discussed in this chapter are just one example, to which we could add the countless Catholic associations scattered through the city and the rest of Italy, or the deeply radical strains of Catholic social thought present throughout Europe.

I make this point not to ‘defend’ Catholicism, but simply to point out its indeterminacy and heterogeneity (Mayblin et al. 2017). Perhaps this problem stems from the fact that it is never entirely clear in Oliphant’s account what is meant by ‘Catholicism’ – is it located in the institution? In people’s intimate faith and belief? Yet while I am not totally convinced by Oliphant’s take on the ‘banality’ of Catholic materiality, I do appreciate the attempt to offer new insights into the ever-shifting sands of how the secular comes to be constituted. For while none of the artists I have discussed here understand themselves to be producers of ‘religious art’, they each, in their own way, rely heavily on a shared religious grammar with their assumed viewers. In the Neapolitan context, at least, Catholic iconography is not so much a message telling us one thing, but rather a grammar, a generator of meaning, through which it is possible to say quite different, even opposed things towards a highly variegated set of ends.

In this chapter, I hope to have shown how Catholic iconography is a deeply powerful and compelling visual grammar upon which a variety of Neapolitan artists productively draw for different ends. Nevertheless, it is also a profoundly ambiguous and indeed ambivalent resource. ‘Religious’ iconography does not relate to ‘religion’ in as obvious or direct a way as we might expect. The very same image may resonate with a viewer’s deeply held spiritual devotion, with a secular sense of pride in and ownership of a

Neapolitan cultural identity or even with titillation at a conscious devaluation of a religious image to the realm of kitsch pop art. These are not mutually exclusive perspectives. In fact, I suspect that many Neapolitans – both artists and viewers – experience the image in all of these contradictory ways at once. The ontology of the image, as W. J. T. Mitchell (2005) has argued, can never be fully exhausted, constituted as it is by the infinite refractions of both image and viewer, and the relationship between them. So what, then, given this complexity, might we want to say in conclusion about these non-religious religious images? I think, perhaps, nothing more and nothing less than that they are *known*, they are immediately recognizable – San Gennaro’s mitre, Santa Patrizia’s lilies – and they are embedded in a form of life. Thus the key point for me is that while they correspond to terms within a shared grammar of visual reference, they are never wholly predetermined; they may have one foot unmoving, planted firmly with the divine, but another foot with the constant artistic reworking of generations of artists and viewers, each stretching the saint’s stride in new directions.

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NOTES

1. See Ben-Yehoyada (2017) and Chambers (2008) for an exploration of the Mediterranean as a space of constant flux and migration.
2. See Dawes (2020), Lucht (2011) and Tournilhac (2022) for accounts of migration and migrant lives in Naples.
3. Although even Protestantism never entirely escaped the need for mediation as much as it claimed (cf. Engelke 2007)
4. ‘Stai Sciolt’ refers to the exclamation made when San Gennaro’s blood miraculously liquifies on his feast days.
5. Several of the models involved in the project were Muslim, a religion in which saints are not understood to be direct mediators of divine power, but rather exemplars to follow. Yet these models, too, quickly came to understand the nature of saints within the city.

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CHAPTER 14

EXPATRIATE RELOCATION AND REAL ESTATE INVESTMENT IN SICILY

Sentiment, Sociality and New Beginnings

Antonio Sorge



INTRODUCTION

The abandonment and decay (*abbandono* and *decadenza*) of rural spaces and urban quarters alike, often associated with a long history of emigration driven by a lack of economic opportunity, is a central theme of public conversation in Sicily. The accompanying worry centres on the meanings of such a process, which most agree relates to Sicily's marginal status within Italy today and in the past. Successive generations leave for greener pastures. Those who remain, and who year by year get older, scrape by as best they can. The rural interior of Sicily is most afflicted by this process, with its many agricultural towns and villages in decline for generations. Countless of their inhabitants have long ago departed to northern Italian and European industrial centres, and further afield, to North and South America and to Australia.

Sicilian emigration dates to the nineteenth century, when rural labourers sought better lives than could be possible on the semi-feudal agricultural estates and in the sulphur and salt mines of the interior. Emigration continues into the present, but the key demographic is university-educated youth in their twenties and thirties, whose departure constitutes a brain drain to northern Italy and Europe. Across the rural districts of southern Italy, depopulated villages are surrounded by underused agricultural lands

that are worked by fewer local people with every passing year. Death rates outstrip birth rates by wide margins, and village streets are often deserted save for the summer months, when returnees come to visit ageing relatives for a few days. Even then, there are fewer visitors with every passing year.

Within these ‘small apocalypses of abandonment’ (Teti 2022), deserted old houses of the characteristic *centri storici* (historic centres) suggest a slower pace of life attuned to the rhythms of an earlier time. The aesthetic appeal of such places owes much to a particular vision of the rural idyll, of densely settled, close-knit towns that were minimally planned and reflect an image of bygone rural solidarity, of community feeling that surpasses anything that twenty-first-century city life can offer. There is a commercial potential to these desolate places that is not lost on foreign investors who make their way to small towns throughout Sicily and southern Italy to acquire real estate and even set down roots.

This chapter examines the dynamics of expatriate relocation and real estate investment in Mussomeli, a rural town in Caltanissetta province, western Sicily, where an enthusiastic mayor and town council, with the participation of local business, have spearheaded a programme for the sale of abandoned and unused real estate to foreign investors intent on living full- or part-time in rural Sicily. Mussomeli is one among several towns in western Sicily that has experimented with the one euro house scheme, created to revitalize towns in demographic decline through the sale of abandoned properties for the nominal fee of one euro to well-resourced buyers, usually foreigners, who commit to renovate and reside in them for at least part of the year. I present an argument that underscores the transformation of rural Sicily into a site of nostalgic consumption that positions it in relation to a broader set of attitudes that recapitulates its cultural and economic marginality. Namely, a sense of entitlement, born of their position as investors and their self-image as conscientious travellers, frames expatriates’ understanding of their right to the locality. What emerges is an image of transactional interest that is fundamentally economic in scope, where local administrators pursue the goals of economic revitalization, and buyers hope to realize a lifestyle goal that presents an edifying alternative to their workaday lives in large American or European cities.¹

MUSSOMELI AND ITS HINTERLAND

Mussomeli is a medieval town with a population of ten thousand, making it the largest settlement in its surrounding territory. At 800 metres above sea level, it lies on the eastern flanks of the Monti Sicani, a karstic formation in places exceeding 1,500 metres. The town is guarded by the ruins

of a fourteenth-century castle erected on a promontory by Manfredi III of Chiaramonte, one of four viceroys who governed during the reign of Maria Queen of Sicily. Today, wheat agriculture on fragmented parcels requires the use of compact mechanized vehicles, while large swathes of the territory have reverted to pasturage over past decades and are used by the few shepherds who are marginal to the regional economy. There is little pastoralism in the area, it having declined in importance in recent years, but some entrepreneurs and associations have attempted to bring the occupation into the regional tourist offering with guided tours and hikes in the pastures and cheese production facilities (see Mannia 2022). Likewise, the Via dei Borghi, a recently concluded project brought forth by the Ente sviluppo agricolo (ESA; the Sicilian agricultural development agency), promotes tourism across towns of the island's interior by mobilizing the appeal of traditional agriculture and folkways (see Samuels 2017).

The generalized state of economic stagnation in this district was exacerbated both by the closures of the sulphur and salt mines and by the decline of agriculture over the last generation. Today's emigration, unlike the earlier waves that were based on labour emigration, sees educated youth make their way to northern Italy and Europe to work in the professions and tertiary sector jobs. The characteristic response to why young people leave is always the same: there is no work and a lack of opportunity in Sicily. The story of those who remain is one of quixotic struggle, so much so that many of the more socially engaged youth animate a thriving associationism that reassesses the value and desirability of life in the South, and in Sicily manifests in movements that seek the regeneration and reclamation of abandoned spaces, from crumbling hamlets to marginal urban neighbourhoods. Their work is never finished, but their efforts yield satisfaction in light of the history of depredations to which Sicily has been subject, from the razing of its forests for wheat monoculture in antiquity and the after-effects of latifundism on the vast estates of western Sicily (Blok 1974; Schneider and Schneider 1976) to the consequences of petrochemical extraction and refinery in the south-east (Benadusi 2018) and the social costs of illegal construction (Trombino 2016), political clientelism and mafia infiltration, in its polymorphous forms (Santino 2006; Bascietto 2019), of institutions and markets, and spaces of cultural practice (Palumbo 2020) along the island's length and breadth. Sicily's history of emigration witnesses the unending quest for a more dignified life and freedom from want in a society where collective intuitions view social mobility as a zero-sum game, to which, according to one influential analysis (Gambetta 1988), two reflexes have tended to prevail among the responses to the machinations of mafia corruption: resignation to extant realities, or emigration.

Giuseppe Genco Russo, a powerful Cosa Nostra figure, was appointed mayor of Mussomeli by the Allied Military Government of Occupied Territories (AMGOT) in 1943. A handful of families dominated local affairs and controlled the large estates. Notable among these was the Feudo Polizzello, a 2,000 ha latifundium dispossessed by guile from the absentee noble Lanza Branciforte di Trabia family in the interwar years by Genco Russo himself, who started his career as a *gabellotto* (leaseholder), one of Blok's (1974) 'violent peasant entrepreneurs' (see Di Bartolo 2014). Frustration over local conditions came to a head in 1954 after the town's water taps had run dry for a week. Riot police dispersed a large protest using tear gas, with the resulting stampede causing four deaths and countless injuries. On the heels of this tragedy, authorities rounded up sixty labourers, whom they charged with sedition. In October 1954, the court handed down twenty-seven convictions, including a nine-month prison sentence for Salvatore Guarino, the secretary of the regional labour federation. These convictions were a blow to the local trade union and to peasant activism, and, paired with a failed agrarian reform, would hasten a wave of emigration. A small plaque on a wall of the main piazza commemorates these events of 1954.

The Italian economic miracle largely bypassed Mussomeli as it did most of the rest of rural Sicily, and in the two succeeding decades the town experienced a precipitous population decline as local men and women joined the ranks of the Mediterranean reserve army of labour across northern Italy and western Europe. Mussomeli's population is just over ten thousand, down from a 1950s peak of almost sixteen thousand.

The cultural articulation of a difficult history is expressed in a view of life in small rural towns as painful and unpleasant (see Schneider and Schneider 1974). Consequently, there is no romanticism to local conceptions of rurality, rural economy and rural living, and whatever appearance there is of a valorization of the countryside constitutes a minority sentiment based in an idealistic reassessment of the desirability of modern life and of urbanity. But what Sicilians in both rural and urban sectors share, in Mussomeli and in both smaller towns and large cities, is a widespread worry about problems of *degrado* (decay) and *decadenza* (ruin) as they are reflected in myriad spaces and landscapes, but especially in sites of former and current human habitation. What is meant by these apparently synonymous terms is coded according to rural or urban contexts. In rural places, *decadenza* is often referenced in the same breath as *abbandono* (abandonment) of old settlements by emigrants over the past century and more. In urban contexts, the descriptor *degrado* makes an appearance as something of an epithet – developers, entrepreneurs and city planners understand *degrado* as the result of the lifeways of undesirable populations (see Herzfeld 2021; Zinna 2020), and increasingly the presence of racialized migrants. However, to community

activists, *degrado*, *decadenza* and *abbandono* are all a consequence of deeply rooted problems of political mismanagement and civic indifference. Every locality within Sicily and across Italy has its own range of solutions to the problems of *decadenza*, *degrado* and *abbandono*, but the one I examine below involves the sale of abandoned real estate to foreign buyers with the expectation that this infusion of monies will help regenerate towns in decay.

THE ONE EURO HOUSE

Vittorio Sgarbi, one-time mayor of Salemi in the Sicilian province of Trapani and political impresario from the northern Veneto region, first proposed the one euro house scheme (*Case per un euro*, or ‘Houses for one euro’) in 2008 as a strategy to attract investment and new residents to a town in decline. Several municipal councils across Sicily and the Italian mainland have attempted the scheme, but the phenomenon received an unprecedented boost in spring 2019, when major English-language news outlets featured stories of one euro homes in quaint Italian villages, presented to international readers as a golden opportunity to live *la dolce vita*. Mussomeli’s own coming to international prominence followed on the heels of a series of CNN reports showcasing picture-perfect images of a bucolic town with breathtaking mountain views. According to the deputy mayor, Toti Nigrelli – one of the key architects of the town’s embrace of foreign real estate investment – the subsequent days and weeks were a flurry of email queries and international phone calls by eager would-be buyers. To harness this international interest, the municipal council founded a multilingual real estate agency staffed by local entrepreneurs fluent in French and English, and created an easily findable website (www.case1euro.it) that lists the services of local technicians and contractors and provided general information about the town for interested buyers. According to local sources, including the deputy mayor and manager of the local real estate agency, approximately three hundred dwellings had sold to foreign investors by late 2022, with several buyers acquiring more than one property.

The one euro house scheme attracts foreign nationals from around the world (but primarily North Americans and Europeans, with a smattering of Australians and Central and South Americans) who arrive with the intention to settle there, full- or part-time, and to partake of what they perceive as a style of life and local rhythms that are a soothing counterpoint to the tenor of life in large cities. In Mussomeli, their presence has occasioned considerable local ferment. They introduce conceptions of the good life that flow from a set of assumptions characteristic of exemplary neoliberal subjects driven by desires of self-actualization. As self-described expatriates, they

are spearheading a gentrification of the old quarter that renders the town a tableau for their desires for a better life in a picturesque landscape, which, however replete with the historical appurtenances of an agrarian society, is vacant of content for the newcomer who nonetheless embraces its rustic aesthetic as an antidote to urban modernity. A spike in interest in cheap rural Italian real estate followed on the heels of the first COVID-19 lockdowns, a moment when city-dwellers across the Global North pondered alternatives to dense urban living. As Irene Falconieri (2021) shows, Sicily has never thrown off its association with stereotypes of a traditional, archaic culture, and the appeal of this hidebound vision of Sicily exercises considerable influence on tourists and expatriates, despite a long history of investment in heavy industry and other sectors.

In Mussomeli, local businesspeople and the business-friendly town council actively confront what they perceive as the fatalist tendency expressed in resignation to the inevitability of decay, that small towns are fated to be abandoned, that all things have a beginning and an end (cf. Schubert 2021). Their own approach is to usher in a vision for revitalization that depends on a series of investments that aim to bolster outside interest in the town as a site of consumption. As Toti Nigrelli candidly points out,

We never had any illusions that real estate sales would be the solution to the problem of depopulation, but more simply it's a way to bring investment into town, from which everyone will benefit. Frankly, I would never live in any of the old houses in the old quarter. They're uncomfortable, far from amenities and not worth the hassle of upkeep. I could see it being appealing to tourists who might spend a month or two in the summers and then list it on Airbnb to the occasional tourist, but they're not suitable for permanent living, especially in winter.

However, to foreign real estate buyers, the age and decrepitude of the old quarter, with its empty houses beckoning an energetic buyer to restore them, is a feature, an attraction, as it bespeaks a sense of history, of cultural authenticity, of a momentous past that prospective buyers see themselves as becoming custodians of. The old quarter of Mussomeli, just like those of all neighbouring towns and villages, is in a ramshackle state. Situated on a hilly slope, its narrower alleyways are only accessible on foot. Every house is an aggregation of additions constructed to meet the needs of growing families, divided among generations of siblings and descendants into parcellated units with improvised partition walls periodically torn down as holdings might be reaggregated. The Italian legal norm of equal partible inheritance generates an extreme degree of fragmentation of property, both of houses and of agricultural holdings. Old, abandoned homes are marked by falling stucco, masonry and roof tiles, rusted balcony trusses and broken windows and shutters. If they are in less visible parts of the neighbourhood, their

doors may have been forced open, and a peek inside often reveals dumped appliances and construction materials from renovations to other buildings in town. Caved roofs or floors render some buildings perilous, just as broken and uneven stones render any walk down narrow alleys potentially hazardous. Colonies of pigeons, rats and their predators, felines, abound, along with their signature sights and smells, of cat urine and bird droppings, overlain with a patina of grime and, where the sun does not shine, mossy growth and musty smells. Several such houses have sat empty for generations, and are beyond repair, but several others might be salvaged, having sat unused for only a decade or two. The one euro houses consist principally of homes that are but a few years from collapse, all of which, if acquired, would need extensive structural repairs, if not to be demolished and rebuilt from scratch.

Homes sold by the local real estate agency for the symbolic price of EUR 1 entail a commitment on the part of the buyer to restructure (*ristrutturare*) the house and render it liveable within the space of three years. This involves paying the fees for the transfer of title, and the hiring of workers from a list of approved contractors (compiled by the town hall) who can bring the house up to code. Failure to abide by this obligation carries a EUR 5,000 fee, non-payment of which results in the forfeit of title. As of the time of writing, most such purchases have not lapsed. However, acquisition of property in Mus-someli can and does often follow a path more suited to the abilities of people who have serious DIY skills. Real estate sold on what is locally referred to as the upscale market (*mercato superiore*) includes dwellings ranging from EUR 5,000 to EUR 50,000. Such houses come in a range of sizes, are variably endowed with comforts and amenities and may be close to move-in ready. Twice a week, Nadia and Carla, local real estate agents, organize a walking tour for small groups of potential buyers, where they showcase homes for sale on the upscale market. Most prospective buyers who come with the intention of purchasing one euro houses are quickly dissuaded from doing so; there is simply very little worth having for that price. For Michael, an Australian buyer who did manage to acquire a one euro home, it was a frustrating experience. He was only shown the available one euro properties by quietly insisting on seeing them over the course of several walking tours, and, upon finalizing the paperwork, was able to begin repairs on it himself. As a skilled tradesman, he could complete several if not all required renovations on his own. More importantly, as a direct descendant of an Italian grandfather (from the northern Italian city of Treviso), he could acquire Italian citizenship easily and work full-time as an electrician, an occupation for which he garnered considerable recognition locally in little time. Most expatriate buyers cannot claim Italian citizenship, and, as I will explain below, this has important implications.

EXPAT LIFE

‘There is so much history here’, says Emily, a middle-aged woman from Boston, ‘but everyone just left the old town and moved into condos in the boring new part of town. So I’m here to help preserve the old part of town.’ Emily is emblematic of many North American buyers – middle-aged, gainfully employed but unhappy with life back home. Her experience as a politically left-of-centre American sensitive to the political polarization that pervades her country today, to say nothing of what she experiences as a generally poor level of social services and a modest schoolteacher’s income that does not meet her hopes for a comfortable retirement, led her to sell her home and invest in a 100-square-metre house in Mussomeli, where she hopes to retire. As she explains it, life in the United States is disagreeable and stressful. From anxiety over school shootings in the US (‘Every day that I go to work could be my last’) to the possible consequences of illness in a country with a for-profit healthcare system (‘I could lose everything if I get seriously ill’), life back home is unpredictable and precarious. Suzanne, her compatriot, arrived through similar calculations. A middle-aged woman from Philadelphia precariously employed part-time in a range of service industry jobs, she hit a breaking point over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through a succession of public health lockdowns, she came to realize the thinness of her social network, and the futility of striving for a meaningful life in Philadelphia. Her frayed relations with her anti-vaxxer relatives, particularly her ruptured relationship with a favourite uncle, rendered her desperate for a change of scene. With her small dog, a pandemic-inspired acquisition, she packed up her apartment, put everything in temporary storage and tried to begin afresh at age 48. While Emily plans to live off modest investments (including the proceeds of the sale of her house in the US), Suzanne has limited monies and less than clear ideas about how to earn an income in Italy: ‘I have a friend who’s a massage therapist and is on call for a rich Russian, and he pays everything. I think it’s something I could try if I get a sports massage certificate.’ The more serious challenge is her inability to ascertain descent from an Italian ancestor – a great-grandfather, whose birth surname she does not know – which is a prerequisite for obtaining Italian citizenship on the principle of *ius sanguinis*. ‘I’m just winging it’, she admits, days before signing a contract for a EUR 5,000 property.

The desire to escape a fractious set of sociopolitical circumstances in favour of an idealized vision of life in rural Sicily motivates a good number of expatriates, including Michael, who claims to have burned many of his bridges in Australia prior to his departure. His experience of the apparent incredulity of close friends and relatives in Brisbane was disheartening. As he describes it,

I learned quickly who was a friend and who was not by their reactions to my decision. No one gave me their wholehearted support, but all I heard was a lot of people asking me, 'Are you crazy? Why would you go there? Why would you buy an abandoned house? What's wrong with you?' So I knew from that that I wouldn't be going back to Australia. No one was happy for me, no one thought I was doing something interesting. Everything there is about working, making money, buying stuff, and that's it. It's not the same here.

What Michael found in Mussomeli was a community receptive to newcomers and keen to have their participation in community life. His skills as an electrician render him an asset locally, and he charges fair rates to his many clients, several of whom are expatriates like him. He works every day and recognizes that his abundance of contracts speaks to the need for skilled trades in Mussomeli, which he sees as a town desperately in need of help. He cuts off work most days by mid-afternoon and will meet with his mates for an *aperitivo* by early evening, and may decide to retire early or, on weekends, meet friends for dinner or, during summer months, take day trips to touristy coastal locations. Michael's friendly and open manner renders him a fixture in the growing expat community in Mussomeli, which, at time of writing, numbers about three dozen people. This small cohort is supplemented in their sociality by enthusiastic locals who have lived away from town – often in the UK or France or Belgium – for a time but have returned and are eager to meet and connect with different kinds of people. One of these is Federico, the town photographer, who is always obliging in the assistance he offers expats in securing contacts and in sorting out papers for residency requirements.

Michael, as we know, did not need this assistance, but not everyone can so easily obtain residency permits, and most will face a series of hurdles that may prove insurmountable. Sam and Tracy, for instance, came to Mussomeli in 2019 and purchased a one euro home, to then give it up for a more comfortable rented apartment. Their two-bedroom unit on the top floor of a low-rise residential building (owned by the deputy mayor's father) allows them to live with amenities they could not enjoy in their earlier home in the old quarter. Having arrived on the promise of cheap real estate and a low cost of living, Sam and Tracy have lived in Mussomeli for stretches that long exceed the legal limit of ninety days of residency out of every 180-day period. As middle-class retirees from California they pursue a series of interests locally that Sam claims could cause no upset to the Italian government: 'Why should we not live here? We bring money, we cause no trouble, we're not crooks, so I just don't see why we don't have the right to be here.' Being among the first expats to settle in Mussomeli, their reputation as ambassadors for the town (Tracy writes a popular vegan travel blog and organizes walking tours for English-speaking tourists) has endeared them to many

locals, including members of the municipal council. With the mayor's support and the forbearance of the *questore* of Caltanissetta, they have been assured that their residency is not a problem, and that their status will be resolved with the creation of the much-hyped 'digital nomad visa', which will allow remote workers to live in Italy for up to three years (the legislation for which is stalled at the time of writing).

A wide range of other expats make their way to Mussomeli and towns like it. A good many are members of the creative class – a painter, a photographer, an amateur singer, an illustrator and a fashion designer (but also a Belgian trucking company magnate and her husband, a hard-drinking Dutchman and retired legionnaire) are among the many expats who have bought houses in Mussomeli – as well as entrepreneurial people who seize opportunities for greater self-realization and expansion of online businesses and digital brands. Among these is James, an energetic African American millennial and self-defined 'serial entrepreneur' who is founder and director of a US-based consulting and lifestyle agency whose name is inspired by the Myers-Briggs 'personality type' of 'Extroverted, iNtuitive, Thinking, Perceiving'. He offers one-on-one personal consulting services and online how-to courses on investment and career-building, and his comprehensive YouTube and Instagram channels feature videos and commentaries on real estate investing, entrepreneurship and travel. As the owner of two properties in Mussomeli – one for family use and the other to rent on Airbnb – he sees Sicily as ripe for opportunity for energetic entrepreneurs, similar to Brazil and Colombia, where he also travels and owns properties, and for similar reasons. As he puts it, Sicily, like Latin America, is marked by a history of exploitation. In what he defines as a 'classic colonial context', powerful actors have extracted wealth from it, and this has generated a widespread fatalism that forestalls peoples' willingness to tackle their circumstances in the present. Sicilians, like Latin Americans, defer to the premises of a difficult history and the assumption that it is futile to fix that which is broken, preferring instead to emigrate, as their deeply engrained guiding assumptions reflect the principle that life is a zero-sum game, and success is never rewarded but rather a target for suspicion. For him, this is a cultural disposition that does not generate closure to outsiders – one of his YouTube videos underscores that his Blackness is not a hindrance to meeting and knowing people and being respected in Sicily, because Sicilians do not have Americans' racist preconceptions – but on the contrary presents an opportunity for enterprising outsiders who want to try out new things. This curiously sociological assessment of Sicilian life, for all that it recapitulates long-standing stereotypes of southern Italy, reflects thoughtful attentiveness to local discourses, which however proceed from an assumption of Sicilian cultural defectiveness.

Other expats pursue more explicitly consumption-oriented lifestyle interests. One is a social media influencer who owns a *palazzo* in Mussomeli, which she features on her personal blog and various digital channels. Her luxury product and lifestyle brand sells organic teas and tea sets that bespeak refinement of taste and indulgence, while her website celebrates travel and self-improvement and offers reflections on life, love and friendship, which are themes central to her life-coaching courses at her online school. With credentials based in a 'Masters in Metaphysical Science with a strong focus on subconscious money programming', she offers, for a USD 1,998 annual subscription, personalized mentorship that will allow clients to achieve the inspiration necessary to earn their desired seven-figure income and total life success. Mussomeli is an occasional backdrop to her personal brand, a site that reflects her skill in refined forms of consumption and the associated embrace of the cornucopia of delights that make Sicily a beautiful, splendid place full of tradition, good food and picturesque people.

A more community-oriented undertaking consists of a charity kitchen established by an Australian food writer and former collaborator with a UK celebrity chef, which provides free meals to local families in need. As a self-funded endeavour that depends on the goodwill of a wide network of grocers and wholesalers, the kitchen can acquire from them, free of charge, end-of-day fresh produce for meal preparations, which are distributed twice weekly to a local women's shelter, several destitute families including infirm elderly with limited support networks, two families of Ukrainian refugees, and the local parish priests. As an important node that assembles a range of people who together realize a series of reciprocal obligations tied to their common interests as outsiders to Mussomeli, it pursues a charitable function that is inseparable from its founder's personal brand as it is curated on his widely followed social media accounts and covered in local news.² The performative virtue central to this endeavour is a matter of public record; no group dinner, no act of giving, no form of hospitality and no sharing of food is ever only a locally embedded event, but rather is documented with carefully framed images of food, selfies and group portraits that find their way to Instagram, Twitter and Facebook.

Mussomeli does not yet have a fully developed and formalized set of expat associations and groups that integrate newcomers into the local community (see Schiller 2022), and social ties with locals are fluid, opportunistic and often dyadic. Federico, the town photographer, partakes regularly of events hosted at the charity kitchen, and maintains cordial ties with several expats, just as Giovanni, a retired local firefighter and talented painter, is a key local contact for James and his family, and Emily has become close friends with Pina, a local amateur cook who was raised in the UK but returned in her twenties to marry a local man. For many newcomers, these new ties with

local people present an antidote to the condition of general anomie that they experience in the cities from which they arrive, reflecting Marc Augé's (2009) dictum that the proliferation of non-places – of homogenized, socially atomized zones – may generate a desire among the denizens of 'supermodernity' to seek out site-specific, emplaced communities where the fabric of day-to-day life depends on face-to-face sociality.

For several local interlocutors, friendship with expats offers a release valve from the grind of day-to-day relations with townspeople. As Giovanni tells me over the course of a walk through the old quarter of Mussomeli, being out and about represents the epitome of tedium: 'See how friendly we are with one another? Always stopping and talking with people? I can hardly walk two steps [and] my walk is interrupted, and everyone wants to inquire about my business. *Che rompimento* [what a pain]!' Giovanni is at turns irascible and cordial, and on this warm July day, the greater part of his ire was directed towards Sebastiano, the *assessore al turismo*, town councillor responsible for the tourism portfolio. The context of the dispute involved an event called Art Doors/Porti Tingiuti, originally proposed by Pippo, a local painter and sculptor, in which local artists negotiated access to a portico of an abandoned house in the old quarter to depict a scene characteristic of the culture or folklore of Mussomeli. Being the culmination of the *Settimana della cultura* (Culture Week), the creations would be unveiled on the final day of a lengthy period of activity filled with concerts and street food gatherings organized by the town's Pro Loco, the local events organizing committee. A flyer for the event included a map of the walking circuit where interested visitors could take in all the fresh artwork. Several days ahead of the event, Sebastiano called Giovanni to inquire, in apparently reproachful fashion, why he had not covered up his work-in-progress to maintain the integrity of the event, which was supposed to include an orchestrated unveiling of the artwork. Indeed, Giovanni thought the idea unnecessary, as did his friend Pippo, who never envisioned a grand unveiling. As far as Giovanni was concerned, this represented an undue interference that aimed only to seize credit for a local initiative:

We want to organize something nice after two years of COVID, and the ignoramuses on town council want to claim it for themselves! What does the *assessore al turismo* have to do with matters pertaining to art? I agreed to do this on my own terms, and now I get a call because I broke rules they decided to invent! I'm old and retired and I don't need this, I'll sooner just destroy my painting than abide by these silly rules!

Giovanni's painted door, one of the most evocative of the twenty or so contributions, depicted a chiaroscuro silhouette of James walking hand-in-hand with his young mixed-race daughter down an adjacent alleyway where Giovanni had romped as a child sixty years earlier. Inspired by a vision of

hospitality to newcomers, and indeed of local rebirth and new beginnings, of change and of openness, the image, and the idea behind it, won Giovanni many accolades.

FROM PAESE TO BORGO

The *Settimana della cultura* is one among several endeavours that are part of a larger ecosystem for the promotion of rural places in Sicily, and what they share is the desire to explore new vistas for towns with uncertain futures. The keywords of regeneration – *ripopolazione*, *ricupero*, *smartworking* and indeed *rigenerazione* itself – reflect a peculiarly urban and neoliberal vision for rural places reimagined as sites of consumption for urbane middle-class people. A significant platform of Mayor Giuseppe Catania's administration involved a plan for local regeneration that saw considerable infrastructural improvements in town, and the development of an ample online presence that would put Mussomeli on the map for would-be investors who could relocate there. His receptiveness to expats, his willingness to meet newcomers and his wide social media presence – not least his unrestrained digital tagging of thousands of followers, including dozens of expats, in his Facebook posts – impart broad reach that amplifies his popularity locally and regionally. As a rising political figure, he recently sought his fortunes with the Fratelli d'Italia party and was elected to the chamber of deputies for the Sicilian regional assembly in the 2022 national elections.

Mussomelesi position themselves within a global heritage-scape that celebrates a definition of their town as a place of inspired history (it has an important Norman castle) and authentic food, sociality and culture.³ Several local artists and artisans, as well as amateur cooks, are active in online communities and post images of their creations, and social media posts of the many local events offer an image of a vibrant town and together generate a brand that the municipal administration and mayor enthusiastically propagate on social media channels of their own. Toti Nigrelli, the deputy mayor, is an enthusiastic proponent of local investment in old real estate, and welcomes any form of outside interest or publicity in Mussomeli. Among these is ITS Lending, a boutique lender that offers crowdsourcing investment opportunities in abandoned houses in rural towns across Italy. Their portfolios are purported to offer guaranteed returns on restructured old houses in rural towns, and target would-be expats who dream of relocating to 'ancient and charming villages across Italy'.⁴ The ITS brand is part of EAT DRINK LOVE ITALIAN Ltd, a UK-based lifestyle platform, digital branding company, and consulting and PR firm that promotes 'the Italian lifestyle'. According to local sources, Mussomeli is the most successful investment site for ITS

Lending, with the entirety of its local projects fully crowdfunded, but many stalled for a lack of architects, engineers and workers who can see to their final restructuring. In a meeting in his office, Nigrelli lauded this enterprise, and, handing me a recent (December 2020) copy of the Italian business magazine *Millionaire*, beamed that Mussomeli is at the forefront of Sicily's rural transformation, and enjoined me to read the special themed articles in that issue on 'La rinascita dei borghi' (the rebirth of burghs). Talk of *borghi* and of the regeneration of semi-abandoned rural towns has hit a fever pitch in recent years as entrepreneurs, investors, journalists and academics feel out the possible opportunities of and alternatives to Italy's rural flight.⁵ But as Barbera, Cersosimo and De Rossi (2022) note, the redefinition of Italian *paesi* (sing. *paese*, village or small town) as *borghi* (sing. *borgo*, burgh) overlays upon these rural sites of human experience and habitation a set of connotations of bourgeois derivation. Namely, it depends upon a regeneration of rural spaces as sites for the realization of an urbane vision of modern life in a sanitized understanding of the quaint small town. The *paese*, with its dense, generationally rooted networks of kin- and kindred-based sociality, grounded in a rural economy, is adapted to the aesthetics, lifestyles, interests and pursuits of late modern urbanity unmoored from its habitat, a process that was accelerated over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic as more people left the city in order to embrace remote or hybrid models of 'work-from-home', in Italian known as *smartworking*. Furthermore, as Rizzo (2002) notes and as the foregoing suggests, the idealized image of rural villages depends on a conceptual sanitation that allows them to fit the aesthetics of the aspirational hashtag that calls to mind all the salubrious wholesomeness that is life in charming rural Italy.

Many expats in Mussomeli explicitly or implicitly embrace an understanding of their move to rural Sicily as an act of 'adoption' of a beautiful village in need of their custodianship. A key particularity of such patterns of small-town regeneration efforts is their concentration of focus on the built-up space of a town, extending no regard to the surrounding countryside that has historically sustained it. The rise of what Jean-Didier Urbain (2008) calls 'escapist new ruralism', characterized by urban peoples' seeking a reconnection to place and the creation of community-based ties, is paradoxically unmoored from any engagement with rural towns' surrounding territory (see Pazzagli 2022). In this sense, the decision to valorize the town and its architectural heritage is an explicit one, and expats do not come to Mussomeli or any other small town with the intention of communing extensively with its rurality, aside, perhaps, from admiring its vistas and rolling hills from afar. It is as if the long-standing Sicilian knowledge of the suffering that characterizes work in the countryside somehow, indirectly, is not lost on newcomers. As my friend Salvatore, a local shepherd, said to me,

‘Foreigners look at the countryside and say it’s beautiful, but they know nothing about it. They see it from afar, like a postcard, and seeing it that way, maybe I could agree that the hills and valleys are pretty, but even then, my bones hurt just looking at it, because I know what it’s like to work in it.’ Most local people are in general agreement, and the few remaining youth do not want to work in agriculture or pastoralism. Salvatore’s sons refuse to help their father with his small flock of sheep or his hay fields, leaving him no other option than to hire Albanian informal labour in the district whenever the work is too much for him.

REFLECTION

In a long-form interview with French journalist Marcelle Padovani, Sicilian novelist, essayist and parliamentarian Leonardo Sciascia described Sicilian history as a succession of domination by outside forces, collectively leaving behind the remnants of their civilizations, none of them indigenous to Sicily. He follows up his articulation of this commonplace with the disquieting claim that Sicily has never had a moment of historical grandeur all its own, an efflorescence of a properly local great tradition followed by decline and decay. Rather, all Sicilian history exemplifies an existential condition of permanent decay born of a pattern of foreign domination geared to wealth extraction that leaves in its wake a landscape of ruin. According to this interpretation of the past, the Sicilian landscape is replete with the detritus of a history of subjection that offers a stark reminder of the island’s place on the margins of the human story.

This gloomy assessment of the past rests on a view of Sicilian deprivation born of a denial of agency by powerful outsiders of diverse kinds. It is a place to be seen, sized up and conquered, or, today, consumed within a tourism imaginary where it is possible to find oneself and seek personal meaning, connection and the warmth of community, using the island as a conduit to realize a better way of being in the world. Such a reassessment may be read optimistically as a revalorization of a place long maligned in the Western imagination as a mafia-ridden backwater, but it reinscribes a set of images of Sicilian rurality that resonate with the aesthetic predilections of middle-class seekers who project their desires for an alternative to their own realities. It transforms rural Sicilian towns, with their decaying quarters and abandoned real estate, as sites of consumption for comparatively wealthy outsiders. These newcomers seek something that is missing from their own places of origin, and the meanings of Sicily to which they subscribe underscore its rustic charm and the social communion that is alleged to be possible only in a small town. For their part, local people – members

of town councils, local entrepreneurs and townsfolk eager to connect with different kinds of people – variously welcome expats while remaining uncertain of the long-term outcome of their acquisition of real estate. Clearly, the realities at hand transcend Sicily and resonate with a broader Italian concern with the fate of small towns and villages, as well as the desire of local politicians and businesspeople to integrate them within a broader touristic imaginary of Italy and Italian life that helps to supplement the usual urban circuits and sites of mass tourism. In Sicily, the depopulated small town, village or hamlet is thereby assimilated to the interests of a wide range of opportunistic actors, thus re-consigning them to spaces of conceptual extraction.

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NOTES

1. For an examination of second-home tourism in Sicily, see Volo (2018).
2. Compare with Trundle's (2014) examination of American women who reside in Tuscany. Being of predominantly middle- or lower middle-class, it bears noting that in the present case most expats' relationships to Mussomeli are not mediated by charitable giving or philanthropic action.
3. See Palumbo (2003) for an ample examination of heritagization in Italy.
4. See <https://itslending.it/how-it-works> (retrieved 8 February 2024).
5. A series of edited volumes (Barbera, Cersosimo and De Rossi 2022; Barbera and De Rossi 2021; Carrosio 2019; De Rossi 2018; Lucatelli, Luisi and Tantillo 2022) and two scholarly manifestos (Cersosimo and Donzelli 2020; Rizzo 2022) in recent years seek to critically assess and offer solutions to the problem of rural flight and abandoned villages in Italy.

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CHAPTER 15

MARGINS OF ‘NEOTARANTISM’ IN CONTEMPORARY APULIA

Giovanni Pizza



INTRODUCTION

Tarantism is a therapeutic dance carried out in Salento, a strip of land in the province of Lecce, Puglia, 40 km wide and 100 km long, with about one hundred towns and cities within it. Tarantism was historically based on the music of a therapeutic orchestra composed of a violinist, a tambourine player, a guitarist and an accordionist and was famously studied by Ernesto De Martino in 1959, with an ethnographic team that included an ethnomusicologist, Diego Carpitella, an anthropologist, Amalia Signorelli, a psychiatrist, Giovanni Jervis, a psychologist, Letizia Jervis Comba, and a social worker, Vittoria De Palma, alongside other scholars. Coordinated by De Martino, the founding father of Italian anthropology, this research on *tarantismo* is considered a classic of Italian anthropology and Salento one of the dance's places of memory.

In this article I reflect on heritage margins when tarantism, and De Martino himself, are turned into a cultural heritage asset, within the framework of a critical reflection on the heritage of tarantism.

‘Any historical re-enactment of ancient Tarantism is only possible outside’, cautions the new plaque that stands in the chapel of San Paolo in Galatina. The outside to which it refers is ‘outside’ of the small church, which constitutes the much mythologized location of Ernesto De Martino and his team’s observations of tarantism ‘in the chapel’ (De Martino 1961, 2005). The tarantism that took place ‘outside’, in contrast to inside, was painful to watch, practised without the music of the healing *orchestrina*, taken away from the ritual of sounds and from anything that could give it symbolic



Figure 15.1. Chapel of San Paolo in Galatina (Lecce). © Massimiliano Marianelli.

effectiveness. A device of pathologizing marginalization, it consumed the figures of the dancers in a manner akin to the gaze of the anthropologist. ‘Outside’, ‘tarantism appeared to recede to the level of a true psychic alteration, having lost any appreciable significance as cultural reintegration’ (De Martino 1961: 57; 2005: 32).

The new plaque echoes the ritual-bureaucratic utterance of ecclesiastical injunctions that once banned the ‘original’, ‘authentic’ tarantism, and that now prohibit its historical ‘re-enactment’. Such commandments did not always succeed against popular resistance, because even in the 1970s and 1980s male relatives of the *tarantate* (the women practitioners) were more effective than ecclesiastical rules in protecting women from the crowds of onlookers who wished to enter the sacred space of the church with cameras.

‘Neotarantism’ is the revitalization of tarantism. At the end of the last century the altar of the church and the well behind it (‘il pozzo di San Paolo’), the ethnographic objects of De Martino’s team, were made the subject of ‘guided tours’, which are conducted on, as it were, the ethnographic traces that they left behind. The chapel of San Paolo is today restored to a splendour it perhaps did not have when De Martino and his original ethnographic team were there in 1959. It is preserved by owners who meritoriously allowed its restoration, but seek to prevent the re-enactments of certain physical actions, such as climbing on the shelf, reaching out a hand towards the picture of St Paul and prostrating oneself on the tabernacle – all gestures of mirroring the saint that characterized tarantism in the chapel of San Paolo.

As in classic anthropological work on ritual space and time, the outside–inside dialectic encapsulated in the sign outside the chapel today captures

a sense of a separation between the sacred and the profane (or profaned) areas. The separation appears recomposed and immune to all confusion, like a sacralized border marking the impossibility of crossing a spatial threshold and welding together heterogeneous moments of history and memory. Indeed, mirroring the apparently sacred and inviolable space of the church, the town of Galatina itself was said by De Martino to possess a 'local immunity' to the bite of the tarantula spider that induced tarantism, to be a sacred space of its own. De Martino writes:

As soon as the team arrived 'in the field,' the first indication to surface was that Galatina enjoyed the privilege of being 'immune' to tarantism, due to the protection St. Paul bestowed upon it together with its 'fiefdom'. Thus, it would have been futile to look for tarantati in Galatina and the surrounding countryside included in the 'fiefdom'. The word 'fiefdom' calls to mind ancient social relations, long gone today; however, in local linguistic usage, the expression 'fiefdom of Galatina' was used above all to indicate a sacred delimitation – an area in which the tarante did not cause harm by concession of the Apostle to the Gentiles, who in Malta had dominated an echidna, a poisonous viper that had freed itself from a bundle of sticks the Saint had thrown to stoke a fire. At one time, there must have been other areas of immunity in the Salento and throughout Apulia, under the protection of one saint or another. (1961: 46; 2005: 23)

MARGINS

Galatina as a sacred space was the oasis of an *immunitas* that at the same time marked the boundaries of a *communitas*, as the Neapolitan philosopher Roberto Esposito (1998, 2002, 2010) argues with his evocative metaphors of *immunitas* and *communitas* at the conclusion of his itinerary of Italian thought (destined, however, not to reach De Martino's texts), between biopolitics and the concept of 'community'. Yet, observed today with the ethnographer's eye, these boundaries between sacred and profane appear uncertain and blurred, and no claim that comes 'from above', as authoritarian prescription, or 'from below', as a scatological claim, is able to separate clearly the space that unites them (Palumbo 2003; Collins 2008). After all, the frontier, the edge, the border, the margin, are 'hinges' rather than 'barriers'. Their definition is in the eye of the beholder, and in the power of the classifier (Das and Poole 2004).

As a smaller team than that of De Martino, with me as coordinator alongside Andrea F. Ravenda, Elisa Pasquarelli and Raffaele Gallo, we went to Galatina, the heart of *tarantismo*, to celebrate in 2009 the fiftieth anniversary of De Martino's research, conducted in 1959 and published in 1961 as the famous volume *The Land of Remorse: Contribution to a Religious History of the South*. We arrived on the evening of 28 June and found the chapel barred



Figure 15.2. Chapel of San Paolo in Galatina. © Raffaele Gallo.

and undergoing restoration. On the central part of the wooden scaffolding, someone had written the following in red paint: ‘APRITE LA CHIESA . . . BASTARDI’ (‘open the church . . . bastards’), which we did not photograph, planning to do so at dawn on the 29th. Surprised by the rain, we took refuge for dinner in the pub *Il Covo della Taranta* (‘The Lair of the Spider’), located near the chapel of San Paolo. Transformed into sepia-tinted blow-ups, Franco Pinna’s photographs, which accompanied De Martino’s 1961 book, looked down on us from the pub’s walls. The next day we found only a halo of red paint on the scaffolding, a remnant of the inscription washed away by the rain. But shortly thereafter we discovered that a hand, insistent and discreet, had rewritten the phrase in smaller characters, in marker pen, on the right-hand corner of the structure.

A year later, in May 2010, Andrea F. Ravenda began a new ethnography of the ‘No-Coal’ social movement that was developing in Brindisi, beyond the Salento area of the province of Lecce. That movement stood against the pathogenic pollution produced by the thermal power plant in Cerano (Brindisi), one of the largest in Europe (Ravenda 2014, 2018). At that time, Salento’s administrative frontiers were being widened; a ‘Greater Salento’ was entering the borders of Brindisi and Taranto. One of the concertmasters of the well-known tarantist festival *La Notte della Taranta* in Lecce, who had by then founded his own touring folk orchestra, had accepted an invitation from the main Italian energy company to an ‘energy festival’ financed by multinationals in the industry, including those who owned the Brindisi power plant (Spada 2010; Ravenda 2018: 160–67). Held in Piazza Sant’Oronzo in Lecce, the festival had chosen Salento folk music, which had emerged from *La Notte della Taranta*, as a vehicle for the commercial advertisement of sustainable energy, a brand that once again was based on the peasant ‘roots’ of the *pizzica* (the name of the dance in the tarantella).

With a banner reading 'NO AL CARBONE' ('no coal') acting as a shield, protesters were also present at the concert, and were supported by the more radical musicians. They were united by a movement that goes by the name 'Biocontestiamo' and were performing a sort of folkloric populism, treating popular music as a sure ally of their militant antagonism in defence of citizens exposed to the risk of cancer. In the clashes that followed, police were deployed to mark the boundary between the two kinds of spider songs and dances based around the music of the *pizzica*: a pre-existing conflict in the Salento heritage, musical and political field was now made physically visible, polarized in the confrontation in the square between two different groups of tambourines and batons.

What kind of boundary separated the two phenomena? The 'no coal' social movement naturally opposed the use of tarantist music in support of exploitative energy companies, but in a sense the two factions drew schizophrenically, or 'schizophonically' as music anthropologist Steven Feld might put it, taking up an expression of Murray Schafer (Feld 1995; Cestellini and Pizza 2004), on a single matrix. And what of the boundaries around the new 'Greater Salento'? It appeared on the geopolitical and cultural scene through interprovincial agreement, considered a part of the broader European border constituted by the south-eastern Italian frontier, the heel of our Italic boot.

This territorial interweaving (more or less institutional, more or less politically agentic) constitutes one of the possible examples that show here how radically conflicting dialectics can flourish around certain borders: (1) The sacred–profane threshold of access to the chapel; (2) The border between Lecce and Brindisi; (3) The border between uses and abuses of tarantism; (4) The slippage between connivance and popular struggle; (5) The clash between post-industrialism and the claim of the right to health.

These dialectics are sometimes a war of confrontation, sometimes one of position, with trenches historically marked by tactical expectations and strategic advances, webs of conflict woven by the spider of the *taranta*, conflict that has always spread from the geopolitical margins of Puglia to the heart of the Italian nation state.

In Salento, the field of communizing practices and discourses, taking on the guise of the process of patrimonialization, has always been animated, in its most intense moments, by a visibly evident conflictual pluralism, played out in the public arena and aimed at extending the spaces of democratic participation (Pizza 2015). Over time, the capacity of this field to construct frames for making the conflict explicit, to act as a laboratory, came to a halt, suspending itself after reaching its peak in the political campaign for the Puglia region's election of left-wing president Nichi Vendola and in the effects of his first presidential term (2005–10). The word 'narrative' was launched as an innovation of political communication from Salento and Puglia in their

guise as political laboratories. Suddenly everyone wanted to come to Puglia. The notion of 'narrative' appeared in the Italian public sphere in connection with sentimental popular enthusiasm for new forms of popular political participation organized in the 'Nichi factories' (the name given to the propaganda centres of the future president of the region). It was thought capable of going beyond representation and delegation, only to be abandoned today to populism and advertising.

Moreover, the passionate force of the word 'identity' quickly waned, not so much under the blows of critical anthropology as through the failures of eponymous councils and departments ('assessorati all'identità culturale'). Today it seeks to find its communicative force in the performative and emotional values of the word 'community': thus a concept long since deconstructed in the social sciences (Busino 1978) reappears in the institutional field of heritage in theoretically and politically controversial forms (Adell et al. 2015). Once again, the emotional and political power of words finds itself expropriated if, for example, processes of community inclusion are not considered subjects for an examination that could reveal their movement from the outside in, from the centre to the margins: to what networks are actors who intend to foster popular community participation connected, and by what values are they oriented? Critical ethnography examines such patrimonial processes and tries to answer such questions by showing, particularly in Italy, how the boundaries, thresholds and margins of the 'patrimonial community', such as the Italian 'cultural district', are far from being clear and defined (Palumbo 2003, 2006, 2010, 2013; Noyes 2006; Harrison 2013; Rozentel et al. 2016). Even the notion of 'community of practice' becomes a tool of populist discourse if it does not reveal the economic-financial matrix that originates it as a matter of concrete stakeholders who drive the legitimization of 'peripheral participation' through the manipulation of broader political-economic and financial networks. These conceptual-verbal metamorphoses, in which memory is lost in the timeless discursiveness of an eternal present, only revive the need for a true anthropological observatory on the current enthusiasm for the patrimonialization of living culture, which, in many cases, is associated with political appropriation (Giguère 2006: 126).

CONCLUSION

Scazzicare is a word used in various forms, as De Martino says. Let us follow him and read what he writes about this local verb:

this verb has a varied semantic use in the Salento: it indicates an action of lifting or removing a material weight or compact mass (for example, moving a straw mattress),

and in the psychic and psychosomatic framework, it denotes an abnormal and irresistible stimulation of sentiments and bodily needs, their indomitable pricking and unleashing. Thus, for example, infants *si scazzicano* when they cry desperately; hunger which appears suddenly and without restraint *si scazzica*; and of someone compellingly taken by emotion, it is said *li scazzicano li passioni*. (De Martino 1961: 64; 2005: 37)

In contemporary Salento, patrimonial enthusiasm is almost an anxiety: everything happens as if a sacred and at the same time democratic *taranta* makes the new 'heritage believers' *scazzicare* (Brumann 2014). That is, one is constantly striving towards a specific goal that, however, is difficult to reach. It is a sometimes spasmodic expectation of a kind of messiah who has never arrived, and perhaps will never arrive, but who *is always coming*. This surreal waiting for a heritage Godot increasingly resembles a treasure hunt. Galatina's UNESCO clubs organized a travelling theatrical re-enactment in 2015 (a re-enactment that no doubt resulted in the affixing of the new prohibition plaque on the chapel): young women on old carriages, dressed in snowy white, accompanied by carters dressed and with double-cut hair à la Dolce & Gabbana (a look already familiar to us, at least from early tarantism-inspired contemporary cinematography), performed in the area in front of the chapel a 'historical re-enactment' of tarantism under the gaze of citizens, tourists, scholars and students, armed with iPads and iPhones and enveloped in rather conflicting emotions.

In fact, the next day, familiar conflict burst forth in the ensuing controversy on local television stations, in Salento newspapers and on the social networks: is it respectful to contaminate the sacred area of the anthropological monument to suffering with a travelling theatrical event read as folkloric, and therefore as a spectacular 'clowning around'? The controversy evoked the intricate sequence of mutual attacks in the late twentieth century that constituted the public dimension of the conflict between 'purists' and 'contaminators' that marked La Notte della Taranta festival at its inception (Pizza 2015: 57–62). Again, the two positions appeared to elide each other: on the one hand the supporters of the re-enactment were able to escape the risk of violating the margins sacred to the memory of the place; on the other hand, the detractors seemed to draw on an idea of dehumanized monumentality by claiming respect for it, that is, removing it from the physical, noisy, chaotic and passionate forms of contemporary Salento cultural life.

What I mean is that that the young women re-enactors in 2015 were certainly far removed from the mournful physiognomies of old *tarantate*, and even their bodies were different from the embodied presences of avant-garde Salento theatre, but they certainly had more to do with the political forms of neotarantism than might appear to the anthropologist-censor's eye. They seemed determined to show tarantism publicly on St Paul's Day.

Their performance resulted from collective training, the outcome of local workshops on the meaning of women's bodies in the public space of contemporary Salento. The theatrical re-enactments were kitsch and may have taken perturbing forms, but they intended to allude to a possible embodied critique of commodification (as heritagization shows itself to be sometimes, as in 'merci-patrimonializzazione', as Berardino Palumbo has called it (making a sort of 'crasis', a fusion between the word commodification – which in Italian is 'mercificazione' – and the word heritagization – which is in Italian 'patrimonializzazione', as in Italian heritage is 'patrimonio': Palumbo 2013: 136, 144). The subjectivity of the women involved, explored ethnographically, had to reveal itself as parallel to women's anti-violence associationism. It defined, by dancing the *pizzica*, the boundaries of a new community that danced entirely 'on the margins of the state' (Goldstein 2008; Pizza 2015). Going beyond the superficial scandal, it could perhaps reveal contacts with the musical choreographic exorcism it re-enacted, at least insofar as, by producing the conflict of interpretations, it appeared capable of laying bare the violent roots of historical and contemporary tarantist representation that manipulated women's bodies in an incessant rhetoric of margin-making.

The English historian David Forgacs dedicated a chapter of his book *Italy's Margins* (Cambridge, 2014, translated into Italian in 2015) to a critical reading of Ernesto De Martino that includes *The Land of Remorse* (Forgacs 2014: 139–96). He has pointed out how the 'founding father' of our studies, perhaps more than the famous artist and writer Carlo Levi, was aware of the risks of paternalist populism in the construction of 'marginal' subjectivities and spaces, inherent even in the practices of ethnographic description. This is similar to the heritage discourse that today would like to turn De Martino into a ghost in the Salentine 'heritage machine'. In fact it has the same risk: precisely of obscuring De Martino's attempt 'to to build into his ethnographic practice a critical awareness of the power relations that this activity involved' (Forgacs 2014: 294). In his later, aborted, project of a religious history of the South, to be understood as a new cognitive dimension of the so-called Southern Question, De Martino (1961: 24) considered the 'marginality' of the South intimately connected with the rest of Italy. As Forgacs shows, the margin is certainly not a natural essence nor an essential quality, but an image projected by the state, and the 'South' was created as a margin in the process of Italy's formation as a nation state. The well-known 'peripherality' of the anthropology of De Martino and his disciples in relation to the international mainstream reflected that critical approach, including De Martino's missing conceptualization of 'the state'. In social historiography the term 'marginality' originated as a metaphor or 'image-concept' (Geremek 1979: 750). Instead, from its earliest days, the anthropology of the state has shown how in a national context the 'marginality' of anthropology mirrors

the 'marginality' of the nation state in the international community (Herzfeld 1987). More recently, it has become apparent that the margins are not only the peripheries or territories where the state 'has not yet arrived'. It is precisely the perception of the uncertainty and blurring of rule and law experienced in such places that has led to the realization that 'The entirety of the state is a margin' (Asad 2004: 279–87).

Gramsci, writing his twenty-fifth notebook in 1934 on the history of subaltern social groups, entitled it *At the Margins of History* (Gramsci 1975: 2277). To see in Gramsci's definition of subaltern an essential idea of marginality would be a mistake. Hegemony and subalternity are two inseparable moments of a single dialectic that Gramsci explored in his writings through a molecular analysis of the bodily life of the state (Pizza 2020). The essentialization of power and force relations is thus a paradoxical risk residing on both sides of the conflict between high and low. It is a risk fostered by heritage processes if these are not subjected to critical and reflexive ethnographic scrutiny.

Ten years ago, the US folklorist Dorothy Noyes, dealing with analogous issues, subjected the emotional and political force of the idea of 'community' to critical analysis, defining it as so powerful on the symbolic level that it can hardly be evaluated on the empirical one (Noyes 2006: 27). One can assess how true this statement is by leafing through the May 2016 issue of the monthly magazine *quiSalento*, entitled: 'The Beauty of Community in the Salento of Tourism' (Guido 2016). It is interesting to notice that a popular, important magazine with a large circulation, read by tourists and citizens of Salento with great consensus, employs the term 'community' as a choice of value: 'While in the metropolises the thread of humanity has been lost, in Salento the beauty of community is found again', the editorial concludes. An enthralling portrayal, which, like the sun in *Salento 1959*, envelops us in a ray of fascinating seduction in the face of the undoubted promise of beauty in a Salentine sea- and windswept summer. Nevertheless, when it is projected onto the politics of heritage, the emotional power of the word 'community', like a dazzling light, runs the risk of technicalizing the notion and concealing the dynamics that underlie it or that it triggers.

The point is not so much that we should anthropologically 'apply' in local contexts the awareness that emerges from the critical analysis of the complexity of cultural heritage processes, but that we should prevent the expropriation of cultural heritage in the name of democratic participation. We must avoid the possibility that in the name of communal heritage the living dimension of conflict and the democratic and innovative effect that derives from it are defused. Conflicts should not be eclipsed by a rhetoric projecting the ancient fetishism of the commodity into a new morality totally averse to critical confrontation.

The public anthropology I have practised in Salento, even challenging its academic legitimacy in my writings, has always intended to escape the teratological, parascientific metamorphosis that exalts the commodification of culture and of the person. It still does not give up the search for new dialogues and creative engagement. It is willing to analyse the real obstacles standing in the way of an insurgent democracy.

In this chapter I have sought to reflect on the margins of heritage and to critique the concept of community, beginning with the transformation of tarantism and De Martino's study of it into cultural heritage. The anthropology of historical metamorphoses in a place of memory such as Apulia can reconstruct the genesis of the territory, radical conflicts and traces of dialogue, contributing to the production of new forms of social knowledge and democratic citizenship. If we read the phenomenon of tarantism ethnographically through its margins, it unveils a complex strategy of cultural heritage politics that involves in its network institutions, anthropology, local culture and social memory of De Martino's own anthropological research on the south-eastern margins of Italy.

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CHAPTER 16

HERITAGE POPULISM

How a Hyper-Place Turned into a Village

Berardino Palumbo



INTRODUCTION

Militello in Val di Catania, the site where I carried out my ethnographic research, was included in the UNESCO World Heritage List (WHL) in 2002 together with seven other locations in the south-eastern part of Sicily. It was also recently named ‘the most beautiful Sicilian village for the year 2022’.¹ In several of my works, I have used the expression *hyper-place* to define the institutional, cultural and historical stratification of Militello, conceptualizing this term in contrast to the idea of *non-places* put forward years earlier by Marc Augé (1993). In the face of the polarity between (ethnological) places and *non-places*, the opposition between essential and relational space/time that, according to Augé, characterizes the places of modernity, and the surplus of time, space and individuality that connotes *supermodernity*, the idea of *hyper-places* allowed me to imagine a location that participated simultaneously, and in the long term, in multiple discursive regimes and moral economies. Above all, this notion allowed me to avoid framing the poetics of space/time, forms of subjectivity and styles of action that I saw unfolding in my field within a linear and evolutionary conception of history, such as the one underlying Augé’s theses. Compared to Augé’s *nonplace*, my *hyper-place* displayed a hyper-excited and metaleptic relationship with the past, very different both from the presentism (Hartog 2003) underlying the historiographic and statist notion of ‘places of memory’ (Nora 1984) and from the space/time saturation of a *supermodern* condition. And at the same time, the men and women who experienced it appeared to be skilful manipulators of their positioning in multiple scenarios. They showed the ability to

represent themselves to the outside gaze, depending on the moment, as part of premodern worlds, a national/state modernity, or post- and late modern existential conditions.²

According to Augé (1993: 73), in the supermodern condition ‘ancient places’ that are not integrated into the discursive order expressing the feeling of the times are ‘included in repertoires, classified and promoted as “places of memory”’. In other words, they are constructed as heritage. Beginning in 1996 and for the following decades, I monitored the process of Militello’s inclusion in the UNESCO WHL. I wondered how the political and devotional logics, the poetics of the self and local actors’ agency were able to interact with the institutional logics, moral economies and principles of heritage construction, as well as the ideological foundations, of the late capitalist present-day from which they stem. After some initial enthusiasm, it seemed to me that for years local administrators and citizens showed a widespread lack of interest in, if not outright mistrust of, UNESCO recognition. Other towns in the area that were also included in the UNESCO WHL (Noto, Scicli, Modica, Ragusa and Caltagirone, and, later, Syracuse) quickly recognized the economic and cultural value of the quality label awarded by UNESCO and thus moved towards exploiting their status to promote tourism. My hyper-place (its local intellectuals and administrators, but also ordinary people) instead showed pride in their town’s monuments and the weight of their history, yet seemed to fail to grasp its economic potential.

This is why Militello’s participation and plebiscitary victory in the contest for the title of ‘Sicily’s most beautiful village for 2022’, associated with a series of touristic and cultural initiatives untaken by local administrators, intrigued me. It seems that applying the label of borgo/‘Village’ was enough to insert this ‘hyper-place’ into the especially mediatic, but also touristic, scenario for the construction of heritage goods, almost as if this label managed to remove from the UNESCO label a certain veneer of prestigious, yet useless, officiality. In this chapter I consider the shift towards a (more) explicit commodification of the kind of resilient context that the Militello hyper-place has seemed to represent for years now. I will do this by embedding this ethnographic case in a more general analysis of global scenarios and the logic of what has been called the ‘heritage scape’ (Di Giovine 2009; Geismar 2015).

A RESEARCH TRAJECTORY

In the second half of the 1990s, when I began publishing the findings of my ethnography, an anthropological and critical approach to heritage construction processes (patrimonialization) was rare both in Italy and on the international stage. In Italy, indeed, anthropologists focusing on so-called

'demo-ethno-anthropological (cultural) heritage' were all confined to the tradition of anthropological museology.³ There were no ethnographic analyses, at least in the Italian context, that investigated the political and intellectual processes of constructing 'cultural things' (anthropological and otherwise), the social scenarios in which these heritage processes took place, the institutional imaginaries that guided such processes and, at the same time, the practices that social actors implemented around and through so-called 'cultural heritage'.⁴ To find references that I could use to compare in some way, I had to look outside the national context.

The French *anthropologie du patrimoine* was necessarily my first comparative reference.⁵ From the outset, however, I realized that the social practices and processes I experienced in my Sicilian field were clearly less tractable than the ones my transalpine colleagues were highlighting in their work. I was struck, above all, by the gap between the ways of doing and being I observed and the conceptual, theoretical and political frameworks underlying the French approach to heritage. In French ethnology, the very notion of *patrimoine* was configured as an institutionally pre-packaged and hyper-disciplined bundle, a sort of black box inserted within what Jeudy (2001) would (self-)critically call the *machinerie patrimoniale*. The universe I saw swirling around me had very few of the space/time coordinates that granted order and compactness to the galaxy of French *patrimoine* studies. The universe I observed did not have the same ideas about the nature of space/time as the French literature, often imaged by the institutional gaze of French scholars as linear, measurable and irreversible, while the practices of 'my' actors depicted them as manipulable and restless. There were differences in the more general moral economy (Thompson 1971; Asad 2003) within which the agency of human beings was defined: the 'French' models took this moral economy as isomorphic with that of an ideal modern rationality, while it appeared to me to revolve around 'poetics of the self' and forms of subjectification centred on 'strength', aggressivity and manipulation. In my field, moreover, public space and public culture took on configurations that were not at all guaranteed, contract-based, or essentially politically and socially 'aseptic', making them markedly different from the public worlds and modes depicted in the studies of my French colleagues.⁶

Another, more similar, comparative landscape was that of Anglophone anthropology. In fact, as early as the beginning of the 1980s, various anglophone scholars had begun to use a critical lens to investigate the politics of culture and their relations with the functioning of nation states. Herzfeld's (1982, 1987) work on Greece, Handler's (1988) on Quebec and Holmes's (1989) on Friuli, together with numerous other studies, provided detailed indications for interpreting the patrimonialization processes that I saw taking shape in Sicily. Besides, my ethnography did not begin as an

investigation of ‘heritage-related’ issues. In 1997, in my second year in the field, I was already interested in understanding the relationships between politics, devotion, ritual, violence, memory and poetics of the self. In the very first months of that year, a process took shape before my eyes that had begun with the collapse of the Noto cathedral dome (March 1996); over the course of a few years (1997–2005) it led to the listing of ten local towns in the UNESCO WHL and, more generally, an increasing tendency to structure the cultural, economic and urban planning policies of the so-called ‘Noto Valley’ around heritage issues. Working in the field and archives to investigate the conflict between social groups, I was trying to understand how certain ‘monuments’, art objects and documents, along with elements of urban space, were being deployed in the complex and ancient political and ritual game involving two simultaneously ‘religious’ and ‘political’ parties. Indeed, all of these ‘objects’ acted as rhetorical tools through which people could manipulate relationships between antecedence and succession, priority and posteriority, and pre-eminence and subordination along chronological axes and in political scenarios. This took place in a public space and culture dominated by *pòlemos* rather than contract logics, and connoted by the social and political attributes of the actors rather than by their aseptic and formal parity.⁷ As the patrimonialization process commenced and was subsequently structured, these ‘objects’, whose performative value and capacity to provoke conflict I had experienced first-hand over the course of two years of fieldwork, were inscribed in a different discursive regime. The new regime needed to be understood, first in terms of how it was structured within institutions and then in terms of its capacity to interact with (and act on) local contexts. My book *L’UNESCO e il Campanile* (2003) sought to investigate both dimensions. It was immediately clear to me that an anthropological approach to patrimonialization processes must necessarily employ theoretical frameworks capable of simultaneously considering bureaucratic procedures, political and diplomatic logics, ideological assumptions, symbols and classifications, conceptions of public space, policies, the more general political economy, and the implied forms of ‘heritage’ subjectivity characteristic of supranational and national institutions, with their various effects and affects. At the same time, the theoretical frameworks suited for investigating these processes needed to analyse ‘local’ ways of constructing space/time, investigate modes of human agency and enable an ethnographically dense examination of the ways that the ‘self’ is constructed and expressed, as well as the more or less institutionalized moral economies within which subjects and localities have produced themselves over time, specifically in their relations with nation states and other universalist institutions (from the Church to transnational agencies such as UNESCO). After all, it is here, in the potential for heritage

processes to offer a privileged analytical window for observing political and politico-cultural processes, the frictions connoting global late modernity, and the conceptual reconfigurations that these processes impose on the social sciences, that we find the reasons for which heritage has ‘exploded’ – a development that was scarcely foreseeable at the turn of the century – as a central focus of contemporary anthropological discussion.⁸

DISCREPANCIES

Observing the initial stages of UNESCO patrimonialization, it was very clear that conflict was central to this process. From the outset, age-old conflicts between the elites of the different towns in the area were rekindled while new lines of tension surfaced (Palumbo 1998, 2003, 2006a). In that period, Lowenthal (1998: 329) had already presented a general denunciation of patrimonialization, albeit one that too simplistically counterposed ‘heritage’, partisan and manipulative, to ‘history’, based on scientific fact-finding; besides this study, the idea that patrimonialization produces conflicts intimately linked to the political sphere was not widespread. True, Poulot (1997) had revealed the strong iconoclastic tensions that had developed around the places and monuments of the *Ancien Régime* in the early French revolutionary phase. At the same time, however, as the revolutionary process stabilized, after two decades of heated debate, the association between monuments, works of art and nation-building – the core intersection of the modern notion of *patrimoine* – had set (and achieved) the goal of defusing possible conflicts. From the ‘beginning’, therefore, heritage and museums, as expressions and instruments of national identity and unity-building, displayed that pedagogical vocation that has continued to characterize nation states’ heritage policies ever since. After all, the heritage rhetoric, and ideologies of a supranational institution like UNESCO are also characterized by a similar pedagogical drive (Hafstein 2018: 19). While permitting regulated diplomatic competition inside its procedures, UNESCO has long denied (at least on a formal level) the legitimacy, much less existence, of internal conflicts within sites and so-called ‘communities’. Conflict-ridden places are instead relegated to specific lists of sites considered to be at-risk. Even when – as in more recent years – the UNESCO world itself has begun to explicitly reflect on the conflict surrounding heritage, the ideological system of this transnational diplomatic agency does not seem to be able to acknowledge the kind of conflict I had the opportunity to see operating in south-eastern Sicily. However much UNESCO action produces conflict, and the organization now seems willing to take it into consideration as an important feature of patrimonialization processes, there are some instances of conflict

that do not seem to be acceptable: specifically, that is, when it erupts uncontrollably and erodes that intimate social level labelled ‘community’, ‘group’ or ‘locality’ that UNESCO’s topological and typological apparatus, as expressed by the various conventions and particularly the one on intangible heritage, takes as an objective, basic and to some extent unassailable reality.⁹

And yet my ‘communities’, woven over the centuries in a fabric brimming with factional passions and bitter conflicts – albeit cloaked to the gaze of outside observers – represented just this kind of community. After two years of fieldwork, my view of the patrimonialization process could not, therefore, fail to be steeped in these characteristics. This ethnographic grounding shielded me from the risk – run by much anthropological research on heritage¹⁰ – of uncritically embracing some or all the dense cultural assumptions and heavy ideological presuppositions accumulating under the all-modern, Western and political notion of ‘cultural heritage’ (Handler 1988; Palumbo 2003).

OTHER, NON-SEMIOTIC FORMS OF OBJECTIFICATION

Analysing the discrepancies between UNESCO ideo-logic, local and regional political dynamics, space/time poetics and the multiple moral economies within which people’s agency and subjectivities are constructed has constituted a key focus of my research agenda. After the 2003 monograph, I turned my attention to the beating heart of local political passions, festivals, the role of ritual parties, and the ‘religion’–‘politics’ nexus. In a later monograph, I showed how the requirement to represent one’s political and ritual scene, objectifying it over the course of several centuries for highly diverse audiences and contexts, was a constitutive feature of local historical events (Palumbo 2009). Indeed, the various moves to ‘culturally objectify’ the festive scene were embedded in complex genealogies. Tasked with determining, for example, whether I had studied ‘festivals’ or ‘religious contests’ or, as my friends sometimes called it, ‘u jocu’ (the game) between the two rival churches and parties of St Nicholas and St Mary, I could not help but dwell on the expression ‘war of saints’. This phrase was used especially in the post-Second World War period by the regional and national press and, therefore, by some local intellectuals to define party-faction conflict. It is used even today in the village whenever someone wants to give the outside world a quick and deliberately schematic objectification of the complex social practices associated with it. The expression dates back to a novella published in *Vita dei Campi* (1880) in which Giovanni Verga enacted a parody of ritual practices of whose complex political significance he could not have remained ignorant. One of the not-necessarily intended effects that Verga

achieves with his narrative choice is to make it impossible to explicitly state on the public stage (which Shryock 2004 identifies as the display stage of neo-national public culture) the passionate and violent dimensions of jurisdictional and devotional rivalry without adopting an ironic stance. Judging from sources up to the first decades of the nineteenth century, the complex political and devotional, religious and passionate nature of the local world could be explicitly stated and represented. From Verga's novella onward, such matters were instead subjected to a process of 'folklorization' that conditions their staging, their narrative and public objectification. Writing at the beginning of Italy's unification and for an audience ready to be enthralled by the exotic allure of an Italian South only recently brought into the fold of the nation, Verga could still afford to look ironically at 'wars of saints'. Only twenty years later, in the midst of anti-Southern clashes, Giuseppe Pitrè (1900) definitively relegated 'religious contests' and other forms of violent devotion to the 'ghetto' of pathological medicalization, albeit while continuing, at least in part, to perform them as a prominent actor in Palermo's political scene. From then on, it has been possible to represent the passions and attitudes such as the ones I investigate only as scandal or pathological deviation from public and modern normalcy. They are thus moved 'off stage', concealed inside the intimate and publicly unspeakable mound of local identity.

At first glance, therefore, the phrase 'war of saints' appeared – drawing on Herzfeld (1987) – to be a *disemic* construction serving to provide a representation shared with people from outside the community, even while concealing intimate terrains of local social life in which many actively participate. In fact, the people I had interacted with in the field not only seemed to be skilled at genealogically reconstructing the forms of 'cultural objectification' that practices, beliefs and emotions related to political and ritual conflict had undergone over time; it was evident that they were also shrewd at positioning themselves among the different objectifications that 'history' made available to them, requiring others (whether an ethnographer or an official from some government agency) to position themselves in turn. This way of interacting with a 'professional stranger' revealed the relative inadequacy of semiotically derived cognitive models, models such as the one Herzfeld (1987, 1997) proposed first for the Greek context and then extended to Italy (2003), based on a sharp and, as it were, bifacial (*disemic*) opposition between public officialdom and cultural intimacy. My interlocutors' skilful practices remained impervious to the configurations of supposedly modern subjectivity and public space. At the same time, they even evaded framing within that particular accommodation between the ideal institutional-Weberian forms of the nineteenth-century nation state and the (regional, local) contexts of practice that Herzfeld's proposed *disemic* schema and

notion of ‘cultural intimacy’ were intended to establish. It was evident that the analytical problem was not how to frame the level of collective belonging that defined the threshold of intimacy (the region or the city or locality, rather than the nation state, as Herzfeld 2003: 6–7 suggested) in Italy (or Sicily). Rather, it was to show how a multiplicity of levels of aggregation could, depending on the moment and context, serve as either a sphere of formal representation or space of intimate and sometimes awkward closeness. And, in so doing, it was to understand how social actors could move skilfully between these levels without ever rigidly identifying with any of them. In the area I investigated, each of the many ‘identities’ institutionalized and objectified as part of a long-standing history can thus function as a formal and official level in one context, and as an intimate performative space in another (Palumbo 2006a, 2009, 2013b). In short, this context is not shaped by a rigid set of *disemic* oppositions between inside and outside, intimate and formal, secret and public, local world, region and nation state. Sicilian ethnography instead offers us the portrait of an institutional polycentrism that, through the contextual staging of areas of relative intimacy and alterity, produces a complex identitarian polymorphism skilfully exercised by social actors.

FORMS OF RESISTANCE, ATTACHMENT AND COMPROMISE

Social actors’ positions are thus embedded in a complex genealogy through which the ‘local community’, with all its innermost divisions, has provided objectified representations of itself, thereby shaping its relations with diverse and multiple ‘external’ scenarios. Because of my ethnographic research, it seems to me that, for twenty years (2000–20), the leading groups and most Militello locals viewed the move to become a UNESCO-listed site as nothing more than a specific, albeit limited, opportunity: the chance to access a new level of ‘identitarian objectification’ and achieve a new facet of their own ‘hyper-place’. This was an operation to be undertaken with detachment and a healthy dose of ironic indifference within the fluid landscapes of late modernity. Beyond this, until 2021 there was no real attachment to the UNESCO vision with its associated ideological scenarios and the educational mission such a vision entails. Above all, there was no real attempt to adapt policies, practices and configurations of the self to the ‘commodified persona’ (Bunten 2008) that, according to some anthropological and critical analyses, characterizes the ‘commodification-patrimonialization’ of tourism (Palumbo 2006a: 65; 2009; Collins 2015).

The stance we find in other towns of the ‘Sicilian south-east’ affected by the UNESCO patrimonialization process between 1996 and 2005 was

different. While Militello and Palazzolo Acreide displayed a kind of wait-and-see approach, municipalities such as Noto, Scicli, Caltagirone and Syracuse made a different choice. Here, patrimonialization has had generative effects, giving rise to new forms of identitarian aggregation and redefining the cultural and economic policies of the various cities. More generally, back in 1996 neither the expression ‘Val di Noto’ nor the label ‘south-east’ had any meaning for the majority of the population.¹¹ Only ten years after the UNESCO heritage-building process began, the national government passed Law No. 77/2006 allocating EUR 1 million to the ‘Cultural District of the South-East’, the association of cities involved in this process and created as part of the unfolding of the UNESCO procedures. In turn, these policies have had concrete effects on the area. Between 2005 and 2007, a grassroots movement protesting the oil drilling licenses that the Sicilian Region had granted to some multinationals took shape in this newly invented ‘south-east’. Young university students, tourism workers, agricultural entrepreneurs, politicians, neo-rural immigrants and local, regional and national intellectuals took to the streets to defend these entities (the Val di Noto and Sicilian south-east) that only ten years earlier (when the UNESCO heritage process and its governance effects had not yet materialized) had no significance in their daily experiences (Palumbo 2011). The leading players in this movement were concentrated in the cities of Noto, Modica, Scicli and Syracuse, not coincidentally the same places where local elites had adhered more directly and with varying strategies to heritage policies, triggering, among other effects, significant processes of urban and rural gentrification.¹² The two most inland and least easily accessible towns, Militello, first and foremost, and to a lesser extent also Palazzolo Acreide, remained on the margins of this process. Up until just before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, they were less effective in attracting tourist flows and, therefore, quite insulated from these forms of gentrification. One consequence of these different ways of participating in patrimonialization processes is that only in the local areas that have been most open to such processes, accepting and amplifying their effects, do we see the emergence of ‘heritage emotions’ and identity and community sentiments sparked directly by UNESCO logic and its adoption (Palumbo 2011, 2013a; Fabre 2013). In contexts such as Militello where the governing classes and ordinary people alike have reacted with distrust and irony to these processes, on the contrary, identitarian passions continue to be rooted in political and devotional anxieties embedded in the town’s long-term existence. As I show below, these locally rooted emotions remain distant from the political and moral economy that is addressed by patrimonialization processes (Palumbo 2009).

SYMBOLIC ECONOMIES, MORAL ECONOMIES AND POLITICAL ECONOMIES

The political anxieties and factional passions of the people with whom I lived for almost three years could not be corralled into a shared ‘cultural heritage’, neither within the taxonomic and institutional procedures of the UNESCO system nor within the practices of the concrete actors involved in (at least) one local scene. The task, then, is to understand the reasons behind such difficulty and, complementarily, why heritage policies did instead prove effective in other similar nearby contexts.

A few studies by economists and cultural geographers dedicated to the case of south-eastern Sicily (Valentino 2003; Le Blanc 2006, 2010; Cuccia 2012) have sought to pinpoint lines of structural differentiation in this area that might explain why individual municipalities reacted differently to the patrimonialization process. Pietro Valentino is an economist and planning expert who authored the economic section of the Management Plan for the eight south-eastern Sicilian municipalities included in the 2002 WHL. In drafting this Plan, he wrote:¹³

The critical step for entering into a dynamic of economic growth that is stable over time and sustainable is to set up a network of activities that is extremely integrated and highly specialized, that is, through a development strategy that must necessarily involve the fusion of endogenous resources, in other words, of the resources that we might define as the ‘raw materials present in the local area’. . . . In this vein, it is necessary to plan and then manage integration processes both at the level of interventions and on the local level; it is necessary, in other words, to ensure that *a real ‘local product’ is created and offered, [a product] which, although complex and multipolar, can be perceived from the outside as having its own singular character.* (Valentino 2003: 241, italics added)

Constructing a ‘local product’ endowed with its singularity is the primary objective when planning the economic development of an area subjected to patrimonialization processes. In addition, the cultural dimension (material and immaterial, as specified both in the lexicon of district-level economics scholars and, significantly, in UNESCO language) occupies a central place among ‘the raw materials present in the local area’ to be transformed into a product. The precise meaning of ‘culture’ in this literature is not easy to understand, however, at least from an anthropological point of view.¹⁴ Generally, in this sector the cultural dimension (when not equated with art, monuments and knowledge, or reduced to a series of assets and potentially productive sectors), the social dimension (often identified with ‘social capital’ and ‘symbolic capital’) and the notion of the ‘symbolic’ itself, evoked but never defined, remain difficult to manage by forms of institutional

knowledge, with their disinclination for (self-)critique. The impression is that ‘community’, ‘local community’, ‘culture’ and ‘symbolic value’ play a ‘magical’ role in these areas, appearing as undefined concepts with essentialist connotations and thus being well-suited to supporting arguments that, at times, take on a tautological character. This is the case of the notion of ‘identity’ as used in the aforementioned ‘Val di Noto’ Management Plan:

The creation of a ‘system of Baroque’ in the area can trigger cumulative processes by attracting new tourist demand and, at the same time, creating ‘economies of agglomeration’ stimulated by the externalities resulting from the emergence of more highly ‘ranked’ services and the dissemination of new experiences and knowledge in the area. This system would be distinguished *by the Baroque brand, which can also benefit from UNESCO recognition*. Integration should take place both economically and socially by *strengthening local communities’ identity and sense of belonging*. *The growth of identity, if it succeeds in transforming Baroque heritage into an effective collective good*, could also have significant economic repercussions because, on the one hand, it would make the population co-responsible and co-participatory in the activities of preserving and valourising the assets and, on the other hand, it could stimulate entrepreneurial dynamism and transform it, if supported by cohesive activity on the part of local authorities and a functional system of governance, into a bottom-up planning process, a decisive factor for the success of the operation. (Valentino 2003: 243–44, italics added)

The ‘structural’ factors identified by economists and geographers (distance from the sea; challenging accessibility caused by precarious road and rail connections; the weakness of the economic sphere, increasingly tied exclusively to hillside agriculture) have certainly exerted a certain weight in making it difficult for the local context to take economic advantage of the potential represented by the patrimonialization process. To understand the lack of interest locals have shown in a heritage economy, however, it is also useful to identify other interpretive approaches that would be more accurate than the vague notions of culture, society, symbol and identity employed in economist analyses in capturing the various symbolic, moral and political economies at work in the patrimonialization process. Despite its structural limitations and economic and demographic decline, it cannot be said, for example, that Militello (i.e. its ruling class and a significant portion of its inhabitants) has lost that sense of ‘identity and belonging’ that, according to these economists of patrimonial culture, should play a decisive role in ‘transforming Baroque heritage into an effective collective good’. Quite simply, the identity and sense of community operating in this ‘hyper-place’ have a hard time relating to the label constructed during the patrimonialization process and to the imagined ‘identity’ of the heritage scenario. What is it, then, in the ways of being of people in a hyper-place such as Militello, that generates these frictions? And, complementarily, what is it in the heritage label that prevents it from suiting a local scene of this kind?

Answering such questions requires us to delve into the taxonomic and symbolic systems of the *machinerie patrimoniale*, to understand its logic and investigate its effects. After all, precisely because of their theoretical ‘naiveté’ in analysing symbolic and cultural dimensions, economics-complicit studies using the logics of patrimonialization end up making explicit some of the symbolic and ideological features specific to their operations. Founded on the logic of ‘cultural objectification’ and centred around the idea of possession (Handler 1988), heritage agencies and processes transform ‘cultural things’ into a particular kind of commodity. Nation-states retain the ultimate rights and duties of ownership preservation and management about these commodities, while UNESCO’s humankind holds ethical and formal ownership.¹⁵ In analysing the Sicilian case, it immediately seemed clear to me (Palumbo 1998, 2003) that the UNESCO patrimonialization process was based on producing intrinsically stereotypical and schematic labels and attributing them to listed place-sites. These labels work to grant each node of the world included in the various lists a differential heritage value, an intrinsic quality or identity that is proclaimed to be universal. Being included in the various WHLs involves being assigned or acquiring a ‘quality label’ that, by distinguishing this ‘good’ from any other, certifies its value as a precious commodity within a market that basically sells essentialized and stereotypical heritage identities for a global imaginary and tourist market. This cultural commodification process (Palumbo 2006a, b), that is, the construction of essentialized cultural specificities in terms of heritage commodities, is neither neutral nor sterile. As we have seen, it can generate emotional, social, cultural and political effects, or even forms of accommodation, if not outright resistance. To begin, it has effects on the bureaucratic and institutional level: the documents produced at various institutional levels during the processes, together with the literature – some of which is academic but nonetheless uncritical and engaged – have the effect of conferring reality on social entities and communities that simply did not exist before. ‘Things’ such as the ‘Val di Noto’, the ‘cultural district of the south-east’ or ‘the territories of the Sicilian Baroque’ are constructed as sociocultural realities by the objectification procedures of transnational agencies (UNESCO), national ones such as MIBAC, regional ones such as the Sicilian Region, superintendencies and numerous provincial and municipal administrations involved in the patrimonialization process I analysed. Thanks in part to the ‘organic’ activity of consortiums, ministerial officials, experts, planners, economists and urban planners, they become administrative realities. The commodification of culture can thus be said to generate new and distinctive institutional realities; activated and operationalized, these realities can in turn produce governmental effects (Palumbo 2010; Collins 2015; Hafstein 2018). In the ‘Val di Noto’, in the span of only a few years, under precise political and economic

conditions and thanks to the efforts of agencies at different levels (political groups, the press, the media, local and national intellectuals, universities with their scholars disciplined in heritage logics, cultural associations and, increasingly, tourism operators, NGOs and foundations), some sectors of local populations have come to treat these bureaucratic and institutional constructions as part of their identities. The imaginaries, moral economies and configurations of the self in which this takes place are themselves linked to global processes of commodifying culture. Such imaginaries include ‘Montalbano’s Sicily’, televised and mediatized;¹⁶ centuries-old olive trees, loved and cherished by managers for northern industrial firms who have moved to live in the countryside of Modica, and sold off by local farmers following the logic of gentrification; the original grain crops of Terra Madre, farmed biodynamically by Roman neo-ruralists; old abandoned farmhouses in the Ragusa area, renovated in sturdy stone with capital from outside the area and transformed into luxury resorts, showcasing the bright and sunny style imagined to be typical of those worlds, sometimes clashing with the opaque origins of the capital being invested; B&Bs appointed with art nouveau furniture, serving orange juice (often industrial) and ricotta *ravioloni*. However, they also include patron saint festivals that aestheticize themselves and put on a show for the outside eyes of television channels, photographers and tourists, or struggling confraternities that aspire to enter one of the books of the Regional Department of Cultural Heritage and Sicilian Identity’s Registry of Intangible Heritage (Registro delle Eredità Immateriali or REIS), managed by academic document-drafters.

Keeping in mind the ‘cultural commodity’ nature of heritage objectification, we might formulate in new terms the questions aimed at understanding why towns in the ‘Sicilian south-east’ have reacted differently to the patrimonialization process. Indeed, we have seen that the element that proved difficult to fit into the UNESCO bureaucratic apparatus was the intimately conflictual character of the local public scene. In Militello, people’s community loyalties continued to belong to the factional and jurisdictional subdivisions that have connoted the village’s existence for the previous five centuries, rather than the abstract, tamed label of ‘World heritage’. Compared to other, earlier and more deeply rooted objectifications of ‘intimate’ dimensions (‘the war of saints’, ‘u jocu’ or ‘parochialism’), heritage objectifications remained too formal and external. They could be played out in some institutional contexts as part of a long-standing dialectic between institutional polycentrism and a situational polymorphism of membership, but above all they proved unable to refer, even allusively, to the deeply contentious character of local social life. Even when political and economic tensions erupted beneath the heritage rhetoric in the broader area covered by UNESCO activity, these tensions remained unspeakable in the sphere

of patrimonialization (Palumbo 2006a). At first, I was inclined to assume that this cloaking of social and political conflicts at the grassroots level was a direct consequence of the way UNESCO's diplomatic imagery is institutionally articulated. Such an interpretation remains valid to some extent, but with the passage of time it became apparent to me that the reasons driving people to cover up conflict were more complex and overarching. In my view, the tendency of official heritage rhetoric to conceal politics, with its interests, tensions and stickiness, and render it unspeakable, as well as the move to suppress social life with its interconnections and passions, along with the removal of the concrete practices of real social actors, seemed to be indices of a more general tendency, specific to neoliberal political and economic systems, to decouple the sphere of production from that of consumption (Wolf 1982; Harvey 2007). The dematerialization of the economy, which can take place through the increasingly pronounced removal of the materiality of social ties, relations of domination and forms of exploitation, corresponds to a dematerialization and mediatization of social and cultural life. Seen in this light, the UNESCO WHLs system appears to be a transnational taxonomic system that – like other systems for classifying the global imaginary (Palumbo 2010) – produces formal labels (endowed with an iconic character) for an ecumenical marketplace of imagined immaterial and symbolic goods. The UNESCO taxonomic, bureaucratic and institutional system does not merely produce objectified and essentialized 'cultural things'. It also transforms these 'cultural goods' into labels of collective identities, themselves imagined as essential, abstract, rarefied and immaterial. Like 'localities' in Appadurai's (1996) analysis and in line with a tendency typical of neoliberal systems, these labelled identities are presented as exclusively cultural phenomena, separated from the political and social contexts within which they were produced. In a scenario of this kind, 'authenticity', 'typicality', 'antiquity', 'diversity' and 'identity' become symbolic resources for which and through which various institutionalized powers compete in the attempt to secure a (better) position in what Herzfeld (2004: 4) has called a 'global hierarchy of value'. The UNESCO system not only conceals fractional conflicts (such as those in Militello), violent forms of action (e.g. ritual processions involving violence on human bodies or figures of organized crime) and 'deviant' subjectivities (such as, for example, those described by Collins in his 2015 ethnography of a neighbourhood in San Salvador de Bahia) because they deviate from an ideal and ideological vision of public and 'democratic' space/time. It also produces new sociopolitical conflicts linked to its own institutional activity. At the same time, however, it removes these conflicts from the space of representation because the mechanism behind this system – and perhaps its main purpose – is to construct official, rarefied symbols (separate from the logic and concrete interests of the sphere

of political and cultural production) that can function as identitarian brands in a global marketplace of the imaginary. These are symbols that are capable, for that matter, of acting as instruments of a new neoliberal-style global governance (Palumbo 2010; Collins 2015; Hafstein 2018).

RAREFACTION

The institutional effectiveness of such processes relies on classification operations that require identitarian labels imbued with specific semiotic connotations. ‘Communities’, that is, social groups, are indeed always imagined as part of universes of meaning and through the workings of institutionalization processes. Groups of relatives (e.g. a *razza* of the Samnite mountains; Palumbo 1995) are imagined based on their sharing an onomastic trunk (proper names and a group moniker), a common land (the area where they live) and shared ‘biological’ matter (blood); a nationstate, on the other hand, employs other symbols that are more ‘stretched’ (Herzfeld 1992) but are directly founded on symbols of a more ‘elementary’ level (e.g. ‘brothers of Italy’, ‘sons of the motherland’, ‘shed blood for the motherland’). In heritage-oriented identitarian scenarios, ‘places’ and neo-communities are labelled using even more rarefied symbols: for example, the ‘troglodyticity’ of Matera (listed in the UNESCO cultural heritage WHL based in part on this criterion). This aspect is even more evident in the case of so-called ‘intangible cultural goods’, which, according to Conventions (both UNESCO and European), are supposed to be identified following a request by local communities or groups of individuals. The idea is that, by practising certain rituals or sharing specific techniques and knowledge, such communities apply to institutions for recognition, to be granted a heritage label attesting to their objectified cultural value. ‘Truffle hunting and extraction’ (the label under which the newly established UNESCO ‘community of truffle hunters’ are framed as self-identifying) or ‘the art of the Neapolitan *pizzaiuolo*’ (a quasi-DOC label that I imagine identifies a community of skilled artisanal pizza makers) are taxonomic categories expressing belonging and constructing identities that are less and less substantial, more and more rarefied. In short, they are less or not at all rooted in the spaces of intimate and substantive sociality or production and reproduction: they are symbols of symbols of symbols, objectifications of already objectified ‘cultural things’. In these cases, lacking ‘common symbolic roots’ (Herzfeld 1992), it is difficult to engage in that game of reciprocally manipulating the meanings attributed to symbols and stereotypes; the game that, involving both the top and bottom of the system, enables the state machinery to function on a daily basis. Being less ‘rooted’ in the everyday experiences of concrete social actors belonging

to local scenes, commodified and patrimonialized identities seem to be less capable of kindling affections, emotions or elemental feelings of belonging than identities (based on blood, kinship, family, dead and ancestors) of the domestic sphere. They also lend themselves less to the game of display and concealment, stereotyping and manipulation that characterizes relations between levels of collective belonging within a nationstate (Herzfeld 1997; Shryock 2004).

Schematization, abstraction and rarefaction of the labels marking specific social groups, thus giving them institutional life and form; the suppression of conflict, multiplicity of positionings and chronological fractures; disregard for, if not outright concealment of, the very logics driving label-production and neo-communities: if we concede that these are constitutive traits of patrimonialization processes, it is perhaps easier to understand some of the reasons that they are so contagious in the political-economic dynamics of our late-liberal contemporary age. The fact that heritage labels are so rigid and schematic, and at the same time sustained by an institutional drive giving them social life through a pedagogy of consumption and mediatized imagery, makes them very similar to a quality brand or advertising device. In this sense, the relationship between the brand and the social entity it stands for has a character that is both creative and iconic. It is creative because it produces new social 'realities', easily definable and immediately spendable in a mediatized market of cultural differences; it is iconic because forms of cultural difference (i.e. groups, individuals and 'communities') have a 'moral' (institutional and commercial) obligation to conform to the heritage label or brand: a 'community of Neapolitan *pizzaiuoli*' who produce pizza with starch-derived banana flour (a choice that is not altogether improbable if the *pizzaiolo* is a creative Ghanaian who has long lived in the neighbourhoods of Naples), or of heritage festive-machinery porters who choose to use a motorized wagon to pull their statues (a choice and change that is quite frequent in non-patrimonialized festive scenarios in Italy), would no longer properly represent the 'communities of practice' institutionalized through any of the various conventions or included in some List or Registry.

The point of view argued here is quite evidently opposed to the one advocated by heritage specialists through institutional, scientific, media and 'popular' rhetoric. Institutional experts, the many social scientists driven by participatory enthusiasm and an imaginary of care, together with sociologically specific portions of social groups, instead operate on the premise that it is the 'communities' in question (and therefore they themselves) who actively seek to be granted a heritage label. It seems obvious to me, however, that without a prearranged institutional mechanism and pre-existing configuration of the taxonomic and symbolic heritage scenario, such requests not only could not be evaluated – they could not even be put forward. There

is undoubtedly an ever-increasing demand for (being labelled as) ‘heritage’, but at the same time, the institutions in charge also display an ever-increasing tendency to further the superfetation of cultural differences and volatilization of social relations. World Bank documents and guidelines have been proclaiming for over thirty years that ‘culture matters’. To matter, moreover, ‘culture’ must be attributed value, produced and reproduced, objectified and rendered iconic in the form of differential identifying brands. The commodity character of cultural heritage is produced and played out precisely in the relationship between the demand for the patrimonialization of culture and the supply of disarticulated, fragmented and depoliticized culture, culture that is rendered ephemeral and, finally, packaged in the form of ready-to-wear symbolic brands.

IN THE END, A VILLAGE

With these final observations, we can now return to the site of my Sicilian research and its readiness to embrace the idea of (re)imagining itself as a village (*borgo*, in Italian). In my ethnographic writing, I have tried to understand the jurisdictional, economic and political stratification of this ‘village’, to explore its historical complexity and the specific poetics of self and action that have connoted its existence over the past five centuries. Having observed the process through which this ‘hyper-place’ was inserted into the UNESCO patrimonialization process, I wondered how forms of complexity, social practices and political and devotional logics could possibly relate to the moral economies typical of our late capitalist present that provide the framework for the logics driving supranational agencies. For years I have observed widespread disinterest, if not outright distrust, on the part of administrators and citizens about UNESCO recognition. Other towns in the area that are also included in WHLs perceived the quality label awarded by UNESCO as having economic and cultural value. My ‘hyper-place’ did display pride in its valuable sites (albeit always within a deep-rooted sectarian logic) and the weight of *its* history, but it did not seem capable of recognizing its commodity and heritage potential. For more than two decades, its ruling groups and ordinary people seemed to me mainly interested in continuing that game of concealment and unveiling, of ambiguous positioning and communicative defiance, that had for centuries shaped the building of relationships between their world and the diverse, multiple external settings in which they knew themselves to be encapsulated. UNESCO labelling was too simplistic, rigid and distant to serve as an effective and meaningful terrain of moral and performative attachment: it was viewed as a label tinged with an insufficiently comprehensible veneer of intellectuality.

Over the past few years, the situation seems to have changed. The area has suffered a sharp demographic crisis linked to significant economic decline, the historical town centre has become depopulated, a form of pastoralism that is invasive, and in some senses risky, has spread throughout the countryside and few tourists visit the area (compared to the well-documented exponential increase of tourism in other 'Baroque' centres). These shifts seem to have reduced the margins for game-playing and autonomy available to local actors. It seems to have been sufficient, therefore, just to apply the brand of 'borgo' ('village') to insert this 'hyper-place' into the mediatic and touristic scene of heritage goods, as if this label were capable of purging from UNESCO recognition that rhetorical veneer of prestigious officialdom that cloaked its intimate nature as a quality brand to be showcased in the market of cultural identities. The 'village' is a transparent commodity, to be packaged in a certain way and sold in that market. You would never imagine yourself as 'the most beautiful village in Sicily' (or as 'the Village of Villages') outside of a mediatized competition that offers itself up in a transparent and fixed way to an outside audience. No stratification, no friction or conflict, no historical fracture and no duplicity: the village, like heritage 'communities' but in a more explicit form, is an imaginary 'community' pacified and available for use.

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NOTES

1. By the website All Food Sicily (2022).
2. I used the notion 'iperluogo' in 2003 (41–50) and 2006. A few years later, Berliner and Istasse (2013) took up the notion again, but they did not seem to recall the way I had used it.
3. Cirese (1977); Clemente (1996); Lattanzi (1993); and Padiglione (1994).
4. Since then, the Italian landscape of critical studies on patrimonialization processes has expanded: see Pizza (2004) and the article included in this volume, Siniscalchi (2010), Bindi (2013) and Macchiarella (2011).

5. See Babelon and Chastel (1980), Chastel (1986), Jeudy (1990, 1995), Fabre (1994, 1997), Poulot (1997) and Audrerie, Soucher and Vilar (1998).
6. Studies employing a critical perspective also appeared later in the Francophone context: see Jeudy (2001), Tornatore (2004, 2011), Fabre (2009, 2013), Barbe (2013), Berliner and Bortolotto (2013) and Bromberger (2014).
7. Since 1600, the village's life has been shaped by an opposition between two 'parties' (*partiti*) identified with the parishes of S. Nicolò–SS. Salvatore and S. Maria della Stella: see Palumbo (1997, 2000, 2001a, 2001b and 2004).
8. Regarding studies conducted up to the middle of the last decade, see Geismar (2015); for the years immediately following, see Hafstein (2018). In general, some key sources are Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2006), Comaroff and Comaroff (2009), Daugbjerg and Fibiger (2011), Collins (2015), Meskell (2015) and Herzfeld (2021).
9. See Hafstein (2018). Early literature emphasizing the importance of conflict includes Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2006) and Noyes (2006).
10. For example, Breglia (2006), Di Giovine (2009), Brumann (2009), De Cesari (2010) and Bendix, Eggert and Peselman (2012).
11. The first – stemming from the administrative tripartition carried out in the Arab era – circulated in art-historical literature. The second, coined in Syracuse political and intellectual circles between 2001 and 2003 and linked to the idea of establishing a 'cultural district', gradually became established over the following years.
12. See Palumbo (2006a, 2011 and 2013a).
13. The Management Plan is a political and economic planning document that UNESCO required applicants to prepare at the moment of beginning the application procedure for listing the late Sicilian Baroque cities.
14. Cf. Santagata (2002), Santagata, Segre and Trimachi (2007) and Sacco, Tavano Blessi and Nuccio (2008).
15. This holds true even in the case of intangible 'cultural things', which, according to the 2003 UNESCO Convention, require recognition and self-attribution of significance by 'communities, groups and even individuals' in order to be entered into the list. In fact, nation states retain legal ownership over the recognized 'good' and bureaucratic responsibility for basic classification procedures.
16. The highly successful TV series *Il Commissario Montalbano*, based on Andrea Camilleri's novels and filmed in locations in south-eastern Sicily (Scicli, Modica), has sparked significant tourist flows to the area.

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PART V

REGIONS AND LANGUAGE



CHAPTER 17

CONTEMPORARY ITALIAN REGIONAL ECONOMIES AND THE CONTRADICTIONARY RHETORICS OF DEVELOPMENT

Michael Blim



INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I show how collective agents consisting of entrepreneurs, politicians and policy-oriented academic intellectuals of the regions of the Third Italy, a portion of the Italian peninsula located in the centre and to the north-east along the Adriatic Sea, generated descriptions of post-Second World War economic growth that celebrated the regions' distinctive reliance on small and medium enterprises, their family-like social solidarity and their capacity to produce wealth. I argue that the overall insistence on the uniqueness of the regions' development degenerated over time into a form of regional branding that obscured growing economic problems while forestalling many of them from being lumped in with an economically sinking and much stigmatized Italian south. So successful were they discursively in absorbing the analytical energies of political leaders and policy analysts concerned nationally about the economy that the critical condition of the south by comparison receded into the background of Italian life. The recent political turn towards the right throughout the Third Italy reflects local and national economic decline along with a changing view of how the regions' peoples 'fit' within the Italian nation. The Italian state controls 60 per cent of the national gross domestic product, and the south is by far the area in most need. As the economies of the Third Italy have slid downwards along

with the incomes of their inhabitants, the regions find themselves in competition with the south, which can make greater and more serious claims on the national patrimony. The dilemma for the Third Italians is to attract more state support – something that contradicts their original feel-good claims of having built their economies without extensive state support – without becoming tarred with the south-stigmatizing brush of environments unable to achieve economic flourishing.

PREMISE: A LAND UNIFIED AND POOR

‘Plenty of bones, not enough meat’, said Fernand Braudel, recalling a geographer’s quip about the Mediterranean area. Mountains surrounded it, too often keeping back the rain. The plains between the mountains and the sea were scarce and small, almost oases in an otherwise arid land marked more by spring torrents than great rivers. Despite millennia of human engineering, many peasants before the age of commodity-traded foods would find truth in Virgil’s homely injunction that when the grain ran out before a new harvest, ‘shake the oak tree of the forests to satisfy your hunger’ (Braudel 2002: 12).

The Mediterranean was a land of great variety, but not of plenty, and this heritage was bequeathed to modern Italy. The grand imperial shadow of ancient Rome and the glories of the Renaissance had also obscured the fact that Italy by the time of the Grand Tour might have been an object of upper-class curiosity, but it was a desperately poor land. Its economy had been losing ground steadily vis-à-vis its neighbours throughout the nineteenth century. By 1870, it garnered between 30 and 45 per cent less GDP per capita than its neighbours. Though the Risorgimento unified Italy, the new state inherited a peninsula devoid of the coal and ferrous metals necessary for its catch-up industrialization campaign. Half the population were desperately poor, a third were chronically malnourished, two-thirds of adults were illiterate and life expectancy was 30 years of age. What money there was derived ultimately from land rents, and the landed class exploited ‘feudal residues’, the remaining privileges of their rank, in squeezing their impoverished dependents (Galisi 2008; Statista 2022; Toniolo 213; Bairoch 1976).

Internal economic differences at unification were not as great as the gaps in subsequent years might suggest. Gross domestic product per capita in the south in 1871 was 80 per cent of that in the rest of Italy, a spread not unlike that between industrial and rural areas in Spain and Austria-Hungary at the time. The national economic map also refused definitive regional shape: the southern regions of Campania, Sicily and Puglia met or exceeded the national per capita average, even as the more northerly Marche, Umbria and

Emilia Romagna did not. Furthermore, the GDP gaps were almost as large between eastern and western regions as they were between north and south (Felice 2017, 2018; Felice and Vecchi 2015).

Italy was poor, but because its people were numerous, unified it became, *ipso facto*, the eighth-largest economy in the world. The timing was tardy, for the fates of the peninsula's people were joined economically and politically at a moment when Great Britain, the United States and its European neighbours were growing richer via industrialization, and Italy by the admission of its own politicians and intellectuals found itself beginning its own industrial journey far behind the others. The '*bel paese*' was beautiful not just for its extraordinary artistic patrimony but for its singular mix of town and country in which the melding of everyday life with patchworks of agricultural plots turned the visible world into a sculpted garden. Food sovereignty would have been possible for some parts of the peninsula if landlords did not extract so much of the surplus through rent and starvation wages. This forced Italy into a game it could not win, for by the end of the nineteenth century, an agriculture not remodelled along strictly capitalist lines and equipped to compete in international markets after unification brought losses instead of profits. Tariffs to protect basic grains promulgated by the new republic lowered Italy's market share and created disincentives among landlords to invest in more production. The population grew, but agricultural output did not grow proportionately, generating hunger at home and mass emigration abroad (Cohen and Federico 2001).

The fiery furnace of industrialization also received no initial blast from unification. Having missed the first round of capitalist industrial expansion led by Britain based on exploiting steam power, building railroads and acquiring colonies, northern Italian firms attracted foreign investment and harnessed hydroelectric power to jump into heavy industry against international competitors with a hefty head start (Toniolo 2013; Barbiellini Amidei, Cantwell and Spadavecchia 2013; Federico and Vecchi 2015; Galisi 2008; Iuzzolino, Pellegrini and Viesti 2013). Protective tariffs provided a national market, and economic growth rates and personal incomes in the new north-west manufacturing centres of Turin, Milan and Genoa soared, while the rest of Italy trailed behind (Cohen and Federico 2001).

In important respects, however, Italy united in 1861 was a peninsula divided – less at first by income strictly than by life chances. For instance, the lifespan of people in Basilicata was significantly shorter than average, while people in Liguria outlived them by almost eight years. Though only 15 per cent of persons over 15 in the south were literate, half of those living in the north-west could read and write. Poverty at an estimated 44 per cent of the population was thickly distributed throughout Italy, but a person in the south was almost one and a half times as likely to be poor than a person

living in the rest of Italy (Galisi 2008; Toniolo 2013; Iuzzolino, Pellegrini and Viesti 2013).

THE TWO ITALIES

Once neighbours, now one country divided anew by economic inequality, Italy became an exemplar of combined and uneven development in its classic formulation, pushed together politically and connected to different and highly variable domains of the expanding pre-First World War world capitalist economy. Intellectuals decried the growing economic gap and its negative consequences for the people in the south. So alongside uneven development grew, or perhaps festered is a better word, a discourse about southern disadvantage both anticipated and real that is a principal bequest of the unification and central to the politics of today's republic (Trotsky 2008; Dunford and Greco 2006; Petrusiewicz 1998; Moe 1998).

State-making contributed greatly to reifying differences among peoples and tying their attributes, social and asserted to be physical, to economic success and failure. Italy in 1870 was like a Russian doll: inside the new state were various older sovereigns and their possessions, and inside each of these was a mix of territories administered as provinces. Soon the state was to assimilate the concepts of regions that would subordinate provinces to cultural and statistical descriptions. The new kingdom desired to know its new subjects and their communities as completely as possible and instituted modern data gathering that incorporated all the information about the population it could assemble while subjecting what it learned to statistical analysis. As was the case in other nations afflicted with a potent mix of statistical zeal and retrograde Social Darwinism, the data were packaged to create a centre and periphery, in this case two Italies, north-south, good-bad. Even when the data showed a more heterogeneous human geography, they were ignored in favour of the cultural stereotypes (Patriarca 1998).

Though provinces had borne the actual administrative burdens of the various pre-unification states, Pietro Maestri, the kingdom's first chief statistician, added a layer of larger regions to the new national map. Regions were defined by the historical traces of their pasts and were described effectively as homogeneous cultural communities that possessed varying degrees of social vitality, as measured by fertility, longevity and *male* population growth. From ranking the vitality of peoples, racist characterizations of them were just a step away, though executed separately by other scholars interpreting Maestri's data. Italian criminologists, Cesare Lombroso notably among them, created criminal stereotypes based on the belief that Italy was historically composed of different races, and those whose descendants lived

in the south (one word – no longer a collection of regions) were markedly inferior to other races resident in the peninsula. Italy divided into a cultural hierarchy of regions thus provided a good enough reason for its poverty and high level of economic inequality (Patriarca 1996; Gibson 1998).

Though there is no causal link, there was a sequence. After attaching social stigma to poor regions, the new state moved to accentuate the process of combined and uneven development that left so much of Italy economically behind as a consequence of supporting the industrialization of the north. First, successive governments pursued economic nationalism, passing tariffs that protected Italian industry and did so without much regard for the reciprocal negative effects of tariffs on agriculture as a whole. They discouraged foreign participation, prevented foreign takeovers and awarded state contracts only to Italian firms. The Banca d'Italia worked in tandem with elected government by bailing out the steel industry and facilitating the mergers of competitors in shipping and arms. Second, the state fully subsidized and purchased the arms and equipment with which Italy fought the First World War, creating a state-monopoly alliance that beefed up Italian industrial capacity significantly. Third, the fascist regime became part owner and financier of last resort for big business during the Great Depression under the Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale (IRI), eventually accounting for 45 per cent of Italy's industrial and banking capital. With the US Marshall Plan, after the Second World War, it was more of the same: big northern business came first (Castronovo 1980); Iuzzolino, Pellegrini and Viesti 2013.

Thus, the economic inequality apparent among different parts of the peninsula, however placed with prejudice into regions, was nonetheless real and hardly an accident. The state at the end of the Second World War had begun reporting census data for four discrete regions: North, Centre, South and the Islands. But by 1958, it had folded the Islands into the South, and henceforth stuck for the most part with 'Three Italies'. There was good reason because already by 1951, the interregional gap was enormous. The northern industrial triangle's GDP per capita was one and a half times that of north-eastern and central Italy and three times that of southern Italy (Cohen and Federico 2001).

The 1947 Italian Constitution in a concession to Catholic progressives and the lay left included extensive provisions for the establishment and operation of the regions, though none of the new regions was identical with the pre-war folk-fictive assignments, and a succession of governments dominated by the Christian Democrats (DC) put off the implementation until 1970 (Jansen 2017; Desideri 2014). Instead the Christian Democrats under the leadership of Alcide De Gaspari instituted in 1950 the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno, a major intervention to implant infrastructure and force-feed industrialization to the south. No doubt, as Paul Ginsborg (1990) and Gabriella

Gribaudi (1980) claim, the Cassa figured in DC plans both to pacify a region rife with peasant political resistance and to dominate it politically. Yet during the first twenty years the fund was run by technocrats applying the standard development remedies of the era: they invested in infrastructure and subsidized the relocation of Italian heavy industry to the south. The results were initially good: the southern economy grew at the same rate as the rest of Italy during the ‘miracle’ post-war period and southern GDP per capita and personal income began to catch up for the first time with the rest of Italy. The great plants for steel, chemicals, petrochemicals and autos, however, did not stimulate the growth of local suppliers and spin-off firms that typically cluster around large industrial enterprises, and critics of the Cassa derided them as ‘cathedrals in the desert’. The 1971 inclusion of regional governments in Cassa planning and operations turned it into a clientelist captive of the DC. Economic growth stumbled badly after 1975, and the chasm between north and south expanded once more and is now wider than it was at the time of unification. And in a case of very bad timing, Italy’s revised plan for the south ran into the macroeconomic crisis triggered by the collapse of the Bretton Woods exchange rate system, the 1973 oil embargo and stock market crashes that rocked the world (Felice and Lepore 2011; Martinelli 2009; Papagni et al. 2021; Felice and Vecchia 2015; Iuzzolino, Pellegrini and Viesti 2013).

THE THREE ITALIES AND HOW THEY GREW

The Italian economy in the ‘economic miracle’ years had had a great run – as had the rest of the world economy. But as profits ran down, workers protested and wages caught up, big Italian business took money off the table, disinvesting, squeezing its workers with Taylorism, then switching to ‘quality circles’ and worker involvement while trying to break unions, and outsourcing as many tasks as possible to non-union small firms that had shot up throughout the Industrial Triangle. Alongside these freighted manoeuvres, small businesses were sprouting all through the north-eastern and central regions of Italy, and in their geography began to form industrial districts that specialized in specific, often traditional product lines, and often for export. The relationship between these phenomena was not necessarily direct, a matter of different markets and different labour processes. They coincided, however, with the 1970 passage of the *Statuto dei Lavoratori*, Italian labour’s bill of rights that finally superseded fascist legislation then still on the books. The great compromise embedded in the law was that it did not apply to firms with fewer than fifteen workers, and thus cheaper, structurally peripheral and unprotected labour became a desirable commodity throughout Italy,

but most especially in structuring the labours of the new industrial districts (Ghezzi 2020).

The two parts of Italian capitalism, petty and monopoly, were related. Massimo Paci's *Mercato del Lavoro e Classi Sociali in Italia* (1973) offered a compelling unified theory of Italian capitalism as a whole in which Italy's petty capitalist small-firm economy not only served Italian monopoly capitalist outsourcing, but also undermined worker unrest by dividing the working class and its unions between core and periphery workers, and absorbed cheaply surplus labouring populations such as women, former rural migrants to the big cities and young and old people expelled from the mature industrial sector in times of economic crisis. Paci argued that a particularly pronounced dualism afflicted the Italian economy, in part because the northern capitalist core, historically weak relative to northern Europe and under the thumb of American imperialism, could not pull the rest of the economy to full-employment prosperity. This necessitated the creation of a peripheral sector throughout the economically marginal areas of the nation that delivered substandard incomes from highly exploited and irregularly employed workers. Workers in the peripheral sector were precarious, moving in and out of the reserve army of labour like the air in an accordion – labour like air rushed in when the economy expanded and was expelled out and back into the ranks of the unemployed or under-employed when the economy contracted (Castronovo 1976, 1980; Paci 1973).

There was a geographical dimension to this decentralized economy. Arnaldo Bagnasco in *Tre Italie: La Problematica Territoriale dello Sviluppo Italiano* (1977) advanced the hypothesis that central and north-eastern Italy constituted a social formation just as specific as those of the north and south. After proposing that the small-firm environments were not evolutionary barnacles attached to modern Italian capitalism but a part of Italian economic development, Bagnasco demonstrated the likelihood that there were indeed not two but three clusters of related regions, each cluster with an empirically discernible way of life and standard of living distinct from the other two. Bagnasco plotted regional data for conventional measures such as personal income and per capita consumption and showed that the best fit for at least these two variables supported his hypothesis that if one broke Italy into three regional blocs instead of two, a truer picture of Italy's economic geography emerged. This 'Third Italy' comprising central and north-eastern regions included Trentino-Alto Adige, Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Emilia Romagna, Toscana, Umbria and Marche.

In addition to personal income and per capita consumption, Bagnasco plotted regional data for a variety of other variables. Some, like the uniformity of criminality and divorce rates within Italy's three parts, suggested differing degrees of Durkheimian societal cohesion at the regional levels. Others,

like the proportion of homeowners and the ratio of home space to persons, could also have referred to standard of living. He also plotted the days lost per region because of labour–management conflicts, and the proportion of votes gathered in the 1972 political elections by the Christian Democratic and Communist parties. With the last measure, Bagnasco hoped to indicate that the newly anointed ‘Third Italy’ had retained its basic pre-development political and cultural orientations, and that these provided additional social support for development. His colleague Carlo Trigilia extended the hypothesis, arguing that the most important aspect of Third Italian politics was regional dominance of one great party or the other. Recalling the aphorism of Deng Xiaoping, it didn’t matter if the cat was red or white, so long as it caught the mice: what one needed, Trigilia argued, was a unified political culture to mobilize regional resources for development (Bagnasco 1977; Trigilia 1986; Bagnasco, Pini and Trigilia 1981).

Some data plots were much less successful in marking discrete boundaries for the three Italies. Low non-food consumption was true of the centre-north-east as well as the south, while families in both the north and centre-north-east enjoyed less overcrowding in their homes than families in the south. Both the north and the south had fewer hospital beds per population than did the centre-north-east; scholastic success was comparable in the north and the centre-north-east, while the south lagged behind. Albeit with significant overlap, six of the eight southern regions had more homeowners than the national average, as compared with two and three in the cases of the centre-north-east and north respectively. Family size found the north on the low end, some of the centre-north-east on the low end, and some of it sharing the high end with the south (Bagnasco 1977). Despite arguing for the specificity of the central-north-eastern regions as a social formation, Bagnasco in syntony with Paci nonetheless maintained that much of the Third Italy’s productive forces belonged to Italy’s diffused, peripheral economy (*ibid.*).

The attribution of structural causes ultimately deriving from the economy seemed a reasonable general explanation, but as investigators dug into the details of specific Third Italy areas of economic growth, they realized that there was more to the story, and found traces of autochthonous origins. They uncovered proto-industrial and early industrial specializations in traditional goods such as textiles, clothing, shoes, furniture, ceramic tiles, jewellery, eyeglasses and knitwear, along with production of new inventions such as motorbikes and farm machinery. They found clusters of small towns producing all or parts of the same goods led by up to a third of the resident household heads running small firms comprised of their families, relatives and nearby neighbours, who enjoyed good relations with their workers. They found women’s, typically wives’, wealth behind apparently

exclusively male-run firms. The popular social origins of the entrepreneurial stratum were probed, prompted often by the fact that the jump from the peasantry to industry was adjudged a great leap indeed (Blim 1990; Ghezzi 2007; Fontefrancesco 2013; Yanagisako 2002; Corner 1993; Holmes 1989; Ramella 1984; Krause 2018).

ENTER INDUSTRIAL DISTRICTS

Even as sociologists provided highly structural accounts of the Third Italy within an overall pattern of economic dualism, and anthropologists uncovered varied historical and social settings for development, beginning in 1979, Giacomo Becattini, an economist at the Università di Firenze, introduced Alfred Marshall's concept of industrial district to account for the phenomenon, while self-consciously playing the role of sociologist in adding culture as the key leavening agent for the industrial districts' ascent. After Becattini rooted people's economic actions in a functionalist community or social solidarity, perhaps more on the order of Tonnies than Durkheim, he argued that a system of homogeneous values was embedded in the local social metabolism, constituting a kind of 'chemistry' that connected people to the community and to its economy. It also resulted in a rather frictionless account of entrepreneurs and of their workers, whose interests were said to be largely identified with their bosses (Becattini 1979, 1989; Tonnies 2001; Trullen 2010; Marcon 2020).

The notion that small businesspeople were entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs were heroic actors was soon attached to the Third Italy narrative. Joseph Schumpeter's concept of the entrepreneur as a risk-taker and a destroyer of archaic forms of capitalism was enjoying a comeback generally, especially after the economic crises in the 1970s of large firms, and the onset of the widespread adoption of information technologies suggested that an extensive process of creative destruction was underway (Mazzucato 2015; Capussela 2018; Mullan 2017). The small firm owners, many of whom came from peasant backgrounds, often specifically sharecropper origins in central Italy, combined risk with thrift, skill with practical knowledge of how to market their craft, and a determination to build a life for themselves and their families that reflected the best values of their communities. Demanding but generous, 'moral' bosses, they got along well with their workers, often extending to them some of the protections ordinarily reserved for family (Blim 1990).

The image of the sharecropper as a property-sharing candidate member of the petty bourgeoisie has been around since Sismondi and John Stuart Mill. Both believed that a connection to property through sharecropping – if

not possession of property itself – still fostered a moral responsibility that was demonstrably unlike that of landless labourers, who were thought to be shiftless, resentful and prone to dishonesty (Sismondi 1815; Mill 1974).

The historical prevalence of sharecropping in central and northern Italy combined with the rise of small and medium-size enterprises suggested a formal homology between the ‘family firms’ of the two, a claim made very clear in a pioneering analysis in 1980 by Massimo Paci. His analysis was less a celebration of the value of tradition in making the modern world than a set of reflections on the petty authoritarianism of family heads, the heavy burdens of work on all household members, but most especially women and children, and the development of an ethic of savings that bordered on the obsessive. The unspoken allusion was to Max Weber’s sectarian capitalist, driven to work incessantly at almost any cost. However, others saw, in contrast to constant labour struggles in the north, that the Third Italy offered industrialization without social fractures, ‘*industrializzazione senza fratture*’, in the apropos phrase coined by the eminent Marche economist Giorgio Fua, which was also famously lampooned as ‘*industrializzazione senza fatture*’, industrialization without invoices, a reference to the widespread fiscal evasion undergirding the Third Italy (Paci 1980, 1992; Fua and Zacchia 1983).

As an ethnographer living in one of the Marche region’s shoe-producing towns during the 1980s, it was apparent to me that there were both few fractures and few invoices to be found. It was a beehive of small-scale manufacturing, and factories, workshops, garages, houses, and even people, tablecloths and bedsheets smelled of leather and glue. Ten to twelve hours a day, five days a week, and half a day on Saturday – and then a couple of months after the season’s orders were filled of no work and no pay – everyone able from the age of 12 on was involved in making shoes. There were a few stabs at elegance *alla moda*, but for the most part, the production consisted of serviceable, a bit stylish, medium-priced shoes for the middle classes of northern Italy and northern Europe. It was easy and in fact impossible not to admire the effort and enormous hustle of firm owners and workers, and equally impossible not to learn over time that some owners drove workers relentlessly, cheated them on wages and social security payments and evaded income taxes. Almost everyone in the town – historically either sharecroppers or poor artisans working largely at the whim of the tiny landed class that sat atop them – had generations of privation to make up for, transforming real wages (finally) and firm profits into family homes and decent lives with meat served at Sunday lunch (along with the regional first course requirement of *tagliatelle al ragù* or the local lasagna) on nice tablecloths, perhaps afterwards a stroll to visit the deceased in the town cemetery, a game of *bocci* ball and an evening pizza at the town tavern. The money from shoes created consumption, surely much needed, but not much capital. The family had

need of the firm and its monies as much as the firm relied upon the family for its labour. The Gini levels of inequality in the regions, unlike in the rest of Italy where inequality levels closely resemble those of the United States, reached as low as Sweden's – an enlightened social planner's dream – and without resort to the redistribution instruments of the state (ISTAT 2021).

REGIONAL RHETORICS OF DEVELOPMENT

The sparse accumulation of capital was no secret, yet a realization of its implications was forestalled perhaps because the regions of the Third Italy (excluding the few major cities) and their people (as well as their politicians, who profited thereby), while proud of their achievements thus far, still had much catching up to do (Jansen 2017). Parliament in 1977 granted regions authority over their economic development and planning, and this in practice transformed the regional political apparatuses into sponsors and advocates of their local economies and local university researchers into policy protagonists. Regions had been handed operation of the national healthcare system, and later responsibility for public education, and both increased the possibilities for local political patronage. Assumption of local economic development, however, created the opportunity for regions to benefit businesses directly that were in effect political patronage multipliers, because helping firms survive and thrive put owners at the disposition of local politicians, but also generated goodwill among their workers.

The rhetoric of regional advancement was supported by the formation of an elite triangle that sought to steer the local economies and consisted of businesses organized into professional associations; politicians building governing majorities by currying the favour of business interests; and academic analysts, many if not most natives of their respective regions also swept up in the project of economic advancement, and often recipients of regional research monies. In the symbolic sphere connected with marketing and tourism, the elite promoted the region or its industrial districts as brands. The products of Emilia-Romagna's Motor Valley, the home of Italy's famous race car industry, for instance, are boosted with museum and factory tours, car races and car festivals under the patronage of the region. The region of Umbria runs an export-import service expressly for its ceramics producers. The Marche region in cooperation with its shoe industry hosted the San Remo Music Festival's annual press gala. These are exemplars of the number and scope of marketing and promotion activities of the district-laden regions.

Regions also offered direct aid to businesses. They sanctioned property acquisitions by municipalities for industrial parks and consortia for

supporting data collection, marketing, apprenticeships and technological innovation, and they created governmental offices dedicated to sustaining business growth. The Italian parliament and Council of Ministers also passed five different laws and decrees to support industrial district growth between 1991 and 1999 (Bersani and Letta 2004). Both the interested regions and the Italian state stood behind business.

A pro-growth consensus sealed over the cracks of doubt that surfaced among reports by experts from time to time. The need for investment, capital-deepening, scaling up the size of firms, developing a brand, hiring or training professional managers – all were suggested at meeting after meeting of the guiding triangle at the seats of regional power. Messengers from the relevant governing *giunta*, academe and the political parties spread throughout the regions' peripheries where most of the production was taking place. The ho-hum reaction they received was in part based upon the myth they were creating: namely, that the population, with its native capacity for ingenuity and hard work, had lifted the people from penury, and in so doing, had created a new industrial model. So why, they asked, should we stop now, especially when our families still need the firms' support for economic and social advancement?

Hardscrabble and struggle had been transformed by Italian scholars into a model, and one that would stir economic policy networks worldwide.

MIT DISCOVERS THE THIRD ITALY

By the early 1980s, contemporaneous with the early work of Becattini and Sebastiano Brusco, an economist at the Università di Modena e Reggio Emilia, the Third Italy was on its way to acquiring mythic status (Brusco 1982). Economist Michael Piore and political scientist Charles Sabel of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, with funding from the German Marshall Fund in 1979, visited industrial districts throughout the Third Italy and concluded that they had found an alternative economy that could pull the West out of the slump that followed the Yom Kippur War, the oil embargo and stagflation, and had killed off the 'trent'anni gloriosi' (Piore and Sabel 1981; Sabel 1982; Brusco 2022). Their subsequent book, *The Second Industrial Divide: Prospects for Prosperity* (Piore and Sabel 1984), was ultimately cited, according to Google Scholar, 18,773 times, while Arnaldo Bagnasco's *Tre Italie*, which had put the concept of the Third Italy into circulation, was cited only 2,864 times. Few scholars read or followed Italian social science, perhaps to their shame, it must be said, but in contrast, the explosion of interest prompted by Piore and Sabel was indeed remarkable. It awakened interest in small and medium enterprises, petty entrepreneurship and the

new computerized technologies that could enable firms to compete successfully in segmented and uncertain world markets. When mixed with Becattini's reprise of the virtues of industrial districts, the scholarly literature ballooned. Researchers poured into the regions to discover their 'secret sauce', even as others took their measure of petty commodity production around the globe to discover whether these areas too had found a way to make money while remaining small. The emergence of regional science, the renewal of economic geography, the conceptual rediscovery of the category of 'small and medium enterprises' (SMEs) by international development agencies and the emphasis of the European Union on strengthening local development all contributed to copious energies devoted to uncovering or constructing a model that would help the Third Italy grow in Italy and in other regions around the world (Isard 2003; Granovetter 1984; Storper and Scott 1992; Holmes 2000).

In Italy, the stress on the cooperation between workers and their bosses in the Third Italy, importantly without union intervention for those who wished for a non-union world, soon attracted special interest. The Third Italy discovery of 'functional familism' also began to repair the wounds that Edward Banfield in *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (1958) had famously inflicted on Italians for prizing family interests over social interest, which were subsequently re-inflicted by Robert Putnam (1993), who had elevated social trust, a virtue seen as the essential glue to post-war success, and had claimed that trust declined the further down the Italian peninsula one went. Thus, the Third Italy, which had shared the ancestral experience of local self-government, in obvious contrast to the south that Banfield thirty-odd years before had blamed for its backwardness, shined as an exemplar of how forms of interclass and inter-caste trust had survived and contributed to economic success. The rediscovery of trust in the Third Italy floated many boats, including those that had objected to Banfield in the first place, and those that believed that the Italian south had been wrongly stigmatized by the American analyses (Triglia 2012).

The central and north-east regions heavily promoted their small and medium-sized industries. The European Union refusal to countenance further direct government aid to industries in the Italian south provided an opening for Third Italy politicians in Rome to redirect EU and Italian funds to support their regions' economic development. The Italian parliament appropriated funds in 1992, 1995 and 1996, providing each region with an amount based upon population size and various development variables for regional economic development. Nimble regions, mostly those located in the Third Italy, generated hundreds of projects, and the funds disbursed easily exceeded those that found their way to the south. The shift of southern development support to the centre and northern regions also reflected the

growing political strength of northern separatist parties often entangled as allies in the various Berlusconi governments (Dunford and Greco 2006).

The Third Italy regions understood that the protean generation of entrepreneurs that had performed its economic miracles was passing away, and that the industries in which they were strong faced stiff competition in export markets from Asia. They were diligent, commissioning studies from local economists and sociologists and instituting study centres within their bureaucracies that boosted the quality and quantity of data available to policymakers, as well as policy advocates in the regional offices of the *Camera di Commercio*, the *Confindustria* and the cooperative and artisan associations. They subsidized local government efforts to encourage new industries with land and tax incentives. With EU funds, they provided seed money for small business development by young people, women and residents originally of foreign origin with ‘innovative’ ideas. New entrepreneurs and new industries, the latter mostly in services, were solutions designed to work around the old industry entrepreneurs and throw some money at the groups who had been economically marginalized in the first round of development.

THE MODEL IN ACTION

By 1980, every region of the Third Italy had bested the national average for personal income as a direct result of small-scale industrialization. By 1997, however, the north-east regions continued to thrive while the economies of the central regions, Emilia-Romagna, Toscana, Umbria and Marche, had stagnated. By 2020, in terms of GDP per capita, the configuration of two of the three Italies – the south remaining at the bottom of the wealth hierarchy among the twenty regions – had changed considerably. Liguria and Piedmont, conventionally considered part of the ‘first Italy’, had effectively dropped out of the wealthy club, while Emilia-Romagna and Trentino-Alto Adige had joined Lombardia at the top. The shifts occurred over the course of a general decline in the Italian economy, a trend that persisted after the worldwide recovery from the 2008 great recession. In eleven years, Italy, having exceeded the EU per capita GDP average at 106 per cent in 2010, dropped to 95 per cent of the EU mean by 2021. No region escaped this decline: some lost wealth but still met or exceeded the EU mean. Southern regions, however, slumped significantly, none surpassing 71 per cent of the EU mean by 2020; Calabria and Sicilia reached a little over half (Eurostat 2020; Brida et al. 2014; Blim and Valles Codina 2017).

The economic rearrangement of the Italies is no longer like Caesar’s nifty Gallic three. The new drivers of the economy, designated here as the ‘first’ Italy, have shrunk, now consisting of the three regions of Lombardy,

Emilia-Romagna and Trentino-Alto Adige, with perhaps Veneto as a cadet member. Their economies are responding to the by-now common global stimuli of finance, technological innovation, information and the production of luxury goods when possible. Their economic basis has also changed: the leaders are no longer all big or small firms, but a mix of the two. In Emilia-Romagna, for instance, big firms abound, either through direct investment in plants and equipment or via subsidiaries they have bought out from among local firms. The remaining regions of the Third Italy are slumping a bit southward, making common cause with Abruzzo while avoiding a tumble into the domain of the south. The plenitude of literature by now makes it plain that capital in a capital-scarce country is lacking, technological innovation is slow, managerial talents are minimal and a qualified labour force for breaching the barriers to innovation is lacking (Brioschi, Brioschi and Canelli 2002; Hadjimichalis 2006; Dunford and Greco 2006; Carabelli, Hirsch and Rabellotti 2009).

Researchers now often reckon on Four Italies, the fourth possibly consisting of the north-eastern regions of Veneto and Friuli-Giulia Venezia, once lumped together with the north-eastern region of Trentino-Alto Adige and the central regions of Emilia-Romagna, Toscana, Umbria, Marche and Lazio (Felice and Vasta 2015; Dunford and Greco 2006; Associazioni Cristiani Lavoratori Italiani 2017).

THE RHETORICS OF ITALIAN DEVELOPMENT AND A POLITICAL DEPARTURE

In Italy as elsewhere, more than one rhetoric controls the board of any set of social actions, and they are often proffered insistently and raised in public significance through persuasion. The regions, despite their arguably historically suspect status, became a fount of rhetoric devoted to political contestation and capture. The Third Italy, concept and reality, became a highly generative notion that highlighted the connections between petty capitalism past and present in a heretofore marginal swathe of the country, as well as helping to stake a claim to greater consideration in the political economy of the nation. The identification of the regional concentration of small and medium enterprises as instances of Marshall's concept of industrial districts rationalized, even legitimated their business activities within an acceptable economic theory. Together, with actors contriving to act in unison, a way of life was helped along.

Yet there was a snake in the garden. Regionalism, the post-war dream state of Communists and progressive Catholics of more direct democracy, combined with the belief in a more egalitarian economic order enabled by

industrial districts throughout the centre and locally guided economies, was one potential outcome, but not the only outcome. An autonomist regional nationalism triggered by resentment of state redistribution of resources to other regions, perceived economic decline and fear of added local welfare burdens via immigration could – and did – arise. The Lega Nord, with its elective roots stretching back to 1983, became a national party in 1991 and a party of government with Berlusconi in 1994. It fashioned itself as the representative of the people that work, the support base for entrepreneurial Italy and the protector of Italian virtue in the face of what it claimed were the decadence of the south and the dangers of immigration. Its rhetoric consisted of ‘beggar thy neighbour’ on a grand scale, a call to eliminate state redistribution of revenues to the south and to end state interference with the affairs of business, particularly of the small, entrepreneurial character (Huyseune 2006; Zaslove 2011). It is one of the subnational autonomist movements that have emerged across Europe as a response to the growing power of the European Union and the subordination of nation states to the EU’s will, which also includes obeying a mandate to pass more authority and monies down to the regions throughout Europe, something that the Lega, despite its originally anti-European views, conveniently overlooks (Holmes 2000; Berti and Sondel-Cedarmas 2022).

The rhetoric of the Lega, once northern nationalist, then regional autonomist and now nationalist in its project to save Italy, now proposes itself generally as the answer to diminished sovereignty, declining standards of living and the imagined threat of immigration to a properly Italian way of life. It advocates for lighter regulation and lower taxes for small and medium-size businesses, as well as a flat income tax for all citizens (Passarelli and Tuorto 2022). Voters throughout the Third Italy and its industrial districts in the 2018 political elections backed the Lega in unprecedented numbers. People throughout regions unconnected and uninvolved with northern strivings for autonomy, and many who on an interpersonal level found the Milanese and the German-speaking mountain populations among other northerners haughty and disdainful, voted for the Lega in significant numbers. Roughly 20 per cent of central region voters in 2018 chose the Lega, up from 1 per cent in 2013. Among the electors in the north-eastern regions closer to the Lega’s geographical base, the Lega scored between 19 per cent and 32 per cent of the vote, also a great improvement over their 2013 results (Albertazzi, Giovannini and Seddone 2018).

In the 2020 regional elections, the left, the Five Star Movement and Forza Italia were net losers; the Lega and Fratelli d’Italia were significant gainers across regions. Their gains were most notable in the ‘old’ Third Italy regions of Emilia-Romagna, Veneto, Toscana and Marche. In the Marche, a ‘red’ region since 1995, the two parties of the right polled 41 per cent and

formed a government headed by a neofascist with the votes of Forza Italia. This followed the 2019 election in Umbria of a governor backed by the Lega (Vampa 2021).

The Fratelli d'Italia holds a position farther right than the Lega's and embraces its direct lineage to fascism without apology. The party head, Giorgia Meloni, shares many of the Lega's first premises, but is more strident in her disdain for sexual minorities (she wants a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage), her support for a Christian Europe (zero tolerance for immigrants often stereotyped as infidels) and for the rights of nations to ignore or modify EU policies (Hungary and Poland) (Barbero 2022). In April 2022, Fratelli d'Italia overtook the Partito Democratico as the largest political party in Italy; in the September 2022 general election it placed first with 26 per cent of the vote.

The shift to the political right in what might now be called the once and future Third Italy is synchronized with trends national and international now working their way through the world. Defensive localism and resentment towards state redistributive efforts sped along by economic unpredictability and decline, as well as increased economic inequality, are currently powerful and widespread social forces. This sort of hostility towards outsiders is indeed deeply ironic for a society where regions market themselves, to take a slogan from the region of Toscana, as 'beautiful everywhere', or in the words of Umbria, 'the green heart of Italy'. The province of Macerata in the Marche region fashions itself as a place of 'infinite beauty', an obvious reminder that it can claim Giacomo Leopardi, Italy's greatest romantic poet, for its own. However, the province is also the place where a neofascist sporting an Italian flag and giving the fascist salute upon arrest gunned down six African immigrants while racing his Alfa Romeo through the streets of the Macerata city centre in 2018 (Povoledo 2018).

Selling beauty is hard, even in less defensive and uncertain times than these. Italy is the fifth most popular world tourism destination, and visitors in the pre-pandemic year of 2019 numbered 65 million. Regions blessed with beauty and burdened with industrial decline have latched on to tourism as the new economic engine that could facilitate their transition to postindustrial service economies. The problem with tourism is obviously not numbers; it is remunerative occupations. The Italian tourism industry employed 2.7 million people in 2022, which amounts to 12 per cent of total employment (Statista, 2024; ISTAT 2023). These workers in 2022 made 65 per cent of the average Italian hourly wage, the latter itself so low that it only meets the EU average if all members including from Eastern Europe and the Balkans are added (Statista 2023; Trading Economics 2024). The state and the regions have tried to raise the value added by tourism with the hope that higher wages will trickle down to workers. High net worth foreign nationals

have been encouraged to buy rural housing and estates, develop agribusinesses in commodities such as wine and operate spacious rural properties with farmland attached that are grouped as *agriturismo*, agricultural tourism, an experience for the tourist that mixes the great rural outdoors with adventures in tasting local food and recipes. Subsidies were offered to start-ups, and after an uncoordinated twenty-year effort, there are a goodly number – twenty thousand establishments hosted three million guests in 2021 (Statista 2023a, 2023b). The future of tourism as an adequate replacement for manufacturing is as yet unclear.

THE ‘COSTS’ OF RHETORIC: A CONCLUSION

Words do have consequences, and the concepts we lift up with them do too. Put together in a discourse of persuasion, they affect what people think and do. In the case of the modern economic development of Italy, its miracle years and the subsequent bumpy ride precipitated a flood of words, concepts and statistics, all of which traded on the underlying success of its people in creating goods and services that brought forth a better life. Astute agents ranging from entrepreneurs and trade associations to academics and government officials at all levels, though especially at the regional level for our purposes here, shaped a robust discourse supporting the virtues of local economic development via industrial districts while simultaneously seeking government aid for their growth. Though the rhetorical project succeeded, and government monies flowed into the districts, it was not entirely successful in convincing owners and workers in the districts to upgrade and in effect to transform their labours from hardscrabble to handsome, internationally competitive firms. The regional solidarity rhetoric praised the model while disguising serious shortcomings in many local economies throughout the regions.

The rhetoric highlighting the Third Italy was perhaps the most ambitious and successfully presented after the prior developmental focus on the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno. The Third Italy project in part redirected Italy's regional economic attentions away from the south, an outcome unwarranted by the facts. Since the global crisis of 1974, the south has reported little or no growth and has dropped further behind the rest of Italy in GDP per capita and personal income (Papagni et al. 2021). It suffers from poor public health-care, lower education attainment levels and continued out-migration north and abroad (Associazioni Cristiani Lavoratori Italiani 2017). In contrast with the industrious, ‘small but beautiful’ Third Italy, the south is yesterday's news. Its limited growth, based upon big, lumbering heavy-industrial complexes and the subsequently shopworn theory of ‘development poles’, has

disenchanted planners, politicians and academics. They have half-heartedly advocated small business development, the 'Third Italianization' of the south (Iuzzolino et al. 2013).

The regional economic development project and its praise of petty entrepreneurship (and union-less worker compliance) dovetailed nicely with a justification for the neglect of the dire conditions of the south. First, the newly empowered and richer regions outside the south have camouflaged their 'beggar thy neighbour' stance with the Bunyanesque aphorism of 'every tub on its own bottom', that is, their contention that it is right and proper for each region to support its own economies to the exclusion of supplying funds for others through taxes. Second, Italy's national economic troubles have encouraged reactionary political forces in the north and centre to advance arguments for decoupling, in effect, their regions from the state and from the regulatory reach of the European Union. Their constituencies want less and fewer taxes, an end to income subsidies for the unemployed and underemployed, and a strong central state for only one reason: to stop immigration (Huysseune 2006; Jansen 2017; Zaslove 2011; Hadjimichalis 2018).

Rhetorics and the projects to which they are attached come and go, often becoming untethered from the material reality from which they arose and exposed by their mismatch with the facts. And any post hoc analysis risks becoming as dated as the rhetorics themselves. So, with a touch of irony, it can be reported that according to the bank Intesa Sanpaolo, which monitors district economic activity, 98 out of 158 industrial districts that the bank follows had, with a bit of help from inflation, returned to their pre-COVID 2019 sales levels by the end of the third quarter of 2021 (Intesa Sanpaolo 2022). Have we here a cup two-thirds full, and a model partially redeemed? Hard to say, but its rhetorical costs cannot be deduced from the regional economies' bottom line. For all the good that the Third Italy did for many of Italy's citizens, it also encouraged a careless disregard for those who did not reap its benefits, and its celebratory rhetoric became a justification for a rejection of national responsibility for the country's problems, which dwell in the Third Italian regions as well.

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CHAPTER 18

DIALECT CHRONOTOPES

Politics, Nation and Re-Imaginations

Jillian R. Cavanaugh



INTRODUCTION

Dialects in Italy – *dialetti* in Italian – always look simultaneously to the past and towards the future. They provide a model for how things were done in the past and an opportunity for building on this past, either in contrast to it or in continuity. For many Italians, dialects are seen as the practices of the peasant, the subaltern, ‘our’ ancestors, the campanilistic other, or sometimes, as just what we do. They exist in contradistinction to Standard Italian, its Other in terms of their nature and use, their sounds and nuances. And they scale to Italian geographies and histories, pointing to moments of division as well as unification, as they resonate with Dante’s judgements and Manzoni’s voices, Gramsci’s predictions and Bossi’s declamations.

Dialects are also vernaculars – that is, everyday language varieties – that millions of Italians use in the course of their daily lives. According to ISTAT (2017), 32.2 per cent of Italians speak both Italian and a regional dialect, and 14 per cent predominantly use dialect. From my own linguistic anthropological and ethnographic research in the town and province of Bergamo in Lombardy, it is clear that these statistics are complicated on the ground, as patterns of language choice and code-switching are complex and shaped by numerous language ideologies, social contexts of use and individual aspirations, as well as patterns of residence, educational background and class status (Cavanaugh 2008, 2009). Many Italians, including Bergamaschi (the plural of Bergamasco, or those who live in the town and province of Bergamo), use their dialects in everyday life, and value them for a range of reasons.

This chapter, however, will have little to say about contemporary everyday practices of speaking dialect(s), important as they are. Instead, it focuses on the language ideologies of dialect, ‘the beliefs and attitudes that shape speakers’ relationships to their own and others’ languages, mediating between the social practice of language and the socioeconomic and political structures within which it occurs’ (Cavanaugh 2020: 52; see also Schieffelin et al. 1998; Woolard 2020). As representations of collective order, language ideologies do not just describe what language is or means; language ideologies take form through how people use language, and the ends towards which they put it. To attend to the language ideologies of dialect(s) is to focus on what people use them to accomplish, both in speaking them, but also in speaking about them. Dialect language ideologies marry ideas about what dialects are and should be, how their speakers sound and what their appropriate use should be, always within particular historical moments and anchored in particular regional or local places.

Due to their embeddedness in particular places, dialects have long been useful in various ways, from the *commedia dell’arte*’s reliance on local and regional stereotypes to the Northern League championing them as evidence of a specifically northern Italian way of life that should be politically and economically protected. Moments when dialect or dialects become the focus of scholarly, media or popular attention, as well as whenever there have been movements to save or keep or discriminate against the dialects, can signal deep political wranglings about the meanings of the nation state, its relationship to particular histories, and the nature of political and cultural belonging.

To illuminate the shifting scales of time and place animated in dialect language ideologies, I consider dialect to be a chronotope, or a meaningful fusion of space and time. According to Mikhail Bakhtin (1981: 258), ‘every entry into the sphere of meanings is accomplished through the gates of the chronotope’, which he defined as ‘the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships’ (ibid.: 84). Bakhtin focused on literary chronotopes within the novel, contrasting, for example, the time space of the epic with that of the romance, charting how scales of time and place aligned with how characters moved within and across them. For example, the first line of Alessandro Manzoni’s *I Promessi Sposi* (*The Betrothed*), which begins ‘*Quel ramo del lago di Como . . .*’ (that branch of the lake of Como), indexes, or points to, and begins to establish a chronotope that encompasses the world of Manzoni’s novel (in the north of Italy, during a time of war and plague in the early seventeenth century), as well as the time and space of the Italian nation state and its construction, as it became a model of and for standard Italian, read by generations of Italian school children. It also indexes both the space of the classroom, where each line of the novel is scrutinized and often memorized, and the role of such classes as forging an Italian-speaking

and nationally oriented citizenry. The chronotope of this novel thus scales across the intimate and the national, the personal experience and the shared. One element of this chronotope is the well-circulated anecdote that while writing it, Manzoni went to Florence to ‘*lavare i panni in Arno*’ (wash his laundry in the Arno river), that is, to make sure all the language in it sounded as close to Florentine – the dialect that became Italian – as possible, washing away any trace of his own dialectal roots in Milanese. Dialect and standard, then, exist in tension even in the text held up as the most representative of standard Italian.

Dialect language ideologies take various forms in different moments at different times, from the conversational to the entextualized, the most casual to the floor of parliament, but they are always formatted chronotopically. To talk about dialect in Italy sometimes points to all dialects, from Sicilian to Venetian, and at other times to particular dialects, and their embeddedness in specific histories of use, communities of practice, and ideological associations, like the expansiveness of southern dialects seen in both speakers’ practices and their doubled consonants, or the social conservativeness of northerners as reflected in their dialects’ clipped dropping of word-final vowels. Like *I Promessi Sposi*, dialect language ideology chronotopes scale variously, encompassing at times a specific yet broad notion of ‘not-national’, that is, the local, and at other times pointing to particular locales and the histories, geographies and ways of living peculiar to each.

In the rest of this chapter, I focus on three historical moments when dialect language ideology chronotopes took particular shape, drawing on my own research in Bergamo to centre and ground this discussion in the ethnographic and historical particularities of one dialect and place. These moments are inherently iterative, drawing on previous formations, but also extending them and shaping them to serve contemporary needs. Dialects remain anchored to local places, but how they relate to the nation state, citizenship, and inclusions and exclusions shifts over time. All three examples focus on moments that involved the entextualization of Bergamasco, when writing in or about the dialect occurred. The tensions between Standard Italian – born a literary, written language that slowly became a spoken language with much effort – and dialects, some with literary traditions, but most largely spoken languages, come to the fore in these moments of transformation. I start with a discussion of a prominent dictionary of Bergamasco published in the 1870s, which continues to serve as a point of reference in the century and a half since.

DIALECTS, DICTIONARIES AND IMAGINING THE NATION

Dictionaries are prime instruments of linguistic representation, tools for standardization and textual assemblages that imply the completeness of the language forms they represent. They are prime mediating mechanisms of language ideologies, representing languages as if they were complete, discrete sets of words, inevitably drawing boundaries around what a language is and is not. They may also create or maintain equivalences across languages, constructing particular relationships among them in the process. Although they contain examples of words in use, they are not – could not be – representations of all possible ways in which language is used, given how much variation characterizes everyday language use across speakers and contexts. But as objects, materialized concrete things in the world, they may take up space on desks or bookshelves (or websites), and thus have a presence that reaches far beyond their individual components. The language ideologies they embody are thus concretized into physical objects in the world, taking on weight and authority in the process.

Such is the case with the Bergamasco dictionary written by Antonio Tiraboschi, a scholar of local language and culture in Bergamo. *Il Vocabolario dei Dialetti Bergamaschi Antichi e Moderni* (The Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Bergamasco Dialects), published in 1873, was based on Tiraboschi's fieldwork with Bergamaschi in rural areas across the province, and offers two volumes of Bergamasco words with Italian definitions. Through its definitions, the ways in which it is organized and the implicit and explicit comparisons and connections it makes between Bergamasco and other linguistic varieties, the *Vocabolario* is a complex chronotope that has had multiple lives.

The original text was assembled and written during the Risorgimento, as the *questione della lingua*¹ or 'language question' about what language would be the official language of the nascent nation state of Italy was being debated and settled. What Italians would speak was an essential dimension of building Italians, a citizenry that would, or should, evidence their shared orientation towards the state through the language they shared. Linguist Tullio De Mauro (1972) has estimated that at the time of unification of the nation state of Italy in the 1860s and 1870s, only 2 per cent of Italians spoke Italian. No one spoke it as a first language. While the story of how what is now Italian (a variety of Florentine, as mentioned above) was selected to be the national standard has its own complex history beyond the scope of this chapter (but see Cavanaugh 2008; Kramer 1983; Perrino 2018), what can be said here is that the issue of what Italians did and should speak is also always an issue of belonging to and orientation towards the nation state. Italian was held up as the linguistic means through which Italians would be

brought together as citizens of the emerging nation state, while dialects, through their multiplicity and the variation they represented, were threats to this unity.

Tiraboschi's efforts seem to have offered an alternative view of this, for while Italian figured prominently in his work in many ways, he, and the many scholars with whom he communicated about their work on other dialects, portrayed their efforts as dovetailing with and not counter to this national unifying project. Invited to be a member of the nascent Italian Society of Dialectology, Tiraboschi presented the materials he collected as part of a rich Italian inheritance, with no contradiction between the local and the national. Hence this work was produced in a particular moment towards particular scholarly and potentially political ends, and represented Bergamasco as an Italian language, to be approached via Italian, and valued as one of Italy's many linguistic varieties, not as something qualitatively different or dangerous.

The *Vocabolario* itself was rather encyclopaedic and a closer look at some of its pages reveals the comparative viewpoints that Tiraboschi assembled. On its pages, extensive linguistic variation is normalized and even celebrated. Bergamasco is translated into Italian, but also compared to other languages. The work presents variation within Bergamasco, sometimes locating it geographically, sometimes not. Phonological variation is indicated through spelling variation as well as the use of diacritics (accent marks of various sorts) – for example, '*Mèz Vedi Mès*', where the word for 'half' is shown with two different pronunciations of the word-final consonant ('z' versus 's'), a geographical variation that still occurs today across the province. In other definitions, abbreviations are used to indicate that the term is particular to a specific location in the province, such as the use of 'V.S.M.', which stands for *Valle Seriana Media*, or the Mid-Seriana Valley.

There are also comparisons to other language varieties, such as Tuscan, as in the definition for *Moei* (Bergamasco for cigarette or cigar butt), which reads:

Comunemente si dice della Parte del sigaro che si getta per essere troppo corta. In Toscana dicono *Mozzetto*, *Cicca*; e *Ciccajuoli* chiamono coloro, che vanno per la via ricogliendo [sic] *cicche*.

(Commonly said for the part of the cigar that is thrown away for being too short. In Tuscany, they say '*Mozzetto*', '*Cicca*', and '*Ciccajuoli*' is what they call those who run to collect '*cicche*'.)

Other dialects, such as Venetian, are also points of comparison, but so are French, Greek, Provençal and Latin, where similarities are drawn between words, common usages or sayings. For instance:

Molagua V.S.M. Lenza, Filaccione. Strumento da pesca che consiste in un filo ben lungo armato di ami inescati. Questo strumento è chiamato *Togna* dai Veneziani e *Dirlindana* o *Molegna* dai pescatori del Lario.

(**Molagua** V.S.M. [Mid-Seriana Valley] Line, troll line. Fishing tool that consists of a long line armed with baited hooks. This tool is called ‘Tonga’ by the Venetians and ‘Dirlindana’ or ‘Molegna’ by the fishers of the Lario [Lake Como].)

The definition here is brief, descriptive and to the point. But in making comparisons to what Venetians and fishermen from Como call the same item, this definition makes them equivalent, an equivalence that is commonplace, unremarkable. In doing so, it naturalizes the assumption that there will be different words found – and used – across the peninsula, without necessarily ranking some as better or more correct than others. Similarly, the definition above for **Moei** gives the equivalent in Tuscan, distinguishing Tuscan from Italian itself, but also highlighting how the particulars of Tuscan itself are worthy of attention and interest.

More local variations are also presented as interesting and worthy in various ways. There are references to the appearance of particular terms in poetry, as in the definition for the word for ‘best’, which gives variants of everyday terms ‘**Migliùr**, **Miùr**’ but also an example from poetry – ‘*e nell’Assonica Mejùr*’ (‘and in Assonica[’s poetry]’) – before giving the Italian definition, ‘*Migliore*’. Repeated references like this to the use of particular Bergamasco words in poetry also portray the value of the dialect as not just spoken but as capable of literary expression, tapping into long-standing Italian tendencies to rank writing above speaking, and poetry above virtually all other written forms (Brevini 1999; Cavanaugh 2017). Similarly, the entry for ‘to die’ (**Mör**) has both a long list of euphemisms for ‘die’ and also a longer list of sayings that include death or dying in them, as well as information on how the word is used in non-human realms (for plants or about fire or embers). All in Standard Italian, this list demonstrates the metaphorical richness of how death is used to talk about life in Bergamasco.

Bergamasco is also an intimate, homely language, in the words it includes, but also in the uses that are alluded to and represented here. In the definition for ‘**Miao**’ (meow), Tiraboschi offers the Italian equivalent – *Miao* – and then the following definition in Italian: ‘*Parola colla quale imitiamo la voce che manda fuori il gatto quando miagola*’ (Word with which we imitate the voice that the cat sends out when it meows). Note the use of the first-person plural, or ‘we’ conjugation of the verb, that ‘we’ (Bergamaschi) imitate this voice. This voicing is echoed as well in the calque, or layering of one language’s syntactic patterns into another’s, represented in the phrase ‘*manda fuori*’ or ‘throw out’. In Bergamasco, phrasal verbs like this one (that is, verb phrases that include adverbs or prepositions) are extremely common; while they are not technically incorrect in Italian, a more common and standard

way to put this would be ‘*emettere*’ (to emit, utter, issue). In definitions such as this, a community of speakers – to which the author belongs – is conjured and represented, again, as equivalent to other language communities, Italian included.

So Bergamasco, as represented in this dictionary, is interesting, translatable and equivalent to other languages. It is capable of poetry itself, but also comparable to poetry in other languages, examples of which are occasionally included in the ample definitions. It is alive, in use and portrayed as being used. It is specific, representing foods, tools, places, ways of doing things specific to it, but also capable of abstraction, able to, for instance, talk about death and use death as a way to talk about other things, as other languages are. It has geographical variation within it, with no hierarchy among these variants, but there is also a variety that is simply ‘Bergamasco’, unmarked and presumably shared by all speakers.

At the same time, the dictionary implicitly addresses a literate audience, one that reads (and presumably writes) Italian, but also Latin, French and other European languages, as well as potentially other dialects. This is an audience who wants to know and would appreciate the text’s extensive comparisons. Given the long entries, multiple pronunciations and sheer size of the work, the *Vocabolario* is clearly a text for reading, not for using during interaction, and in its unidirectional translations (Bergamasco into Italian, and not vice-versa), it renders invisible the possibility that someone might want to translate an Italian term into a Bergamasco one. Bergamasco, in this text, becomes something to be documented and deciphered through Italian and comparisons to other languages. As a chronotope, it captures a dialectal world that is alive and well, with its own particularities of place and history, but these particularities are translatable into or equivalent to words and experiences in other places. It is different from Italian, but not antithetical to it, nor threatening in how it represents the world of Bergamasco. The Italy it represents is one that contains much language variation, but that variation is comparable to French, Provençal, even Greek, as examples from each are offered on the same pages as examples from within Bergamo and across other Italian dialects. At the same time, Bergamasco is objectified and contained as it is transformed into the written word, located on the page.

These elements of the dictionary and how it was constructed express and embody language ideologies that portray what Bergamasco is and what it means vis-à-vis the languages that surround it. These ideologies in turn construct a chronotope, bringing together a particular scope of time and expression of place. As a chronotope, Bergamasco in this dictionary is anchored in the province, but also variable across its landscape. It is relatively timeless: its examples and sayings were gathered from contemporaries, representing how ‘we’ speak. This moment is connected to a continuous past, with no

comparisons between the past and present, and in this is it similar to other languages of the moment, which represent their own particular worlds but in recognizable ways.

CHANGE AND RESISTANCE: DIALECT IN THE 1970S

Roughly a century after the publication of *Il Tiraboschi*, dialect language ideologies had undergone a number of shifts, and in the 1970s another chronotope of the dialect emerged.² The so-called economic miracle of the 1950s and 1960s had initiated a widespread shift in language practices, as more and more Italians had impetus and occasion to learn the standard, through school, mass media and various moments of civil service and engagement, such as serving in the two World Wars together. In the late 1960s and the 1970s, there was a boom in popular music in various dialects across the peninsula, with pop singers such as Ornella Vanoni (with songs in Milanese) and Fabrizio De André (Genoese) demonstrating that dialects could perhaps be safely embraced after these broader shifts towards Italian and away from the stains of dialect (see, for example, Cavanaugh 2009 on the punishments that Bergamasco school children endured for speaking any dialect in school).

In the late 1970s, a series of scholarly books entitled *Mondo Popolare in Lombardia* (Popular World in Lombardy) was published in Lombardy, with volumes focusing on the dialect and folklore of various towns and provinces across the region. Books in the series had titles such as *Brescia e il suo Territorio* (Brescia and Its Territory), *Cultura di un Paese: Ricerca a Parre* (Culture of a Village: Research in Parre) and *Le Parole dei Contadini: Ricerca a Casalpusterlegno* (The Words of the Peasants: Research in Casalpusterlegno). They were based on field research in these communities, and authored by a range of scholars, including sociologists, linguists and folklorists. All focused on what the series editor and author of various pieces across the volumes, Roberto Leydi, referred to as '*il mondo popolare e proletario*' (the popular and proletarian world) (Leydi 1977: 7) in the preface shared across the volumes. In Leydi's preface, '*il mondo popolare e proletario*' was not something of the past (as contemporary stereotypes about Lombardy often depicted it as industrialized and dominated by consumerism) but '*un'altra civiltà, cultura*' (another civilization, culture), '*con una sua visione del mondo*' (with its own view of the world') as well as its own '*voce*' (voice), which could be a model for resisting '*alla deculturazione e all'alienazione*' (the deculturization and alienation) of the contemporary moment (ibid.: 9). As Leydi argued, only through a modification of the relations of production that included the voices of the base could real change be made. And these voices were necessarily dialectal and grounded in specific smaller communities. The point of

these volumes was not to hasten the integration of this ‘other culture’ into the world of industry, or to update its variations or document them as they disappeared, but to present them as a way to resist and change the relations of production.³ Funded and supported by the Department of Culture of the region of Lombardy, their publication, Leydi proclaimed, would result in concrete interventions, effected through libraries across the region.

The series’ focus on the ‘*mondo popolare e proletario*’ imagines Italy as a nation built on struggle, but casts the current struggle as one for a just political-economic structure. It portrays a nation state that treats peasants and the proletariat not as holdovers from the past to be dispensed with, but as containing the promise for a contemporary collectivism, a space of resistance and a model of contrast against the ills of industrialization and consumerism that the authors – or at least the editors – saw as characterizing Lombardy.⁴ The chronotope recuperates the past as an aid to building a just political-economic future, one with more equal distribution of resources and less hierarchical modes of production. Local ways of doing things – from agriculture and animal husbandry to modes of socializing and the sharing of local stories and songs – in the north, but potentially across the peninsula as well, could be joined together to provide an alternative to the unequal way in which the nation state was currently structured. In this chronotope, the future and the past could be joined to avoid the problems of the present, but only through re-imagining the space of the nation state as one filled with and oriented towards valuing peasant, subaltern and proletarian voices. While the series is much more explicitly oriented towards political-economic structures and social equality, the inclusion of local ways of life and dialects as part of the nation state, and not antithetical to it, echoes Tiraboschi’s depiction of a nation built of variation and equivalence.

So perhaps it is not surprising that although the books explicitly focused on the communities they examined, in practice there was much reaching back towards past moments of scholarship, and to Tiraboschi in particular. This is most striking in the volume *Bergamo e il suo Territorio* (Bergamo and Its Territory), which contains multiple pieces dedicated to his life and works aside from the *Vocabolario*. The volume offers material collected by Tiraboschi recuperated from local archives, including songs, stories and an overview of Tiraboschi’s life and correspondence with other scholars of dialects across the peninsula, from Florence to Sicily. In the text, the recuperation of Tiraboschi’s work and biography emphasizes that Bergamo can boast a history of scholarly endeavour, and creates a continuity between Tiraboschi’s efforts and the authors’ own. In both, the relationship between the local and the national – as mediated through the presence of dialect – is imagined as vital, and central to a nation state that includes all voices. Rather than the historical disruption that dispensing with dialects represents – for some Italians a

desirable disruption; for others, one to lament – and that aligns with other social, economic and cultural transformations that occurred during the Economic Miracle decades, dialects and their speakers are brought to the fore as historical constants, which, in the 1970s and 1980s, can be drawn upon to recreate the conditions of everyday life. Dialect language ideologies thus construct a chronotope of an Italian nation full of welcome, useful variation, both linguistic and political-economic, one built on newly excavated evidence of continuity and contiguity with a past before the alienation of industrialization.

RISK AND THREAT: THE LINGUISTIC CONSTRUCTION OF PADANIA AT THE TURN OF THE MILLENNIUM

In late 1999, a group that called itself the ALP – *Associazione Linguistica Padana* (Padanian Linguistic Association) – began meeting. Padania is the name with which the Northern League, at the time a separatist, pro-northern political party that married its political and economic arguments to championing northern cultural traditions and ways of life, had christened the northern regions of Italy (after the Po river) (Cachafeiro 2002; Levy 1996). The group's name, then, immediately signalled that it was aligned with the League (as it is known at the time of writing). As an instance of what Douglas Holmes (2000) has called an 'integralist' party, the League brought together what were essentially xenophobic stances towards southern Italians and immigrants to critique the Italian state, pointing to the impending loss of local dialects as one example of how the state's effort to unite Italians had produced discrimination against local ways of life, traditions and histories (Cento Bull 1996; Mainardi 1998). This was a moment in which signs with town names written in dialects were popping up all over the north – including across the province of Bergamo – a product of the League's recently achieved positions of power in town councils and other local government. In the province of Bergamo, where a number of small towns had recently elected Northern League majorities, local government entities were supporting and circulating various cookbooks, primers and calendars, as well as offering dialect language classes. Promoting dialect – and railing against the insidious presence of Standard Italian – was a common Northern League stance.

It was certainly through Northern Leaguers that I found my way to the group, whose bimonthly meetings I attended from its inception in the autumn of 1999 through the end of 2000. Francesco and Vittorio, two acquaintances of mine who were staunch Northern Leaguers, urged me to join the group, as they knew I was doing research on Bergamasco. They told

me the group would be a great place to learn about the value of northern dialects, depicting it as a context for promoting northern dialects, but also for showing how different they were from the standard and other, more southern varieties. They claimed that the group was founded to build connections across dialect communities and find similarities and commonalities across the north. Their portrayal of the group resonated with the dialect language ideologies commonly espoused by the Northern League at that time: that (northern) dialects were inherently valuable, that they were being persecuted and lost as Standard Italian was imposed across communities and that this loss was something that could – and should – be battled through promoting initiatives that focused on writing and recording dialects. Rarely was speaking dialects at the centre of these efforts; much more common was the production or promotion of texts in dialects.

The group was much more varied than I, or I think they, anticipated, however. The head of the group (chosen before I joined, through means that were never explained to me) was a well-respected amateur linguist who had written the definitive Milanese-Italian grammar *Grammatica del Milanese Contemporaneo* (1998), Claudio Beretta. Other group members varied across the meetings, but included people from across Lombardy, and occasionally beyond; some also amateur linguists, like Francesco and Vittorio, others poets, or simply interested parties. Some were vocal in their Northern Leaguist views, but not all. Beretta, for instance, insisted that the group and its undertakings were explicitly not political, but scholarly. This was reflected in the location of the group's meeting, the building that was the seat of the Circolo Filologico Milanese (Milanese Philological Circle), in central Milan, a cultural organization founded in the 1870s to promote foreign language learning.

At the first meeting I attended, in December 1999, about twenty people were present, and we gathered in a large classroom, seated at desks, while Beretta claimed a large desk on a raised platform at the front. Under Beretta's direction, the group agreed to a first step: everyone would produce a list of the hundred most common words in their dialect, with Italian glosses, and send them to Beretta to compile. At our next meeting, set for February 2000, we would discuss these lists and look for points of comparison and similarity across them. But that was about all the group agreed on. More than two more hours were spent discussing what the overall goal of the group and its work would be. Some proponents, like Beretta, argued for the intrinsic value of simply recording northern dialectal variation, which is ample; most saw word lists as the first step in this endeavour, though others wondered how to include grammatical or phonological information as well. A couple of people were very concerned with the issue of orthography, or writing systems, as few dialects had established orthographies, and those that did differed

greatly among themselves about how they represented the same vowel and consonant sounds. Others, like Francesco and Vittorio, thought that the place to start was to author a political manifesto about the importance of all northern dialects, which would frame their efforts as political. The idea of producing a *koiné*, or mixed common language, composed from all the northern dialects, which could be embraced and used instead of Italian, was suggested and generally supported, though there was little shared sense of how to proceed with it. The paradox of potentially producing a different hegemonic language to replace the hegemony of Standard Italian, in the face of sliding geographic scales of affiliation and difference (northern, Lombardian, Bergamasco, etc.), resonates with the geographical tensions discussed in Michael Blim's chapter in this volume, where actors constantly have to position themselves within varying geographical, political and social hierarchies. At last, Beretta brought the meeting to a close and exhorted everyone to remember to send him their lists soon.

The early February 2000 meeting included Beretta, and again, about twenty others, including a poet from the town of Crema, a few people from Como and a man in his seventies who informed the group that he was from Sicily but had lived in Milan for forty years and whose home village had a dialect that resembled northern dialects. Francesco, Vittorio and some of their Northern League acquaintances from other places in Lombardy were there. Beretta began the meeting by berating us: only he and one other participant had composed and shared their lists of one hundred most basic words in their dialects before the meeting. Two other people, he informed us, had sent political statements about how Italian and the Italian nation state were killing their dialects and ways of life. Beretta said this wasn't the point, but Francesco and Vittorio, who predictably had sent the statements, argued that it was, and was a necessary step for the group. Otherwise, they pressed, why do all this work? What would it all be in service of?

This question came up frequently in conversations I had with lots of people across the province of Bergamo in 1999 and the early 2000s about the League's efforts to promote the dialect: why now? Why campaign to post the sign for '**Zógn**' next to the one in Italian stating that you were entering the town of '*Zogno*'? Or '**Berghém**' in addition to '*Bergamo*'? Why have the province publish a calendar with events listed in Bergamasco? People who adamantly supported the League argued that posting these signs in dialect and publishing dialect texts were essential moves towards taking their local places back from what they saw as the tyranny of the state of Italy. Those who objected to the League's positions often dismissed these acts as symbolic, nonsensical gestures, which had little practical meaning or effect. But even some people who were sceptical of the League's politics found these efforts appealing, and indeed, they fit into a broader local cultural landscape that

included dialect poetry readings and dialect theatre performances, many sponsored by a cultural organization founded in the 1920s to support just such local activities. The League and its supporters were not the only voices speaking in support of the dialect at that time, but their efforts often overshadowed others, even those belonging to long-standing organizations.

Multiple language ideologies animated Bergamaschi's relationships with their dialect during that moment. Some people worried about it, some worked to 'save' it, others moved themselves and their children away from it, while others lived their lives in Italian and rarely considered it at all. Bergamasco at this time was a chronotope with various, sometimes conflicting, facets. For those who did not support the Northern League but wrote poetry or attended play performances in dialect, or who participated in the various other long-standing events that featured, or simply took place in, Bergamasco, it existed as a chronotope of 'our place', nested in homes and local theatres, bars and hiking trails, linking the now of speaking and use to a continuous past. Change had come in the 1950s and 1960s, and fewer young people spoke it now, but it was still the ambient flavour of intimacy and home for many. But it was also and at the same time a slightly different chronotope for the Northern League and its supporters and sympathizers, one that looked towards a future in which Italian receded and Bergamasco and all (northern) dialects emerged from the home and family to become public languages, languages of political discourse, public representation and institutional recognition. Both situated the province in relation to the nation, though while for Northern Leaguers this was an inherently political relation, for others it was simply the cultural landscape of the de facto united state of Italy. Once again, we see underlying, recursively repeating tensions between singularities and pluralities (language versus dialects, Italy versus regions, etc.).

A few years later, another acquaintance of mine, long a vocal supporter of the Northern League, gifted me a *frasario* or book of common phrases translated into Bergamasco, Genoese and Milanese that he had compiled. The author shared with me that he had done the work as part of his membership of the ALP, which he joined after I had stopped attending when my dissertation field research ended at the end of 2000. The introduction to the short book stated:

Questo piccolo frasario padano è dedicato a tutti quelli che vogliono tenere vive le lingue regionali dell'Italia Settentrionale. Speriamo che questo libretto possa aiutare tutti a comprendere meglio la ricchezza, la varietà e l'interesse delle parlate dei nostri luoghi.

(This small Padanian phrasebook is dedicated to all those who want to keep the northern Italian regional languages alive. We hope that this little book may help everyone better understand the richness, the variety and the interest of the parlances of our places.)

The book is a list of common words and phrases in the three varieties, offering an Italian word or phrase, followed by the same phrase in each language. For example, here is the entry for the phrase ‘what do you do (as a profession, for work)’:

11. Che lavoro fai? (Italian)
 GE Cös’ti fæ de lòu? [Genoese]
 MI S’tè fee de lavorà? [Milanese]
 BG Cosél tò mestér? [Bergamasco]

It is Italian, then, that is given equivalence, flipping Tiraboschi’s focus on the dialect as requiring of definition and comparison. Note also the extensive use of representational or orthographic methods to emphasize the differences between these dialects and Italian, as well as between each other, such as diacritics (accents of various sorts, like ‘ö’ and ‘é’) and letters (such as ‘æ’) to represent sounds, word variation (e.g. ‘mestér’, the Bergamasco word for work) and contractions (‘S’tè’ in Milanese for ‘what’). Such orthographic choices foreground linguistic difference, indexing cultural and potentially political distinctions as well. The inclusion of these three varieties may also implicitly elevate them as the most important northern dialects in the north, leaving Venetian and varieties in the north-west as separate, perhaps worthy of their own phrasebooks.

This is a book for those who already know Italian (as indeed is true for nearly all Italians now), to instruct them in how to write and say these words in these three dialects – but only if they know the orthography, whose very differences may hamper as much as enable comprehension for the uninitiated. These three dialects are not historical remnants or folkloric objects of interest here. The explicit references to the dialects’ ‘richness’ and ‘interest’, coupled with the phrases themselves, which outline a mundane, contemporary existence of work, small talk and everyday tasks and errands like buying gas, finding the right subway stop or asking for an aspirin, depict dialects as the languages of the here and now, as well as languages to be used in public, not just domestic, spheres of interaction. The answering phrases to the question about work above include office worker (‘*impiegato*’), store owner (‘*negoziante*’) and student (‘*studente*’), as well as worker (‘*operaio*’) and farmer (‘*contadino*’, the same word usually translated as ‘peasant’). These are dialects in use, to be used, not treasured or saved. They exist now, utterly equivalent to each other and Italian.

In many ways, this phrasebook distils the ALP’s ambitions into their clearest form, producing a chronotope that fuses a modern, unremarkable, everyday now of dialect with a space of variation and equivalence. Italian, in this chronotope, still exists in counterpoint to dialects, but not within a hierarchy – it is just one of many possible varieties that people in

northern places may speak, or want to speak. An embodiment of the Northern League's efforts to protect and promote local (northern) ways of living and speaking, this phrasebook indexes those efforts and political goals – in this way, it is a moment of dialect becoming useful and visible, though the efficacy of this chronotopic representation, like the others I have outlined here, may perhaps be fleeting.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Dialect language ideologies congeal into particular chronotopes in historical moments when dialects become, again, useful – useful to define political belonging or threat, to renegotiate the structures of the nation state, to reconcile notions of community that span the local and the national. These chronotopes change over time, and in doing so, may transform dialects' historical trajectories and scales of place, though their relation to, and tension with, Standard Italian remain constant.

As a last example, let us return to Tiraboschi's dictionary, which, after its reissue in the 1980s, became a markedly different chronotope than it was when first published. It became an authoritative text, seen to contain the real Bergamasco. The current edition of *Il Tiraboschi* is a grand two-volume set, bound in green and embossed with gold lettering, an object that adorns the bookshelf of anyone in Bergamo even peripherally interested in the dialect and local culture, even those who profess to speak not a word of it. It is securely anchored in Bergamo and its province through this pattern of ownership and the continual references to it by language activists across the province, and its use connects the historical moment captured by the text to the present of its use. 'But is it in *Il Tiraboschi*?' was a question I heard posed on radio programmes about the dialect, in dialect language classes, among poets and playwrights, as people evaluated a word's authenticity at a time when Italian and Bergamasco were commonly mixed in much everyday use.

But the Bergamasco on those pages was one that often no longer existed, given the usual linguistic changes and innovations that had occurred in Bergamasco over time in the interim. The time it represents is both historical and in certain ways imaginary, and the place it indexes is both simple – Bergamo and its province – and diverse in the variation across this area that is depicted. It is imaginary in that it seems to represent a time before, a time when Bergamasco was simply and unproblematically spoken by all, a time sometimes talked about as '*di una volta*', or '*D'öna olta*', in Bergamasco: once upon a time. Valuable but inert and contained, Bergamasco as embodied by *Il Tiraboschi* at the end of the twentieth century was no threat to the

nation state, but also not the vibrant addition to the national assemblage of languages and dialects depicted in its pages in the 1870s.

Unlike the ALP phrasebook, *Il Tiraboschi* pushes the dialect out of the contemporary realm, into a non-political, explicitly cultural or folkloric space, where embracing it can be achieved as easily and safely as putting it on a shelf. The competing dialect language ideologies linked to each of these texts are evident in these differences, and indicate as well that dialects remain available as useful resources to negotiate ongoing tensions around national belonging, the nature of Italian citizenship and the relation of local places to the nation state.

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NOTES

1. Text in italics = Italian; text in bold = Bergamasco. In quotations, italicization follows the original text.
2. It should be noted that there were several other historical moments in which dialect language ideologies congealed into other chronotopes over the century between these two moments.
3. By the time I was gifted a number of volumes and bought others in the early 2000s, however, it appeared to me that they had become and were treated as evidence of a particular Bergamasco past.
4. This perhaps echoes the anthropology of Ernesto De Martino, particularly his *Rapporto Etnografico sul Lamento Funebre Lucano* (Ethnographic Report on Lucanian Funeral Lament), which appeared in *Mondo Popolare e Magia in Lucania* (Popular World and Magic in Lucania) (Rome: Basilicata) in 1975.

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AFTERWORD

BEYOND RHETORICAL BINARIES

The Anthropology of Italy and the Politics of Critique

Michael Herzfeld



DIALECTS AND DIALECTICS

The wide-ranging chapters that precede this one offer a series of innovative, often interlinked perceptions.¹ However idiosyncratic or selective any account of those insights is likely to be, one commonality, I suggest, is particularly important. Collectively and individually, the authors disperse some unfortunate stereotypes that have dogged both Italy and Italian anthropology for far too long. Like many stereotypes, these do have some basis in reality, albeit often a culturally misunderstood reality. That reality appears in these chapters in a new and constructive light. Among the stereotypes, two stand out for their frequency. One is a rhetorical capacity among intellectuals for operating at a stratospheric level of conceptual abstraction, while the second is an everyday way of expressing dissatisfaction with state, church or any other powerful institution that has manifestly failed to serve the people in its care. Taken together, they suggest a tension between philosophical idealism and a pragmatic realism that springs from a complex and difficult past.

The abstraction is the product of a long rhetorical tradition, but it often frames subtle and interesting ideas. It permits a style of theorizing – in life and in anthropology – that enables a philosophically sophisticated view of ethnographic work. Sadly, however, it has sometimes led to misunderstanding and especially to a serious underestimation (especially by non-Italians) of the conceptual riches of Italian anthropological scholarship, which,

despite its philosophical cast, remains equally rooted in empirical ethnography. There are traces of such abstraction in these chapters, not exclusively in those written by Italian authors, and those traces provide tantalizing hints of how close ethnographic observation infuses philosophical and aesthetic generalities with both immediacy and comparability (to voice abstractions of my own).

The complaints, while often exaggerated in a florid rhetoric that shares common origins with the more extravagant abstractions, are a goldmine for anthropologists hoping to gain admittance to the sites of cultural intimacy. The expressions of complaint (*lamentele*) pinpoint real existential issues and admit the attentive ethnographer, whether foreign or Italian, to aspects of Italian cultural life – notably areas of conflict between institutional norms and ordinary decency – that might otherwise be invisible. The anthropologists' job, performed with insight and empathy in these pages, is not to 'correct' the impressions created by the complaints, but to explain why they are so frequent and to show what larger issues they index.

These two features do not exhaust in even a small degree the rich variety of expressive idioms that pervade a society much given to discussing *cultura*. They do, I suggest, offer insight into some of the distinctive contributions made by anthropologists working on Italian society to a discipline concocted in the heyday of British and French colonialism. This volume is indeed a major step away from viewing Italy through the distorting lens of an essentially colonial epistemology – a lens fashioned under the repressive conditions of the historical emergence of the Italian nation-state itself. From that emergence, Italy has tested the complex relation between state and nation as perhaps no other country has done. It may well be that it is this complexity, for example, that enables Berardino Palumbo to coin the term *hyper-place* as a way of acknowledging (and here identifying) 'multiple discursive regimes and moral economies', which seem especially germane to understanding the management of the past.² Like Greece, Italy carries a huge historical burden.

In this regard, Paolo Heywood suggests that 'Italy has long existed – like Greece . . . – as a sort of internal other within Europe' – an internal other, I would nevertheless add, that also provided standards of cultural excellence in the eyes of more powerful European nations: opera, chamber music, gastronomy, painting and sculpture, poetry and prose. There is also another difference that may be diagnostic of the difference in the two countries' respective impact on modern European cultural ideals. Greece, which still struggles for its arts to be more widely appreciated, has always seemed more rural and wilder than Italy, no doubt in large measure thanks to the prejudices of the Grand Tour. Locally, Greek fascination with the idea of the village (see Herzfeld 2020) contrasts with Italian insistence on linking culture

with urbanity (in both senses of that word). Indeed, those ethnographies of Italy that did achieve classic status early on – notably Silverman (1975) and Kertzer (1980) – did so precisely by grasping the urban nettle with both hands. Silverman did so by showing the pervasion of the rural imaginary by *civiltà*, the ideal of urbanity, while Kertzer took us into the urban core of communist politics in Bologna and thereby connected the national to the local in a less culturalist vein. Thus, the Greece–Italy dyad, which old-school scholars regarded as the tawdry remains of ancient glories, offers rich comparative insights into the currency of these contrasted self-stereotypes of rurality and urbanity – an arena quite as relevant to present epistemic concerns as anything developed in the remote colonial possessions that were the discipline’s early stamping grounds.

Inevitably, an anthropological approach to a single country runs a double risk. On the one hand, it can easily become trapped in ‘methodological nationalism’ (see Glick Schiller and Wimmer 2002). On the other, and concomitantly, it may end up reproducing stereotypes. The only antidote to both conditions is a resolutely open-ended comparativism – an epistemological commitment that, implicitly or explicitly, suffuses every one of these chapters. Comparison, to be sure, can all too easily end up as a bureaucratic exercise in the listing of national cultures, or indeed as a classification of countries by stereotype. A reflexive approach to comparison, however, as here, instead examines *why* a particular set of traits seems so prominent within national borders. Of those traits adumbrated in the present collection, even a preliminary accounting reveals both foreign and internal perspectives that shape the way a country looks from the outside and that prompt visitors to nod sagely and reaffirm their preconceived notions of what is, in this case, ‘typically Italian’.

That is emphatically *not* the point of this book. One way of avoiding the allure of the stereotypes is to place the anthropology of Italy in the context of anthropology conducted in other countries by Italians, as exemplified by most of the contributions to the provocatively titled – provocatively, because in the English language it challenges the Anglophone hegemony over serious anthropological research – *Histories of Anthropology* (D’Agostino and Matera 2023). The vast majority of that research was conducted outside Italy and avoids the mistake of reaching for yet another ‘national anthropology’ (see also the sage reflections of Palumbo 2018: 191 et passim). Younger Italian anthropologists are pushing back at local stereotypes surrounding one of their own current foci of intellectual interest, the process of *patrimonializzazione* (‘heritagization’), in other parts of the world.³ It is indeed time to get away from the false assumption that Italian anthropology has nothing to offer global theory and method – an impression that, as I shall briefly suggest again below, is partly the product of an unwillingness to read Italian

anthropological writings with an open mind towards distinctive local styles of expression.

Italian anthropologists have also employed theoretical models distinct from those most favoured in the Anglophone and Francophone intellectual communities. George Saunders (1984) was an early proponent of taking these efforts seriously, but his advice lay largely unheeded for too long. By neither privileging nor slighting its Italian contributors, the present volume begins at last to reciprocate the generosity of Italian scholars such as Francesco Faeta, who has offered a comprehensive account of the important visual record that Frank Cancian – perhaps better known for his Latin American work – created for the Italian South (Faeta 2022; see also Solveti 2022).

The best evidence for the ongoing and expanding universe of Italian anthropology is precisely the gradual disappearance of arguments for a distinctive ‘Italian school’, an epistemological version of methodological nationalism. This is all the more remarkable in that officialdom has sought to commodify ‘culture’ as a peculiarly Italian possession – but then opposition between anthropology and official world views is itself a long and global story.

An early target of the critique of methodological nationalism was the idea of ‘national cultures’ and the reduction of culture in general to a set of discrete, bounded entities that simply reproduced the logical form of nation-states. In Italy, the ‘culture’ concept has a peculiarly consumerist resonance despite the concomitant realization that the country is a prime candidate among nation-states, especially within Europe, for the recognition of multiplex cultural and linguistic plurality. Gastronomic *terroirs* match an equally heady variety of local dialects. Official Italy, from the gastronomic promotion of ‘Eataly’ to the claim that Italy contains 70 per cent of the world’s great works of art, lays monopolistic claim to ‘culture’ in the elite sense of a higher human condition.⁴

Such official models exploit Italian cultural heritage, ignoring the ways in which it also fuels critiques of the country as an unworthy heir to ancient and Renaissance glories, much as Greece, too, was placed on a pedestal that effectively served to deny it access to modernity.⁵ One consequence of these negative images is a defensive display of cultural virtuosity, sometimes allied to muscular assertions of national rights and recognition (Greenland 2021; Hom 2015). Beyond opera, gesticulation, romantic or predatory sexuality (depending on one’s positionality), pasta and *gelato* and strange rules about when to drink milky coffee, however, culture comprises traits that are also invisible to the casual tourist or foreign consumer but – sometimes painfully – apparent to those who live in the country.⁶

Thus, the abstract noun *progettualità* (see Herzfeld 2009: 121) resonates in Italy precisely because ‘projects’ often get stuck at the planning stage. The

planner Paolo Berdini (2000; see also Negri 1999) has castigated the endless production for the Roman municipal government of master plans (*piani regolatori*) that never seem to materialize on the ground. When projects are realized, moreover, their long-term maintenance is by no means guaranteed; the imperative of *far bella figura* (looking good) – as with the San Giorgio bridge discussed by Emanuela Guano – does not anticipate endless unspectacular years of fixing the pipes and wires.⁷

The creation of municipality-directed murals in Genoa mayor Bucci's misguided attempt to create consensus through aesthetics shows that rhetoric does not always achieve its goal. When the rhetoric is more obviously material than the verbal kind, as with the murals, it is also more accessible to critique. In such cases, social experience exposes the message as an attempt to distract attention from continuing failure to maintain, let alone improve, local conditions. The murals, as Guano shows, represented a top-down aesthetic; claims that the initiative was truly participatory merely served to highlight the fact that it was nothing of the sort – as is more generally true, Pizza warns us, of any attempt to expropriate cultural heritage in the name of democratic participation.⁸

In a country that suffers from the unequal wealth distribution discussed by Michael Blim, moreover, maintenance is a particularly elusive benefit; all too often, funds are lacking for the maintenance even of expensive projects designed to impress. Roads and extensive plots of land remain as *cantieri* (construction sites) for years, either because they are underfunded, or because they have been taken over by mafiosi who ensure that the work is repeatedly undone and redone so that public monies may flow directly into mafia pockets. Neglect can lead to disaster, as happened with the Morandi bridge, or it can be deliberately orchestrated by proprietors keen to expel poor tenants in favour of more profitable ones (Herzfeld 2009: 23, 262). When glitzy projects displace the maintenance of old stock, as Guano illustrates with bleak precision, the drawbacks of such initiatives – new sources of pollution and an almost total lack of relevance to local taste and need – are evident before questions of maintenance even arise. Such failures are by no means uniquely Italian, but they have become part of the negative stereotype – and real-life experience – against which Italians often rail.

Anthropology has its own peculiar embarrassments, and these, too, have helped to create an unjust impression of what Italian anthropology is all about. Much as British and French anthropologists participated in colonial projects, Italian anthropologists laid the grounds for some of the internal discrimination that is addressed in these pages. Prominent among early Italian anthropologists who represent that embarrassing past is Cesare Lombroso, inventor of the infamous 'criminal anthropology'. This was a racist research programme that sought to identify physiognomic features

shared by non-Europeans and alleged European criminals alike. One of the ugliest chapters in Lombroso's career was, as Sorge (2015: 38) has lucidly demonstrated, his claim to have documented such marks of Cain on the swashbuckling pastoralists of Orgosolo in Sardinia. The Italian state identified Orgosolo men as 'bandits' and assumed, on the basis of Lombroso's 'findings', that they were irremediably criminal by nature. This portrayal, as Sorge shows, had a terrible impact on the community and more generally on Sardinia – an impact that reverberates to this day.

Lombroso's views are also of broader importance today because, however indirectly, they prefigure much of the 'integralism' of the political right. Heywood briefly traces the impact of Lombroso's thinking on the emergence of the 'Southern Question'. While Heywood rightly reserves his severest criticism for Edward Banfield and Robert Putnam for contributing to a racist social geography that continues to divide Italians, Lombroso remains a brooding presence because of his appeal to far-right politics. The nascent nation-state eagerly embraced his views on human degeneracy because, as in Greece, the conflation of the cultural with the genetic *also* inspired notions of a unified national character and heritage. Such notions have been variously invoked, by left and right alike, to counteract the centrifugal tendencies of Italian regionalism – although, as Jillian Cavanaugh remarks, the chronotopic possibilities afforded by local dialects may confirm as easily as they sometimes undermine the ideal of national unity. Indeed, they may on occasion also feed local nostalgia for a culturally – and thus, by implication, racially – pure past.

Fortunately, Lombroso's historical importance in the forging of Italian racism and nationalism is more than offset by a long intellectual tradition of broadly Marxist origin, with internationally recognized founding figures in Ernesto De Martino and Antonio Gramsci. Modern Italian anthropologists are often energetically anti-racist and often critical of national state institutions, although, like foreign anthropologists working in Italy, they try to explain the failures rather than simply exaggerating or condemning them. The chapters in this book explore themes of complaint that the authors seem to share, at least partially, with their local interlocutors: the inability to complete projects, official disregard for the weak and the marginal, inefficient bureaucracy, racism, political corruption.

These conditions (and the *lamentele* that betray local awareness of them) reflect the endless treatment of Italy as a poor relative of the European powers, and, as Antonio Sorge notes for Sicily in particular, as a place of abandonment and decay. There is an important dialectic that conjoins the optimism of abstract projection and the pessimism that failure brings in its train. Perhaps the clearest articulation of the relationship between success and complaint is Michael Blim's poignant concluding observation: 'For all

the good that the Third Italy did for many of Italy's citizens, it also encouraged a careless disregard for those who did not reap its benefits, and its celebratory rhetoric became a justification for a rejection of national responsibility for the country's problems, which dwell in the Third Italian regions as well.'

Rhetoric is a powerful tool for the dissemination of discontent. The current, right-wing government, for example, may have triggered a recent increase in racist attacks, both physical and verbal. Maddalena Cammelli here astutely links the tag phrase '*Italiani brava gente*' to a larger pattern of memory politics in which resistance to the acknowledgement of collective responsibility feeds the current fascist resurgence. The phrase, initially associated with attempts to present the Italians as minor players in the Nazi-Fascist persecution of the Jews, resurfaces frequently, although sometimes today, on the left, with irony. For all our concern with the undulating recrudescence of racism in Italy, however, not all forms of forgetting are equally pernicious. Heywood sagely observes that there is a difference between the wilful ignorance of the political right wing on the one hand and the deliberate forgetting by Predappio's residents on the other. That forgetting seems, in fact, to be a form of conscious remembering: remembering to forget, or what Irene Peano felicitously calls 'remembering not to remember'. Predappiesi perform this labour of occlusion continuously. They cannot afford to forget; rather, they dissociate themselves from a lurking past of which many of them thoroughly disapprove.

Their socially performed lack of interest thus differs, not only from fascist denialism, but also from the alleged government indifference either to the burgeoning influx of immigrants or to their deaths at sea. Lilith Mahmud points out that the widely shared view of Italian bureaucracy as 'incompetent', while hardly complimentary, is for that reason a sneaky way of claiming that Italian functionaries are not racist – that they actually *preferred* to act incompetently, to avoid an enforcement that would have resulted in more deaths. Mahmud's contribution, like Michael Blim's commentary on economic regionalism, demonstrates the materiality of rhetoric and its sometimes tragic consequences for those it excludes.

Mahmud's accusation of genocide, moreover, is no exaggeration. Not all would-be immigrants survive the attempt to breach the walls of Fortress Europe. Those who do survive the cruel sea passage, as Grotti and Brightman demonstrate, yearn for a cultural and social rebirth that is itself inextricably ensnared in the reality of a death barely avoided. Yet they are often disappointed. In the second generation, the experience of rejection may be even greater.

Beyond the impossible choice between diabolical incompetence and the deep but polluted sea, Mahmud, Elizabeth Krause, Anna Tuckett, and

Vanessa Grotti and Marc Brightman all demonstrate that ideas of *italianità* are deeply inflected by racial assumptions about who ‘belongs’. Rhetoric materializes unspoken assumptions and lends them political force. Krause, in particular, shows how the rhetorical performance of bureaucratic impartiality and regulatory efficiency works not to protect immigrant rights, but to reinforce discrimination against Chinese workers and to deflect onto them earlier canards about mafiosi from the South. Such devices, which thus betray a long conceptual history at the local level, now pervade the entire European system of migration control (see also Albahari 2015; Feldman 2012).⁹ Italian officials thereby implicitly – and perhaps unconsciously – calibrate *civiltà* across time and space with the encompassing ‘civilizing mission’ through which European colonialism sought justification for its racial hierarchies of slavery, conquest and humiliation. Ancient Roman imperialism, itself an explicit model for (especially) British colonial domination, has returned to haunt those who seek to become the new Italians (and, by extension, the new Europeans), or who simply seek a means of economic survival within that cultural *imperium*.

In Italy, Mussolini’s fascists made ancient Rome the model for the new muscular Italian culture they envisaged. Despite current distaste for Mussolini’s particular brand of *romanità*, it continues to inflect the teaching of history in ways that partly overlap with its counterpart in other European and, especially, British schools. The appeal to a Roman imperialism sometimes headed and largely populated by people of West Asian and sub-Saharan African origin, a detail totally submerged in most European high-school textbooks, serves as a form of self-justification for the ‘civilizing mission’ and, in Italy, for claims of cultural excellence.

Italian racism reflects larger European attitudes – a background currently reproduced in the unequal distribution of responsibility for migrant affairs among the member states, with their racist attitudes towards Italy (and Greece). Americans and Europeans are hardly in a position to deny their own implication in the Italian racial and class hierarchy. Indeed, it acquires dramatic reality in Antonio Sorge’s politely biting description of how foreigners who buy cheap properties in destitute Sicilian towns immediately acquire the social status of benefactors. His comment on one such expatriate’s website displaying ‘the cornucopia of delights that make Sicily a beautiful, splendid place full of tradition, good food and picturesque people’ echoes the Genoese city administration’s promotion of ‘joy’ through its mural painting campaign in Emanuela Guano’s account. In Sicily, as Sorge notes, some foreign residents do bring tangible benefits to local society, but the larger picture, as in Genoa, is one of subordination to neoliberal consumerism, and the socially and economically ruinous shift from *paese* to *borgo* is matched by the relentless gentrification of ‘historic’ zones of the larger cities.

The hierarchy thus evidenced, in some of its other manifestations, can literally prove fatal. That the Dublin Conventions entailed European Union bullying of its southern members, for example, does not exculpate those states from the charge of building a similar hierarchy on the bodies, dead and alive, of hapless migrants. It does demonstrate the capillary breadth and depth of a colonial hegemony that has produced multiple, ramified forms of complicity at several levels, from the pan-European to the kind of regional aggregation represented in Italy by the once-separatist Northern League.

Jane and Peter Schneider's analysis points to the same hegemonic structure from another angle. They show how the mafia image of Italy largely originated in southern Italian migration to the US, where Prohibition (and more recently the proscription of the drug trade) sucked admittedly willing and eager Italian entrepreneurs into an economic dynamic and a hegemonic political order that inevitably positioned them as dangerous actors both abroad and at home. That realization does not lessen their criminal responsibility any more than the current European immigration regime justifies the criminal incompetence of national authorities. It does show them operating profitably as at least nominally free agents within a late flowering of European world domination.

Moreover, the Schneiders' account of the mutual entanglement of national politicians with Sicilian mafiosi, a situation not unique to Italy (see Herzfeld 2022: 10, 29, 53–54), reveals the complex complicities that support forms of action radically at odds, at a purely legalistic level, with the formal rules of the institutional framework within which they occur. 'Lack of proof' (as reported by the Schneiders) has a disconcerting resonance with the charge of incompetence (in Mahmud's account): we are not 'competent', in that other sense of the Italian *competenza*, to push legal proceedings to their supposed final goal, and so we refuse all responsibility.

Silence, however, is not only a mafia prerogative; it also takes the form of an avoidance of talk with the 'wrong people', as Theodoros Rakopoulos recounts, by people who define themselves as anti-mafia activists. That silence, too, entails complicity – a necessity where mafiosi and their nominal opponents must coexist. It enables virtuous self-performance at the formal expense of state institutions but may, on occasion, help those who simply want to improve the local economy and ecology. For those caught talking to mafiosi, the consequences – losing their jobs, for example – are convincingly material. As Rakopoulos says, 'words are not dangerous because of their content, but because of their mere existence' – or, rather, because their occurrence triggers a more or less predictable reaction. Their threatening materiality depends not on content, but on context. Silence, concomitantly, is an expressive denial of content. It is in Rakopoulos's 'meta-talk' (and in

Naor Ben-Yehoyada's engagingly paradoxical 'silence-talk') that we may find explicit content capable of furnishing the grounds for decisive action.

Such dynamics speak to the importance of defining (and constantly reworking) lines of contrast between insiders and outsiders. Those lines separate mafiosi from anti-mafia activists, but, as Ben-Yehoyada shows, that distinction is a contested social construction. It depends on who chooses to hear what. Each side to each conflict lays exclusive claim to factuality – to, in a word, *datità* ('data-ness'). The rhetoric of inclusion can also convey implicit threats of its opposite, of exclusion. The proffering of 'hospitality' to refugees, overtly presented as evidence in support of the *brava gente* image, often serves to put these strangers in their place, denying them membership in the body politic (e.g. Quagliariello 2021).

For those immigrants who do make it through the initial passage and arrival, as Grotti and Brightman show, inclusion in some form of kinship may afford a feeble first grip on Italian society. Further progress is extremely difficult; the obfuscatory rhetoric of *accoglienza* (welcome) makes it even harder to achieve. Even for those who (like Mahmud herself) are highly educated and culturally Italian, and born in Italy, the sense of exclusion never disappears.¹⁰ Official incompetence in the face of immigration, as Mahmud points out, spreads its harm unequally; its effects are especially devastating for those whose physical appearance (or other palpable signs of otherness) serves to classify them as non-Italian. Anna Tuckett demonstrates that such comprehensive discrimination, built into the Italian sense of collective identity, shapes the unequal application of immigration law.

Throughout this volume, we encounter numerous antinomies: insider and outsider, mafia and anti-mafia, *brava gente* and racists, *bella figura* and brute reality, saints and sinners. Their importance arises from their lability, notably in what Magnus Course identifies as the merging of the religious and the secular. Such chimerical binaries frame debate and create lines of opposition. Their clarity, however, stumbles on the quicksand of real social relations.¹¹ It is rhetorical, not empirical. Saints can indeed channel migrants (or vice versa); they can also channel *camorristi* – who are locally viewed less as evil deviants than as victims of state persecution (Pantellaro 2023). Course's comment on the religious and the secular – that through Catholic iconography 'it is possible to say quite different, even opposed things towards a highly variegated set of ends' – can easily apply to the other antinomies. The institutions of the state (and to some extent of the church) demand binary clarity; social experience belies it (see also Palumbo 2020: 49, 58).

The Durkheimian antinomy of the religious and the secular contains the seeds of its own undoing, as when Evans-Pritchard (1956) employed the metaphor of refraction to suggest that social life was the frame through which deity made itself manifest. The social character of iconography so tellingly

portrayed by Course is familiar everywhere in Italy, a country whose Catholic traditions inflect bureaucratic practice as well as ritual observance. Since all humans are sinners, the logic goes, praying to a portrait of the Madonna may – as in many parts of Rome – be more indicative of an attempt to compromise with the divine than of deeply committed piety. The church may – and in at least one case in Rome did – attempt to reorganize such images to suit its insistence on bureaucratic control.¹² For most people, however, the profane is already part of the sacred – as witness the theological allusions with which quite aggressive profanities, in the narrower sense of the unprintable, are often laced.

In his astute analysis of the revitalization of ‘tarantism’, Giovanni Pizza illustrates the historical phases in a struggle between church and people over the delimitation of sacred and profane space, showing, as Berardino Palumbo (2020) does elsewhere, that the boundary is continuously negotiated. Boundaries, as Barth (1969) argued for ethnicity, or ‘hinges’ in Pizza’s terms, do exist; they are sometimes movable and they serve as points of exchange as well as hostility; where locals perceive what Pizza calls ‘the uncertainty and blurring of rule and law’,¹³ the margins flood all formal demarcations. The imagined boundaries that originated in a symbolic geography opposing north to south shifted with the economic winds charted here by Michael Blim. In terms of the contrast framed by Cammelli (‘a shift from looking for something to possess to looking for something to belong to’), Pizza shows us how church and state, and perhaps academia at times, seek to demarcate (and thereby possess) spaces where people instead seek to live and, indeed, simply *belong*.

Iconography is subject to the same tug of war as space. In Naples, the merging of saints’ identities with those of migrants and *camorristi*, two categories that the state ‘illegalizes’, signals protest and exemplifies Italians’ profoundly anti-institutional understanding of membership in a civil (*civile*) society. The reworking of iconographic themes provides a means of asserting social inclusion (belonging) against bureaucratic control of the territory (possession by demarcation).

The sacred and the profane thus merge in social experience. Another binary that displays comparable fluidity is that contrasting the cultural with the genetic. The interchangeability of these concepts in everyday discourse draws sustenance from the official *ius sanguinis* definition of Italian citizenship – but it is the state, too, that takes every possible opportunity to represent itself as both essence and defender of *cultura*. Italians allege that a particular attitude ‘is not in my DNA’ and that it is ‘not in my culture [*cultura*]’. These popular expressions seem to index genetics and culture separately. They function interchangeably, however, and their sheer banality protects them from critical reflection and thereby enables the racialization

of belonging.¹⁴ I have heard these expressions applied to (and self-applied by) leftists who would be horrified at the suggestion that they were racists. Indeed, as Tuckett and Grotti and Brightman show, many are not. The rhetorical conflation of DNA and culture, however, implies the potential for racist perspectives of which the bearers may sincerely – and sometimes justifiably – believe themselves innocent.

Generic complaint about Italian racism nevertheless always implies a measure of self-exception. The phrase ‘Non sono razzista, però . . .’ (I’m not a racist, but . . .) has a more or less global currency (Herzfeld 2007). Heywood offers us a sympathetic account of how the citizens of Mussolini’s birthplace want to reduce his legacy to a determined ordinarieness. The risk, if they succeed, is that later generations will attempt to recover a sanitized rendition of that same legacy in all but name, as indeed the current right-wing government seems intent on doing and as other governments have already tried to do. Cammelli’s clever gloss on Holmes’s account of the new fascism – that Italians experienced ‘a shift from looking for something to possess to looking for something to belong to’ – nicely captures the social force of rhetorical changes that have reshaped the Italian political landscape.

The neofascists’ ‘media squadrism’ in Cammelli’s account is a particularly virulent rhetorical deployment of a violent mythology, projecting its poison far beyond – but also within – ordinary social interaction. It appeals to a modernity to which those who oppose its violence also belong. For that reason, Cammelli warns us, an anthropological assessment cannot simply dismiss it as either mindless or monstrous. Its intimations of familiarity are precisely the source of the unease it generates in us.

That reflexive realization should make us more rather than less alert to the dangers that the resurgence of fascism represents. It sometimes portrays itself as a version of ‘compassionate conservatism’, as in the ‘act of love’ claimed by hardcore rightists calling for the expulsion of African migrants and in claims of sympathy towards the ‘Janus-faced icon of a criminal-victim’ (both described here by Peano). That sanctimonious stance also exploits values associated with an ostensibly well-meaning Catholic church. Pope Francis recently joined forces with the far-right prime minister, Giorgia Meloni, to argue that Italians should stop lavishing affection and care on pets and devote themselves to producing more children.¹⁵ Is this an echo of American-style ‘replacement theory’? Right-wing white Italians fear that collectively they will be displaced by people who look different or that the national stock (*stirpe*) will fall prey to miscegenation. While the pope’s motivation may have been the standard Catholic opposition to birth control, Meloni’s shows itself to be more bluntly white-nationalist. Whatever their respective intentions, the ultimate effect of their combined voices is clear. We only need ask why they did not instead urge adoption and intermarriage as the obvious

adaptations to both a declining birth rate and a swelling migrant presence – both long the subject of concern among Italian politicians of right *and* left.¹⁶

The assumption that Italians must be racially ‘white’, grounded in what Gramsci recognized as the everyday hegemony of ‘common sense’, infuses much right-wing political discourse. Conversely, leftist critics view Italian racism as a betrayal of an equally essentialized notion of national culture and have argued, as mayor Paolo Amenta does in Grotti and Brightman’s account, that the migrants are a source of revitalization. For leftists, the migrants’ contribution to the genetic continuity of the nation is both necessary and welcome. In that context, moreover, generosity to outsiders, even (or especially) to those ‘illegalized’ (see De Genova 2017) by the state, is part of being *civili* – in other words, of *civiltà*. Such ‘civilized behaviour’, which often entails opposition to the state, contributes to the *brava gente* image. As such, however, it is *also* a refraction of colonialism’s ‘civilizing mission’.

The logic of racism is capable of multiple inversions. Deep suspicion of Romanian migrants, for example, may stem from the fear that, because they speak a Latin language that enables them to master Italian easily and because they do not stand out phenotypically, they represent a *hidden* threat of miscegenation. A similar bias inflects the Catholic Church’s charitable support of Latin American migrants, who find themselves the objects of forms of discrimination that seem to contradict the church’s official attitude (Napolitano 2016). So, while the preferential treatment of (for example) Ukrainians and Syrians as opposed to Eritreans does signal racist bias, popular attitudes to genetic origins may at times prove unexpectedly subtle.¹⁷

Racism is often disguised as an argument about culture. The Italian term *cultura* has lofty implications, as the expression of ultimate value. It also serves as an idealized panacea. Thus, for example, Noelle Molé Liston reports on what she sees as the surprising reversion to culture and literacy – rather than technology – as the best means of combating fake news. ‘Above all, we need culture, education and knowledge of users’: the ordering of these three ideals is hardly coincidental. The model of culture thus invoked is the elite perspective currently in the gun-sights of far-right scepticism, but it also reflects a more widely shared (and official) view – despite a high illiteracy rate – that Italy is fundamentally a place of real culture.

Many of those who support the claim of Italian cultural supremacy, including the former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi, have long controlled the most important cultural media and therefore also access to news. In this way, the goal of curing public gullibility with culture suffers an endless short circuit. Molé Liston says it succinctly: ‘the technological form of information may change but citizens must still defer to a small elite group of proper information gatekeepers: the powerful white men become the illuminati of the digital age.’ As her observation shows, moreover, the definition of truth in

the media draws on the racial hierarchy that suffuses the official conception of culture. Molé Liston's account of how dexterously Meloni manipulated the story of a rape to her political advantage also illustrates the dangerously turbid waters separating information from opinion and propaganda – all this in the name of that selfsame scepticism to which anthropology itself, with its relativistic understanding of cultural and social difference, has inadvertently but inevitably contributed.

The present volume is the antithesis of fake news. Like all anthropological writing that rests on immersive fieldwork, it does represent a potentially embarrassing exposure of culturally intimate collective secrets. The touch of the *lamentela* that inflects some contributions – not only those of Italian authors – usefully admits to those spaces where state and church enjoin their own protective versions of *omertà*. That commentator on fake news was closer to the truth than we might first think. Technology is not the answer to the questions raised here. On the contrary, the best antidote, not only to fake news, but also to racism and all the other topics of complaint and concern, is education in a particular, self-critical discipline with a global perspective. That antidote is, in a word, anthropology; and this book is a good place to start.

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NOTES

1. Writing this chapter was a daunting task. I thank Paolo Heywood for some highly creative interactions as I sought to describe the sense of consistent significance in the book's rich range of themes.
2. See particularly Palumbo (2003).
3. See, for example, Gallo (2022: 23) for an innovative approach to the question via attitudes towards and by the community's youths. Bolotta's (2021) study of Thai slum schoolchildren similarly tackles local stereotypes (focusing on an un-Thainess attributed to bad karma) as themselves constitutive of social realities.

4. 'L'Italia, questo incredibile Paese, dove vi sono le radici della civiltà, del pensiero, dell'arte, del bello, che hanno determinato la crescita dell'umanità, questo Paese che possiede circa il 70% del patrimonio culturale mondiale, non è mai riuscita a diventare una potenza culturale viva, né a mettere a frutto l'immenso capitale che possiede' (Boscaro n.d).
5. See Herzfeld (1987).
6. In comparison with Greece, Italians are less likely to try to hide these 'negative' dimensions of national identity from outsiders, whereas they may be equally or more defensive about similar aspects of their local identities. This reflects the widely divergent evolution of the two nation states since their emergence as territorial, sovereign states.
7. Both Guano and Mahmud, in very different contexts, describe attempts to cover up inequities (the term they both appropriately use) with rhetorical devices – in the first context an aesthetic of revitalization, in the second the feel-good language of humanitarianism.
8. On the deceptive rhetoric of participation, see Arnstein (1969). Pizza's appreciation of the importance of conflict parallels that of Scandurra (2003: 10) for urban conflict and its impact on social change.
9. Douglas Holmes (2013) has developed a more comprehensive theory of how rhetorical statements (in this case by central banks) can generate intentionally self-fulfilling prophecies. One wonders how far his experience of research in Italy might have directed this insight.
10. Skin colour is not the only determinant of prejudice. Growing up in England with a German surname indicating a high probability of Jewish ancestry, I never felt 'English', and in fact the distinction between 'English' (one of us) and 'British' (has the right passport) was something I learned early from my parents and that attitudes of my high-school contemporaries only served to reinforce. The ambiguous status of Jews in Italy receives only brief treatment in these pages but represents another curious paradox: an old community and thus part of Italian history, has also suffered a long history of exclusion and persecution. See, e.g., Caffiero (2004); Kertzer (1997, 2014).
11. I take this as the implication of Palumbo's allusion to 'semiotically derived cognitive models'. I do not think that 'cognitive' really describes these models; they are semiotic extensions of what was a deeply divisive and painfully inflicted linguistic binarism – an unstable binarism, to be sure, as is consistent with what both Palumbo and I are saying about the social realities in which it appears. My dissatisfaction with 'disemia' as a more rigid-seeming formulation (albeit descriptive of Greek cultural politics at the time) is what led me eventually to the more pliable formulation of 'cultural intimacy' (see Herzfeld 2016). Heywood's (2018) explorations of LGBTQ activism in Bologna shed critical light on the multiplex pliability of rhetorical binarisms.
12. For the changing significance of the *Madonnelle* and the impact of Catholic doctrine on bureaucratic practice in Rome, see Herzfeld (2009: 103–4 and 131–32 respectively).
13. See also Panella and Little (2021).
14. They work very much in the same way as the everyday ('banal') symbols discussed by Billig (1995). It is conceivable, though hardly demonstrable, that the intimate mutual entailment of (material) death with (social) rebirth described by Grotti and

Brightman plays into the conflation of genetics (as nature) and culture (as a socially shared possession). The emergence of the surviving migrants as potential citizens is marked by such acts of inclusion as the theatrical activity they describe – a clear illustration of moving from a state of natural decay to one of gradual incorporation into culture/society.

15. See the coverage by Nicole Winfield and Paolo Santalucia (2023).
16. On this concern, see Krause (2006); for comparable dynamics in Greece, see Halkias (2004); Paxson (2004).
17. The inauthenticity of *italianità* attributed to people of colour is paralleled in other, non-white settings as well. See Bolotta (2021: 17, 98, 182) on being ‘insufficiently Thai’ among internal migrants, who are often identified by appearance, in Thailand; a rather precise Italian analogy appears in Peano’s observation (this volume) that the prevailing right-wing discourse came increasingly to represent southern peasants as akin to, or partly descended from, ‘Africans’. Such complex racial dynamics are by no means unique to Italy. See also Tegbaru (2020), for instance, for an account of being an educated, UN-employed Ethiopian in Thailand. More reflexive Italians do point an ironic finger at their own surprise to hear people of colour speaking the local dialects that are, paradoxically as it may seem (but as Jillian Cavanaugh astutely notes), the hallmark of being ‘authentically’ Italian.

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