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ARTICLES



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# Textuality of Italian Migration in Luxembourg and the Great Region

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The Banca dati degli Autori della Grande Regione di Origine Italiana (BAGROI) is a bibliographical databank of texts by authors of Italian origin writing in the Great Region (an area encompassing Luxembourg, the French region of Lorraine, the Belgian region of Wallonia, and the German states of Rhineland-Palatinate and Saarland).[1] The project's aim is to establish and document the literary activity of Italian authors or of authors of Italian origin living in Luxembourg and in the surrounding regions.

The impetus for the databank came about during development of the research project "Presence, History, Memoirs of Italians in Luxembourg and in the Great Region," which I had the privilege to lead at the University of Luxembourg between 2004 and 2007. My colleagues and I realized that an increasing number of Italians or persons of Italian origin in the Great Region were writing and publishing books. We started "collecting" these writings, using as groundwork the first studies in this field written by Joseph Boggiani (2005) and Anne Morelli (1996). We also listed announcements in area newspapers requesting submissions of works written by Italians. As news of our initiative spread, getting in contact with new authors became easier. The dimensions of the project (BAGROI currently has approximately one hundred authors) convinced us immediately that it was worth analysis because of its potential as a source of new sociocultural information. Consequently, I set up the databank asking for the following information from the authors:

1. Date of birth (and, depending on the case, of death)
2. Place of birth and generation of immigration
3. Place the texts were written
4. Titles and language of the writings
5. Status of work: published or not published
6. Name and city of publisher and year of publication

BAGROI became more fully developed during a new research project titled "Textuality of Italians of the Great Region and Integration" (TIGRI), which began in 2009 and will conclude in 2014. BAGROI will be online at www.italianistica.lu immediately after the publication of my book in progress *The Anthology of Italian Literature in Luxembourg*.

BAGROI includes the work of both well-known authors (e.g., Jean Portante, Aurélie Filippetti, and Girolamo Santocono) and unknown authors. We used three selective criteria in choosing texts:

1. Works written by first- and second-generation authors are recorded and documented regardless of content and the language in which they were written.
2. Works written by third-generation authors are recorded only if they are explicitly concerned with the topic of migration.
3. The form of the texts (manuscripts or published books) was not relevant for our selection.

BAGROI documents (in the manner of the Banca dati sugli Scrittori di Lingua Italiana nel Mondo [BASLIE] of the University of Lausanne, edited by J. J. Marchand, and the Banca dati degli Scrittori Immigrati in Lingua Italiana [BASILI] of the Università degli studi di Roma La Sapienza, edited by Armando Gnisci) the bibliographical details of the chosen texts, including the language of the writing, as well as important biographical data about each author (e.g., his or her generation and mother tongue), and a small extract of each text.

The criteria listed above indicate BAGROI's principal goal, which is to be less a literary investigation and more a helpful documentation of texts that will be useful from an interdisciplinary point of view. These texts will be thus understood as proof of cultural difference and not as a result of artistic experimentation. BAGROI provides an aid for studying migration in the Great Region vis-à-vis these writings. Therefore the text documents the immigration phenomenon and the degree of the author's integration into his or her respective country.

As might be expected, the body of texts is quite heterogeneous as a result of using a "large net" selection criterion, one that does not consider the quality of the text a decisive element. However, it would be a mistake to conclude that the quality of the texts, in terms that we would call "literary" (that is, texts that make use of aesthetic or artistic features), has been ignored in the process of collecting these works. In order to understand the phenomenology of migration, a text's quality has significance in relation to the authenticity of the writing itself. A "simple" text, or one written by an immigrant who has a "poor" literary and linguistic background, can be of greater importance than a consciously written text, one that uses literary, rhetorical, and stylistic elements. Therefore a "well-written" text will be, from a phenomenological point of view, less illustrative and meaningful than a text written in a simple, more naive, but inevitably more spontaneous and genuine manner. The objective of

BAGROI is to analyze this spontaneous and active communication, characteristic of any text that intends to "tell" something, while offering reliable sociological information derived from it. Such an approach of the written works of immigrants requires the use of various tools of analysis. Literary examination by itself will not be enough to decode the complexity of the chosen texts. That is why we also consider necessary a psychological analysis in order to get to the substance of the message contained therein. But let us stop here and define some fundamental terms that characterize the textual corpus.

After a first reading, which I would call "macroscopic," we identify a "migratory element" in our analysis of content explicitly related to migration: either memoirs or poems and other writings that deal with the topic of migration without connecting it with an autobiographical experience. Out of roughly 120 texts written by some 80 authors, the migratory element is present in about 50 percent of the texts written in Germany, in about 75 percent of those written in France, in 80 percent of those written in Belgium, and in 5 percent of those from Luxembourg. Even if we deal with a very heterogeneous body of texts, it is still interesting to make an analysis of the territorial distribution of the chosen works. These percentage variations can be explained by the difference in every author's perception of the topic of migration, as a result of distinctions in historical and sociological backgrounds in the four territories of the Great Region.

## The Written Production of Luxembourg in Comparison with Those of Neighboring Countries

The first study of Luxembourg's Italian migration literature comes from Joseph Boggiani in 2005. After analyzing several authors, Boggiani reaches the conclusion that the writings found in Luxembourg have little to do with the migratory theme. Instead, most of the authors he examines concentrate on the general theme of "consideration on life" (Boggiani 2005, 147). We are therefore confronted with a body of work in which a migratory element is barely present. If someone were to make a study of "migration literature" (understanding the term the way Marchand defined it) in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, that researcher would likely be disappointed (Marchand 1991, xiii). Nevertheless, there are three elements germane to such a study that are part of the wider and more complex field of migratory phenomenology: (1) the quantity of literary production, (2) the author's generation, and (3) the quality of the writings.

First of all, we have in Luxembourg an important quantity of literary production: There are at least 33 authors who write in Italian (Luxembourg

has only 511,000 inhabitants, 40 percent of whom are immigrants). The second consideration is generational: Almost all these authors are first-generation immigrants, their arrival in Luxembourg dating mostly to the 1960s. Lastly is the question of quality: Almost all these works (most of which rely on happenstance to get published) can be considered good literature and some of them even excellent literature.

The above-mentioned elements differ from those that characterize the writings of neighboring countries. First of all, there are fewer authors in the Lorraine, Saarland, or the Palatinate than in Luxembourg. Also, the literary production spans three generations in France, while in Germany and Belgium it involves only the first generation. From a literary point of view, there is a greater number of "well-written" works by first-generation authors in France and Belgium, as opposed to Germany, where the numbers are quite modest.

It is also true that, as stated above, the percentage of memoirs is much higher outside Luxembourg; consequently, a large number of works (particularly German ones) belonging to the first generation are selected because of the importance of their content from a historical and a sociological point of view, content that introduces the reader to certain emigrational experiences.

Going forward with our study on data and percentages, we think it is important to consider why there is such a difference in the literary production of these countries. The answer will inevitably be sought in the degree of integration or the self-image of Italians in these countries. These forms of integration are somewhat different from country to country, especially in Luxembourg. Italians living in Luxembourg have always had a different perception of their emigration than immigrants in France, Germany, and Belgium. There are three reasons for this perception.

The first has to do with the long period of time that characterizes the Italian presence: Italians reached the Grand Duchy shortly after 1890, working mainly in mines and factories. They tended to congregate in towns in the south of the country (in addition to the capital city of Luxembourg): Differdange, Dudelange, and Esch-sur-Alzette. Apart from the capital, these are also the most populous towns in the country. The number of Italians in the workplace was equal to or even greater than that of the autochthonous population or those of other immigrants (French, Polish, and German). Italians formed the Little Italies[2] in these cities, districts that grew to large dimensions in a short period of time. The host country's suspicious attitude, sometimes taking the form of intolerance, was different than that in other countries because Italians did not constitute defined "minority" groups in many labor fields.

The second reason for the complete integration of the Italians in Luxembourg occurred after World War II, principally in the 1960s, when an immense wave of Portuguese immigrants arrived in the Grand Duchy. The large numbers of these new immigrants made the native population finally accept the Italian presence completely inasmuch as Italians were no longer seen as "the others" in comparison with the newcomers. This kind of integration is relevant from a demographic point of view: Italians were recognized and incorporated as a group (using a mechanism of "integration by exclusion"). Their image was principally associated with unskilled labor in the iron and steel industries and also with gastronomy (the first Italian restaurants in the Grand Duchy were opened in the 1960s [Lorenzini 2004] and spread quickly).

In discussing the third reason for the distinctive integration of Italians, one should examine the end of the 1960s and the 1980s–1990s in order to identify a kind of integration that we could call qualitative. It was precisely during those years that a significant number of Italian professionals arrived in Luxembourg to work in banks or in other European institutions. This period of time marks the profound change of the Italians' image in the eyes of the autochthonous population. Currently, as recent sociological inquiries demonstrate, the Italian community is the best integrated in the country (Fehlen 1999, 83–91; 2006, 27–44; Besch and Legrand 2007).

In addition to these three social factors, which are unique to Luxembourg, a geographical criterion can also be considered. Luxembourg covers only 2,586 square kilometers, and its population is just 511,000 inhabitants, 40 percent of whom have foreign origins. Such a small country with such a high percentage of immigrants has definitely played a very important role in the integration of Italians. They lived their migratory experience in the Grand Duchy in a way very different from that of minorities in other countries. The inquiries show that currently, one inhabitant in four (especially in the southern part of the country) is Italian or has Italian origins. Thirty-four percent of the population speaks some Italian, and 25 percent of it is fluent. These factors have contributed, and continue to contribute, to Italian integration in Luxembourg. So, it is not surprising that this social peculiarity corresponds to a different literary production of the Grand Duchy's Italian immigrants compared with those in neighboring countries. The migratory elements disappear from the writings of the Italian immigrants in Luxembourg not by chance but as a consequence of that complete integration, which leads to a different perception of the immigrant status, a perception without the real trauma of cultural "uprooting." Furthermore, the absence of a linguistic component,[3] historically strong and well defined in Luxembourg (in

comparison with the German, French, and Belgian languages), determines a minor cultural impact: Italians can live and maintain their Italianism without problems.[4] As a consequence, the migratory element in the writing is not represented negatively.

## Ways of Writing

The literary production of Italian emigrants differs from one region to another both in terms of form and of content. Thus we present the distinctive characteristics of the writings included in BAGROI according to the places in which they were written.

### *Luxembourg*

As already stated, a quantitative element stands out definitively and corresponds with a generational element: The high number of texts written in Luxembourg belongs almost completely to the first generation of immigrants.[5] The authors, in most cases, come from the financial field (banks and insurance) or from the political-administrative sector (European institutions). These are persons who came to Luxembourg between the 1960s and 1990s with vocational training and relatively strong writing skills. Once in Luxembourg, they expressed themselves almost always in narrative terms. They wrote almost exclusively in Italian, and the presumptive audience seems to be the people of Italy and/or of the entire world. Regarding the low number of poems, what Boggiani writes is true:

> The migratory theme tends to be replaced by the existential one, a token of humanism where elements of ethical nature dominate. In principle, these pieces of work express what [. . .] Marchand called a patrimony "of lessons on life, because they offer a vision of the human being in a world matured for a long time and in a hard way" (Marchand 1988, 463); we are talking about a few poetical works, whose themes (loneliness, death, metaphysical fear) do not depend on the place they were written. (Boggiani 2005, 142)

As for prose works, it is worth stating that there is a sort of pronounced "detachment" from the setting of Luxembourg that instead gives way to Italian contents and images—sometimes nostalgic, sometimes not. Even when the country of Luxembourg is evoked and described, it loses its contours and becomes the setting of a historical or fantastic romance. Corners of the Grand Duchy turn into gothic places where cruel crimes are committed.[6] It could be surmised that the territory of Luxembourg is

used, and maybe also exploited, because it is a very small country, and its everyday realities are little known abroad. It is transformed into a mysterious topography in which the detective and gothic novels of at least three authors take place (Forgiarini 2000; Van der Noot 2005; Giordano 2007). Thus, Luxembourg becomes a bona fide rhetorical figure, so that the bond with the territory gets lost in the end even when it appears so present on the surface. Simona Giordano (b. Turin 1974), for example, describes the morphology of Grund, a quarter situated in the valley of the river Alzette:

> Grund, the old part of town of Luxembourg, is a not very regular surface of concrete dug up in the rocks, a result of the secular erosive process, where water and wind together gave them the shape of a huge funnel, or of a throat, with the two spurs at the place of Rebecca's lips and her feet resting on the tonsils. On top of the walls, on what are real balconies—areas with a fine view from where it is possible to have a complete prospect of the wide valley—that means the heart of the city, with its shops, offices, and the traffic of the twentieth century. But down here, now, there is only a kind of antique cold air, streets made of cobblestones and medieval houses. Rebecca sets off with a spurt towards the little bridge of stone over the Alzette, a spit of black river, passes by a pub and gets to an open area. All around her, only rocks. Large blocks of dolomites and limestones that split into caves of a fiery red inside. (Giordano 2007)

Shortly before, in the prologue of the same manuscript, Giordano describes a truculent crime in the snow of Grund, detailed in a very cruel manner:

> I plunge her face into a heap of snow and then I pull it back. Her nose, her eyes, her cheek tear up pieces of fresh snow, flocks of bright phosphorus under the cold light. Now she is breathing, no, she is gasping for breath, no. She is braying. Like a wounded donkey.
>
> But she can't react, she is confused, dazed by my blows, by me, by the idea that I exist. I take out of the pocket of my coat the needle and point it to the throat, where the largest vein is pulsing. While her skin is flaking I tear up a tiny little piece of it, put my mouth on it and suck up in such a powerful way that at the end my jaws start aching. (Giordano 2007)

In this way a "dark," sometimes metaphysical dimension of the Luxembourg area comes into being. The everyday objects and places of the Grand Duchy are absent; these physical and actual details, which might be found in memoirs or testimonial writings, unfortunately are almost nonexistent in the texts from this country.

*France*

One notices a completely different situation outside of Luxembourg. The dimensions seem to switch places: Texts are almost always on migration or nostalgic themes. However, one should take into consideration an important characteristic of the writings in the territory of the Lorraine. There is a small difference among the writings of the various generations. The migration theme is scarcely developed by the first generation and more present in the works of the subsequent generations. An almost singular case is that of immigrant Sylvain Tarantino (b. Tuglie, Lecce province, 1946). In his first book (Tarantino 1999), written in French and titled *Un printemps interrompu* (An interrupted spring), the author recalls his entire life story, beginning with one morning when the sun was about to rise in his native town of Tuglie and his mother woke him so they could catch a train to visit his father, who was working in Villerupt, France.

> I realize confusedly that today an important event was going to occur, an event that would unsettle my entire youth, which has been anyway so happy and quiet in this sunny land surrounded by a wonderful blue sea. To tell the truth, I had been feeling for months that this event was going to happen, because I had heard my mother talking with my uncles and aunts about a future trip to France. (Tarantino 1999, 16)

The book is a chronicle of a journey and of a settlement; not at all dreamy or romantic, it is the minute reconstruction of moments, places, and events that reflect the author's world.

In contrast, Mina Zavaglia (b. Marliano, Pistoia province, 1919–d. Villerupt 2006), also a first-generation immigrant living in Villerupt, a famous and awarded poet, almost never wrote on migratory themes or used the Italian language in her poems, with the exception of the following poem, titled "Crepuscolo sul mare" (Twilight on the sea)

> It is dusk,
> Sitting on the gentle slope of the hill
> I'm admiring in that sovereign hour
> Under a magic sky
> The beauty of creation.
> The sun is setting, flames of fire
> Light up the sky and the sea.
> . . .
> Lost in a mute contemplation, floating,
> Immaterial,
> I seem to be suspended in the infinity,
> Among the turbines of atoms, in the starlit sky. (Zavaglia 1937)

Her choice of the Italian language seems to be a vehicle for naturalistic, existential feelings, not very different from those present in all her poems in French.

Most of the writers who deal with the migratory theme in France belong to the second or third generation. Joseph Ciccotelli (b. Nancy 1957), for example, addresses it in his first novel, *Enzo, c'est moi* (Enzo, it's me), a work that he calls "auto-fiction" and in which he describes an immigrant's life projected onto another character's life (Ciccotelli 2006). The following fragment serves as an illustration. The author demonstrates a remarkable easiness in retracing the path of his origins:

> Despite their earlier arrival in France, their French didn't have a comprehensive level at that time, in comparison with their wives' who in the end spoke it fluently—the daily communication helps it—their French will never be really correct; it's the French who ended in integrating these new sounds. . . . Notice: "Italian" wasn't a neutral concept during those years; nowadays, the Italian image isn't anymore the image of an emigrant, it's associated with the image of a tourist, a student, an artist, a businessman, a restorer, or a sportsman, definitely of a European neighbor who comes to do business in our country, but once! (Ciccotelli 2006, 33)

Also belonging to the second generation, Louis Salvatore Bellanti (b. Thionville 1958) deals with the migratory theme in his first book, *Revoir la mer* (To see the sea again), in which he talks about emigration from Sicily:

> "I'm going to make a long journey. Think about me." He asked me to think about him and I didn't do anything else. He smiled at me and I understood I had to leave him by himself. We've always understood our father's meaningful glance, his silence. (Bellanti 2005)

The memory of his Sicilian origins comes to the surface when reconstructing a melancholic episode of his life in this very short book when he talks about the transfer of his father's remains to Sicily (Bellanti 2005). In his book *Un soir sur la terre avec Pirandello* (An earthly evening with Pirandello), he imagines spending time in Porto Empedocle, Agrigento province, conversing with playwright Luigi Pirandello (Bellanti 2007).

The bond with one's own roots is also evident in Anna Bartolacci's (b. Villerupt 1923) handwritten text, titled "Villerupt, ma ville" (Villerupt, my town), written in 1983. The book is about Bartolacci's civil commitment to the feminist, trade unionist, and social struggles of the mining

community of Villerupt, where Italians represented 80 percent of the city's population. It is also the story of that community's victories and defeats in the quest to obtain its rights.

But the real "explosion" of the migratory theme in the Lorraine is evident in the writings of the third generation. One could speak about reclaiming individual memory, family memory, or a cultural revival. Books like those written by Mireille Poulain-Giorgi (b. Villerupt 1948) or Aurélie Filippetti (b. Villerupt 1973) show not only a real and sincere bond with the history of their family but also a study and authentic research containing historical facts. These are people who did not intend to write a simple family history in order that it not be forgotten; they also went to look for information on their ancestors, searching in antique dresser drawers and in parochial archives. The result, in the case of Poulain-Giorgi, is an authentic historical novel in which the first-person narrator is absent:

> Her husband was the first to leave; he had always said he would leave. The first time, Jean left with him; the second time, he left by himself. He couldn't think of anything else than leaving between 1914 and 1923! He was talking only about his departure! Without ever asking himself if he should remain there. Maybe he was feeling as confused as those peasants of Gagliano who live in a land completely abandoned, who are neither Christians, nor men, because "Christ has never descended" [Carlo Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*]. (Poulain-Giorgi 1999, 117)

In this way, Poulain-Giorgi describes her grandmother Giovanna's mood after the death of her husband, with whom she had emigrated to Villerupt.

The fundamental feature of the history of the Lorraine is the deep connection with political, working-class, and socialist activism: In almost all texts written by Italian immigrants there are references to the political climate in which the local populations lived. Aurélie Filippetti describes in third person the unconscious joy that she experienced as a little girl the moment the whole town of Audun-le-Tiche celebrated the victory of François Mitterand in the presidential elections in 1981:

> Two children were dancing and springing in the deserted courtyard of the school. Two little girls surprised and delighted by the joy of the village. Nobody saw them going out. They did not understand why it was such a surprise that the left had won. They lived among communist and sometimes socialist activists. The right must have existed, since they even talked about it, but it was faraway. Were there really persons who didn't vote for the communists? They stopped asking themselves about the reasons for it. No matter why, it was an evening of celebration. They

> felt a little bit ridiculous, but they had to mark the occasion. They climbed over the wall of the school, raised their faces towards the vault of stars, and cried as loud as their eight-year-old lungs could: "We have wooon!" (Filippetti 2003, 160)

These two authors are deeply engaged in the contexts they present, but they prefer to make no references to themselves; they seem to tell stories they know very well, using real places and events, yet at the same time they give the reader the sense that they do not belong to the story.

### *Germany*

The literary works in the database from the German side of the Great Region seem to be authored exclusively by immigrants (to date no texts from the second or third generations have been identified) and are written in Italian. The authors emigrated from Italy into the region of the Saar River, arriving mostly in the 1960s and 1970s, and their writings bear witness solely to their immigration experience. Almost always (though this is not exclusive to Germany), these authors started writing their autobiographies with the intention of writing a "book for the family." The typical scenario is a writer who has access to printing and can produce copies for the members of the family. These are books born inside the home and not originally intended to be shared: Only a coincidence (at least it seemed so) led to their publication and exposure to a larger public. The tone in which the books are written is demonstrated by the first witty remarks of Salvatore Vella's (b. Favara, Agrigento province, 1929) manuscript (translated into and published in German) titled *Geliebte Töchter, Amate figlie* (Book of the family, life and memories of a father holding a colloquium with his daughters):

> These typewritten pages, that I wanted to put together in a volume, do not form a work that deserves to be published, on one hand because it is badly written, on the other hand because it is on my private life. That is why I would like them to remain in the family. The main reason that made me put on paper the most important events of my life, with the various problems, difficulties, delusions, and sacrifices, was to leave a recollection and an evidence of my past for my daughters and my future grandchildren. (Vella 2007, Preface)

The social conditions of the Italians living in Germany have not progressed very far since the time of the post–World War II generation. This different form of integration in comparison with that of the Italians in Luxembourg,

Belgium, and France might explain the dearth of authors in the German part of the Great Region. No Italian author in the German area has become as famous as Aurélie Filippetti in France, Jean Portante in Luxembourg, or Girolamo Santocono in Belgium.

### *Belgium*

The situation in Belgium is even more distinctive. To date, a considerable number of authors of Italian origin have been identified. Almost all of them belong to the first generation. The main themes in the chosen texts are homesickness and the distance from their country. If one were to use Marchand's syntagmatic distinction, almost the whole corpus could belong to the category "emigration literature." A very good example is a work by Ferruccio Esposito, published in 1987 and titled *Requiem per un emigrante* (Requiem for an emigrant); it is an autobiographical work in which the author deliberately alternates the first person with the third person singular:

> On the 29th of September 1926, my poor mother gave birth to me on the holy land of Sotto il Monte, a humble little village (known all over the world now, for the simple fact that the divine force wished to choose among the most humble, and maybe the humblest, pushing him ahead, so that he reached the highest range of the ecclesiastic hierarchy, that is Pope John XXIII).
>
> I lived the first twenty years of my life there, that means a hard life, a life of an incomparable poverty, so I lived the same life and maybe worse than that life presented by Ermanno Olmi in his film *L'albero degli zoccoli* (*The Tree of Wooden Clogs*). (Esposito 1987, 1)

Here we have a story based on the author's experiences written from the point of view of a person who has suffered in life, the circumstances of which he reacted to by working hard and observing fundamental Catholic values. The fragment in the third person could be interpreted almost as a medieval exemplum of his life conduct. After having described his experience as a beggar in Italy, Esposito goes on:

> His father was finally employed at Italcementi. The family continues to increase. Ferruccio will not have to beg anymore. The poor family goes to live in Corna Street. Ferruccio goes into the woods to pasture the goats and gather dead branches of trees to make fire at home. Up there, near the Madonna of Caneve, he continues to grow up humbly, but decently. (6)

Esposito has been living at Jemeppe-sur-Sambre, a small village in the Wallonia, for more than fifty years. This village is not far away from Charleroi, a town known for its very high density of Italian immigrants.

Walter Vacca (b. Parma 1922?) dedicates a poem to Charleroi titled "La terra promessa" (The promised land):

> Charleroi
> Lowers the tide
> The race has finished.
> People waiting
> Pick up their relatives:
> flesh for the mine.
>
> Two days of friendship
> Are ruined instantly:
> a salute:
> Good-bye!
> And each one has his own destiny.
> This
> is the promised land
> here grows the bread-tree
> I wonder, how much
> I will have to take care of it
> so that it would not dry up.
> I will water it
> With blood and sweat
> And so much work
> Infinite work. (Vacca 1996, 52)

## Conclusion

This article briefly analyzes the works in BAGROI that deal with the migratory theme, regardless of the authors' language and generation. For the most part, the texts that do not address that theme have not been examined. The literary works of fiction represent in some areas of the Great Region, especially in Luxembourg, the majority of the works included. Because of the intrinsic characteristics of these works (based more on invention than on autobiography), the collaborators of TIGRI decided to concentrate on the texts that have an autobiographical-migratory focus. The literary works chosen for this present analysis distinguish themselves by their phenomenological representativeness. Even if this article has examined closely only a particular subset of the corpus, some conclusions

can certainly be drawn. There are evident differences among the writings of the different nations of the Great Region. The German contribution accounts for a relatively small number of authors, all of them belonging to the first generation. The linguistic element plays, of course, a very important role: Saarland and the Palatinate are not francophone territories, and the Italians have more difficulty with the German language than with French. Furthermore, the social conditions of the Italians living in this part of Germany have barely progressed since the time of the post–World War II generation.[7] If we take into account popular sentiment and legislative reality, which distinguish Germany[8] on the matter of immigration from the other countries, we can imagine the different self-perceptions of Italian immigrants in Germany, thus generating a different way of expressing themselves in written works. The lack of representative texts from this part of Germany reveals a certain difficulty of integration and of communication (also with the wider public and not only with one's own family) and a different form of integration in comparison with other countries. It is not a coincidence that the very few texts are all written in Italian and are addressed only to the family.

Another example of difficult integration, though a more "dynamic" one, is found in the writings of Italian emigrants in the Lorraine (a generation that has produced very little writing). The fundamental difference between the texts written in this region and those written in Germany is the use of the language of the adopted country in all of them. The first generation in France seems to have been actively involved in learning French and adopting the culture, in accordance with the laws at the time. For this reason, there are fewer authors. The next two generations deal in their writings with migration as it affected the lives of their parents or grandparents. One could say that the problems of cultural dislocation that immigration brings were overcome by the time of the second generation.

The situation is even more remarkable in Belgium, where historically Italians were generally perceived as working class. The significant presence of Italian immigrants in many territories of Wallonia, along with the political rights they obtained in Belgium after the agreements with the Italian government between 1945 and 1946,[9] validated their immigrant experience and inspired them to incorporate that experience into their writing, expressed principally via poetry. It is in Wallonia that one finds the highest percentage of authors belonging to the first generation who dealt with their migratory experience in the Italian language.

Still more notable is the Italian immigrant situation in Luxembourg, where the migratory theme is not very often present in the writings. There it is replaced by other literary themes as previously discussed, especially

among immigrants who arrived in Luxembourg between the 1960s and 1990s and who were part of the professional class. The migratory theme is not found in the written works of subsequent generations either.[10] This fact is explained by the different forms of integration of the Italian emigrants and also by the period of time when they arrived in the Grand Duchy. The first wave of Italians in Luxembourg dates back 130 years (much earlier than in Germany and Belgium). There was a high rate of illiteracy among these primarily working-class immigrants. Italians, already very numerous in the area and continuously present there, even during the two world wars, integrated themselves quickly and transformed the migratory experience into a less painful, important, but not decisive episode of their history.

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## Notes

1. This present work is a modified version of part of an article that I wrote in Italian and that was published in the conference proceedings *Rêves d'Italie, Italies de rêve*, edited by Joseph Boggiani, Maria Luisa Caldognetto, Claudio Cicotti, and Antoinette Reuters (Luxembourg: Saint Paul, 2009). I have not included the quoted authors' original Italian, French, and German texts.
2. The district "Brill-Frontiera" in Esch-sur-Alzette, the district "Italia" in Dudelange, and the district "Italian" in Differdange.
3. It is important to note that until 1984 Luxembourg had no official national language. In that year Luxembourgish became the national language, and French and German became official languages.
4. There are more than sixty Italian voluntary associations in Luxembourg.
5. There are only two memoirs by second-generation authors dealing with the topic of migration: Jean Portante's successful novel *Mrs. Haroy ou la mémoire de la baleine: Chronique d'une immigration* (1993), and Silvio Grilli's recent book *Ein außergewöhnlich interessantes Leben im Minette* (2007).
6. In Simona Giordano's case, this can be seen in the manuscript of her unpublished novel "Veglia profonda."
7. The poetic lessons of the so-called *Gastarbeiterliteratur* (guest worker literature) or of the group *PoLiKunst* emerged out of Germany's specific socioterritorial reality and are thus inapplicable to this study of the Great Region. (See Amodeo 2006, 395–407.)
8. Germany did not consider itself a country of immigration until the end of the 1990s. The first law that controls immigration is dated 2001.
9. The agreement between the Belgian and Italian governments, ratified in 1946, stipulated that Belgium would send Italy two or three tons of coal in exchange for 2,000 immigrant mine workers. (See Franciosi 1997.)
10. Except for second-generation author Jean Portante's invaluable example.

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# The Emerging Tradition of Soppressata Weekend: Sustaining an Italian-American Masculine Identity through Food Rituals

PETER NACCARATO

> *Today, the close relationship between Italian food and Italian identity seems an unremarkable fact.*
>
> —Carol Helstosky, *Garlic and Oil: Politics and Food in Italy*

It was early Saturday morning, February 4, 2012. An important weekend had arrived, and there was much work to be done. Though it was Super Bowl weekend, a time when many Americans planned for parties and anticipated Sunday's confrontation between the New York Giants and the New England Patriots, it was more than that for my father and me. For us, our extended family members, and our close friends, it was also Soppressata Weekend.

As my father and I carried the meat grinder to the car, we prepared for an event that had become a ritual in our household. Since 1998, Super Bowl weekend has doubled as Soppressata Weekend. While I discuss the evolution of this event in detail below, in its 2012 iteration it featured eighteen men, all of whom self-identified as Italian Americans. The men in the group spanned several generations, including first- and second-generation Italian Americans in their fifties and sixties and their third- and fourth-generation Italian-American sons and their friends in their twenties and thirties. From 1998 to 2011, this group gathered at the Tacony-Mayfair Sons of Italy Lodge (#447) in northeast Philadelphia. In 2012, the location changed to the Sons of Italy Lodge (#2311) in Haddon Heights, New Jersey. Prior to the establishment of this practice, a smaller group of typically six to eight men, including my father, his brother, and several friends from the Tacony-Mayfair lodge, would wake early on a Saturday morning (not necessarily on Super Bowl weekend) to drive from the Tacony neighborhood in Philadelphia to New York City's Little Italy. Their primary destination was the Fretta Brothers pork store on the corner of Mott and Hester Streets, where they would buy soppressata. For one of the men in the group, a second-generation Italian American known by family and friends as "Big Dominic," this trip was reminiscent of similar ones he took with his immigrant father as a boy. He felt a particularly strong connection with

Fretta Brothers, having built and maintained a friendship with its proprietors. After stocking up at Fretta Brothers, the men would visit other stores to purchase bread, cheese, and various Italian delicacies before settling in at the bar formerly known as Mare Chiaro (now called the Mulberry Street Bar), where they ate their lunch with wine ordered from Tony, the bartender. This ritual came to an end after Fretta Brothers closed in 1997. Of course, one way for it to have continued would have been for the men to drive to a different location—Arthur Avenue in the Bronx or the Italian Market in South Philadelphia. However, the Mulberry Street location was considered an essential component of their ritual. Specifically, because of Dominic's long history with and personal connection to Fretta Brothers, the men saw it as a site for an "authentic" experience and for "authentic" soppressata. With countless sausages hanging from the ceiling, the store epitomized authenticity and stood for these men as a bastion against mass-produced, prepackaged sausages, which were becoming almost ubiquitous in supermarkets and specialty food stores. Thus, the closing of Fretta Brothers marked the loss not only of a particular food product but also of what the men perceived as a link to an "authentic" Italian heritage. Thus, if a new tradition was to replace the old one, it needed to speak to the men's desire to have access to what they perceived as authentic soppressata, which they used as a bridge to their version of Italian cultural history.

For these men, the solution was not to find a new location for their Saturday tradition; rather, it was to begin a new tradition in which they would make their own soppressata. What at first may seem like a simple solution to a problem—if we can't buy soppressata in New York, then we'll start making our own—offers important insight into how this particular group of Italian-American men uses food rituals to maintain a connection to their sense of Italian heritage. The relationship between food practices, ritual, and ethnic identity is well documented. As Michael Di Giovine explains in his study of the Italian-American tradition of the Christmas Eve meal commonly known as the Feast of the Seven Fishes, "a periodic rite punctuating the calendar" can serve to "continually revitalize the group, which is constantly under pressure of not only acculturation but of schism" (Di Giovine 2010, 183). While the Christmas Eve feast is relatively well known in Italian-American communities in the northeast, Soppressata Weekend is unique.

My ethnographic examination of Soppressata Weekend focuses on food production rather than its consumption. What assumptions are challenged and what boundaries are crossed as this particular group of men shifts from buying soppressata to making it? More specifically, what does this transition reveal about traditional gender roles pertaining to the produc-

tion and consumption of food? Soppressata Weekend can be read in two separate but related ways. First, as these men transition from the traditionally masculine activity of consuming food to the traditionally feminine work of producing it, they open up a space in which normative gender roles can be questioned, complicated, and exposed as performative in nature. At the same time, the transgressive potential of this space is contained as the men attempt to use it as an opportunity to reinforce rather than undermine their conformity to hegemonic notions of masculinity.

## Inside the Ritual of Soppressata Weekend

When it began in the late 1990s, Soppressata Weekend was anchored in a very close-knit group of about ten family members and friends, all of whom were second- or third-generation Italian Americans. The group included my father and his brother, their cousins, their sons and sons-in-law, and very close friends of our families. Participants spanned several generations, with approximately half of the men in their fifties or sixties and the other half in their twenties or thirties. This core group was associated primarily through their connection to Tacony, a small neighborhood in northeast Philadelphia with a long Italian-American history. (See Iatarola and Gephart [2000] for a discussion of the Tacony neighborhood.) Tacony's Italian roots can be traced to immigrants mostly from southern Italy who settled in this neighborhood, established the Italian "national parish," Our Lady of Consolation Roman Catholic Church, and adopted a range of cultural practices that they identified with their Italian culture and identity. In doing so, they created a particular form of "Italian-ness" by reenacting certain traditions with the aim of linking their past, present, and future. They—like the men who would come to participate in Soppressata Weekend decades later—demonstrated through these practices that tradition must be recognized as "a facet of all social life, which is not natural but symbolically constituted" (Handler and Linnekin 1984, 276). In other words, it was through the process of adopting and repeating certain activities that they constructed the "traditions" through which their individual and collective Italian-American identities would be created and sustained.

Today, Tacony faces difficult economic challenges and other setbacks. Most recently, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia announced that it would close Our Lady of Consolation's elementary school, along with Saint Hubert Catholic High School for Girls, which is also in the neighborhood (the decision to close the high school was subsequently reversed). Many current and former Tacony residents across multiple generations are

alumni of one or both of these schools. For many residents of Tacony, this announcement signaled more difficult change for a community struggling to survive.

The specific details of Soppressata Weekend have changed since it began in 1998, but the general characteristics have remained relatively stable. Early on Saturday morning, the men gather at the Tacony-Mayfair Sons of Italy Lodge for the first step in the process, which involves cutting and trimming pork shoulders that one of the men purchases the day before at Hatfield Quality Meats, a processing and packaging facility that also sells wholesale meat. These large pieces of pork are trimmed of excess fat and chopped into approximately two-inch cubes in preparation for grinding. Once ground, the meat is divided into two batches and is mixed with a combination of salt, spices, and wine. The specific amounts vary for each batch in order to produce two different types of soppressata: mild or sweet, with less pepper; and hot, made by increasing the amount of whole peppercorns and adding crushed red pepper flakes and cayenne pepper. The mixed ground meat is refrigerated overnight. The following day, the men make soppressata by stuffing the prepared meat into casings that are purchased by Mark, one of the men who lives in South Philadelphia and who gets them from a meat store in the Italian Market. Soppressata are made by cutting them into individual links, using specific ties to distinguish between mild and hot soppressata, attaching a string that will be used for hanging them, and then distributing the soppressata among the men. The process also involves calculating all of the costs associated with the weekend and using this number as the basis for determining the price per soppressata. The goal is to break even, not to make a profit. The price is usually around $3.00–$3.50 per sausage. Each man indicates how many pieces he would like to buy, and it becomes his responsibility to complete the curing process, which typically involves pressing the soppressata (to remove air and liquid so they don't burst) for a few days, hanging them to cure (for four to six weeks, depending on the weather), and then storing them in oil or vacuum sealing them. Inevitably, there is much discussion about how each man follows or alters this standard process, from not pressing the soppressata to forgoing the more traditional storage in oil in favor of vacuum sealing or freezing, which some men prefer because they find it less messy or because they feel the soppressata lasts longer when stored this way.

While this general outline for the work of Soppressata Weekend has remained consistent, there have been some significant changes over the years. When the tradition began in 1998, the first hurdle the men confronted was finding what they considered an "authentic" recipe for soppressata.

As mentioned above, an important part of their allegiance to Fretta Brothers was their faith in the authenticity of their process and product. Therefore, if these men were to re-create this sense of authenticity, they needed to have the "correct" recipe. While the first- and second-generation Italians in the group recounted memories of soppressata and other cured meats being made in their households, they did not have direct experience doing this work. Therefore, my father initially reached out to his cousin Filomena, who in the 1950s emigrated at the age of twenty from Calabria to Canada. She was one of our only remaining family members who had actually lived in Italy and who still made her own soppressata. For my father, who was born in Philadelphia, the fact that she was born in Italy gave Filomena, and thus the recipe she provided, that ever-important quality of authenticity. Her legitimacy was also enhanced by the fact that, as a woman, she was part of a culinary legacy, which included her mother and my grandmother, that traced itself back to the town of Mangone, Cosenza province, in Calabria, where all three of these women were born. In addition to the recipe, Filomena also offered advice on the crucial steps of pressing and hanging the meat as it cured and storing it once it was ready. At the same time, Nick, one of my father's closest friends, who also emigrated to the United States from Italy in the 1950s at the age of five, researched recipes on the Internet. In those early years, he also brought several older Italian immigrant men to consult on the process. In more recent years, Nick has become the "keeper of the recipe," responsible for the delicate work of measuring out the salt and other spices and directing the overall process. At the same time, his son Domenic has assumed responsibility for overseeing the distribution of the finished product (a process that in recent years has included careful measuring, weighing, calculating, and data collection). In short, while Nick serves as the link to the past, preserving and protecting a recipe that was initially cobbled together from a number of different sources but is now deemed authentic, Domenic has focused on bringing precision and standardization to the process, using scales and computers to guide production and distribution.

Location has also been an important yet shifting factor in Soppressata Weekend. For many years, the entire two-day process was undertaken at the Tacony-Mayfair Sons of Italy Lodge. While most participants either no longer lived in or never lived in Tacony, it served as the literal and symbolic center for this ritual. The neighborhood was deeply associated with not only a general Italian-American identity with which all participants felt a connection but also with the specific history and lineage of the Naccarato family, as well as several other neighborhood families

that were represented by other men in the group. Thus, this location underscored one of the primary objectives of Soppressata Weekend—namely, emphasizing how it served as a means for these men to connect to their familial and ethnic heritage. With a mission that includes "preserving Italian-American traditions, culture, history, and heritage" ("About OSIA" 2011), the Order Sons of Italy in America provided a context in keeping with the men's soppressata production. At the same time, it sustained the particular connection that many participants felt to this neighborhood in general, and to this specific Sons of Italy Lodge in particular. For participants who still lived in this neighborhood or who had grown up there and since moved away, this space served as a bridge between past and present insofar as it had been for generations a site of countless family celebrations and community festivities.

A minor change in location occurred in 2009, when the work of day 2 was relocated to a local deli so we could switch from using the stuffing attachment on the meat grinder to using the deli's professional-grade equipment. A more substantial change occurred in 2012, when the entire event moved from the lodge in Tacony to the Sons of Italy Lodge in Haddon Heights, New Jersey. This happened primarily because the composition of the group had changed. Over the previous several years, Nick began bringing more of his family and friends to the event. At the same time, he and his son Domenic assumed additional responsibility for organizing and planning. When Nick decided that it was time to invest in a sausage-stuffing machine for the event so that we no longer needed to go to the local deli on day 2, it became feasible to relocate to his Sons of Italy Lodge in Haddon Heights, approximately forty minutes from Tacony. While it is difficult to draw any conclusions about the impact of this change, given that it occurred only in 2012, the composition of the group was significantly different, with the majority of participants connected to Nick and only a handful of us coming from Tacony. While the event still entailed a group of men coming together to make soppressata and, in doing so, enacting an Italian-American identity, it was much less associated with my father's family, friends, and neighborhood. This change in venue, in other words, marked an evolution in the tradition, the impact of which cannot yet be fully determined.

Finally, there are a few aspects of the event that are important to know insofar as they provide context for my analysis. First, Soppressata Weekend is for men only. Some women, including my cousin and some of the participants' wives, have inquired about participating but have been told that it is a "men's only" event. While women have stopped by from time to time, their visits are typically brief, and there is a palpable

change in the men's demeanor. To the extent that Soppressata Weekend is a bonding experience, it is clearly and unequivocally one among men (which I discuss in detail further on). Second, the timing of Soppressata Weekend has remained consistent such that it falls on Super Bowl weekend. While I discuss the gendered implication of this timing below, here I note that it has sometimes caused tension. Typically, both days end with a meal, with roast pork the highlight of the second day. For many participants, however, there is potential conflict between their desire to join the group for this meal and their need to head out in time for Super Bowl–related activities. In fact, in 2011 the men decided not to include this final meal, a decision that some others found disappointing, given that for them it was the culmination of the event. The pork dinner returned in 2012, though most men headed out quickly thereafter, forgoing the cigars and wine that were enjoyed at the end of day 1.

As this summary suggests, Soppressata Weekend is both based on the repetition of certain elements, which reveals how its own identification as a tradition is "a wholly symbolic construction" (Handler and Linnekin 1984, 273), and is also subject to evolution and change. It is an opportunity to build community and reinforce bonds between family and friends while at the same time it is fraught with its own complexities and tensions. In short, it is an occasion that offers insight into not only how a specific group of men uses food to sustain Italian-American identity but also into how heteronormative codes of behavior can be complicated and challenged as men who do not typically take responsibility for feeding their families participate in such food rituals.

## Soppressata Weekend as Food Ritual

Soppressata Weekend can be understood as a *ritual*, which Lucy Long (2000) defines as "recurring activities with a symbolic reference" (152). Long argues that a common activity like food consumption is transformed into a ritual "when it occurs with the intentional referencing to meaning larger than the immediate meeting of physical and nutritional needs" (152). Similarly, Jack Santino (1994) defines rituals as "repeated and recurrent symbolic enactments, customs, and ceremonies" and acknowledges that while historically they have been connected to some element of the sacred, in contemporary cultures, they may "include events that are not specifically religious in nature" (10).

Within ethnic communities, in particular, food rituals play an especially important role as they "help to establish a cultural boundary which serves both inclusive and exclusive purposes, uniting those within

its bounds and distinguishing that particular group from all others" (Kaplan, Hoover, and Moore 1998, 130). In fact, Sabina Magliocco (1998) argues that food is "the most common form of symbolic ethnicity" (145–146). In her study of an Italian-American community in Clinton, Indiana, she concludes that "in preparing traditional foods for family reunions and special occasions, the Italian Americans of Clinton are essentially discoursing among themselves about the nature of their ethnicity" (153). Similarly, in his study of "exotic" foods within Italian-American communities and families in Utah, Richard Raspa (1984) finds that "the preparation and consumption of exotic foods among these Italian-Americans is a nostalgic enactment of ethnic identity and familial solidarity" (185–186). Furthermore, he concludes that "personal narratives surround these folk foods and illuminate them as objects of Old World craftsmanship and sources of ethnic pride and familial history" (188).

However, rather than situating ritual activities as separate from those that make up our everyday lives, Roger Abrahams (1987) emphasizes the important link between them: "These framed and prepared-for activities borrow from the everyday but are transformed by stylization and sometimes by the spirit of license which encourages the inversion of everyday values and practices, even to the point of acts of transgression" (176). When applied specifically to food rituals, such transgressive potential may be realized as communal cooking activities focus attention on the typically invisible and devalued work of food preparation. In such instances, meals are transformed from a necessary yet mundane aspect of everyday life into ritualized activities that warrant special attention. As a result, the work of food preparation is reframed in a way that can challenge traditionally gendered assumptions about it.

For example, consider what changes when the domestic kitchen becomes the site for communal cooking by groups of women in preparation for a more ritualized "special occasion." From my experiences growing up in an Italian-American family and community, such ritualized eating included Sunday dinners (Cinotto 2010) and holiday meals that brought together extended family and friends and also included a number of communal festivities, from annual Italian festivals and spaghetti dinners organized through the local parish to smaller ethnic-based fairs and festivals. When these special occasions remained within the private sphere of the home, they typically included generations of women gathered together in the kitchen to prepare ritual foods.[1] When I was a child, the same neighborhood women who regularly prepared meals in their homes for their families shifted into a more public space as they took to the streets or to the church hall to prepare the food that played a central role in our communal

religious feasts and ethnic festivals. From bringing their prized recipes for Sunday gravy and meatballs to the church hall for spaghetti dinners to baking cakes and cookies for sale at one of the food stands, from preparing large quantities of roast pork or roast beef to staffing the stands where sandwiches were made and sold, these women brought the knowledge and skills that were typically reserved for their home kitchens to a more communal space. While in recent years the food offerings at these types of festivals have become increasingly commercialized through reliance on professional food vendors, the annual Feast of the Saints/Italian Festival at Our Lady of Consolation parish still features individuals and families who play a large part in preparing the food. In these instances, food preparation is embedded in a set of ritual practices that function to "help give meaning to our world in part by linking the past to the present and the present to the future" (Kertzer 1988, 10). Moreover, it plays an important role in the process of "self-authentication" (Abrahams 1987, 177) as it allows individuals seeking to maintain a connection to their ethnic and cultural past to do so by embracing what they believe to be "traditional" practices around the production and consumption of food, even as these practices shift from the private kitchen to the public arena.[2]

This is an important context for understanding the symbolic value of Soppressata Weekend. From the perspective of its participants, the event is about making a food product that their ancestors made and consumed and, in doing so, using food to connect across generations to a perceived culinary and cultural past. Of course, their perceptions do not necessarily reflect historical fact. As these men cobble together a recipe from several different sources and develop their own methods for preparing, processing, and storing their soppressata, they are not duplicating the past but rather constructing their own imagined version of it. In this context, the act of preparing food transitions from what they perceive to be a routine obligation that is typically fulfilled by the women in their families into a ritualized activity through which these men create an ethnic heritage as they perform what they understand to be an important facet of their individual and collective identities. This process of ritualizing the production of food provides a context for valuing this work in that it extends beyond the routine responsibility of feeding the family and becomes a means of constituting one's "Italian heritage." This distinction is also important because it provides these men with a necessary framework for distinguishing between the domestic duties and responsibilities that they understand as traditionally assigned to women and their decision to produce the food product that they had formerly purchased and consumed.

## The Gendering of Food Production and Consumption

While post–World War II America has experienced significant changes in how food is procured, prepared, and consumed, gendered assumptions about this work remain deeply embedded in our culture. According to Johanna Mäkalä, "the division of labor has changed over the past few decades . . . however, a study by Susan Grieshaber (1997) shows that girls are still socialized in preparing, serving, and clearing up after meals at an early age, whereas such skills are not required from boys" (Mäkalä 2000, 13). These dynamics have a broader role in establishing and maintaining an array of cultural values and ideologies. As Pierre Bourdieu (1984) emphasizes, a society's eating habits and practices help to shape its broader economic and social landscape. Specifically, how a society eats is "associated with a whole conception of the domestic economy and of the division of labour between the sexes" (185).

Carole Counihan and Steven Kaplan (1998) make a similar point, explaining that "the power relations around food mirror the power of the sexes in general" (4). Specifically, they argue that "gender is constructed through men's and women's roles in the production, distribution and symbolism of food" (3). While they acknowledge that for women to have primary responsibility for feeding the family can be read as "a potential source of influence on husbands and children through the ability to give them a valued substance—food," at the same time, it is more typically linked with "female subordination through women's need to serve, satisfy, and defer to others, particularly husbands and boyfriends" (4).

One important way in which food practices reinforce normative gender roles is by emphasizing the connections between gendered identities, gendered spaces, and the "proper" places for men and women in society. Specifically, women's responsibility for feeding the family is situated firmly within the private realm of the domestic kitchen. As such, it stands in contrast to the professional work undertaken traditionally by men in their roles as husbands and fathers who provide the economic resources necessary to support their families. Of course, such assumptions about this rigid separation between men's and women's roles fail to take into account the range of lived experiences that reveal a much more complex negotiation of these gender boundaries. Nonetheless, there is a normative framework against which individual men and women have been—and to a large extent continue to be—judged. While Joan Newlon Radner (1993) acknowledges that "a man can, of course, do certain kinds of 'domestic' work, like cooking or weaving," she emphasizes that it is most culturally acceptable when "he does it outside the home" (39). This separation between domestic work performed in private and professional work done

in public is important in establishing the relative social and economic value of each type of work. Specifically, the presumed invisibility of domestic work contributes to its devaluation (DeVault 1991).

However, the private, domestic, feminized space of the kitchen is not completely off limits to men. But even as Jessamyn Neuhaus (2003) acknowledges significant changes in rigid gender-based assumptions and stereotypes around the production and consumption of food, she concludes that cooking continues to be perceived as women's work, quoting a columnist who makes this point in blatantly sexist and homophobic terms:

> Columnist Steven Bauer asserts that even though more American men cook, we still "think of the kitchen as a woman's space, one that's too risky for people of the male persuasion, even those who don't flinch at bungee jumping, hang gliding or facing a frothy set of class VI rapids." As Bauer explains, the risk, of course, is perceived feminization: "What can be worse for a boy than to be 'tied to mommy's apron strings'? The message is clear: overexposure to pots and pans can seriously affect a man's ability to make his way in the world." (265)

While such sentiments are deeply problematic, they nonetheless reflect familiar attitudes about normative gender and sexuality. Consequently, men's participation in the production of food must be negotiated in ways that protect their gender identity. In his essay "Making Pancakes on Sunday: The Male Cook in Family Tradition," Thomas Adler (1981) explores how such negotiations are made to accommodate the would-be male cook. While the professionalization of cooking within the public sphere allows for the celebration of the male chef as opposed to the female home cook, in the private sphere, men's cooking must be characterized as special in other ways. As Adler explains, "Dad's cooking exists in evident contradistinction to Mom's on every level: his is festal, hers ferial; his is socially and gastronomically experimental, hers mundane; his is dish-specific and temporally marked, hers diversified and quotidian; his is play, hers is work" (51).

Several of these strategies for accommodating men's participation in food production are evident in Soppressata Weekend. First, using Adler's language, it is temporally marked; it is an annual occasion that stands in stark contrast to the everyday lives of the men who participate in it. Second, it is also dish specific as it focuses on one food product that has significant symbolic value. In fact, the distinctiveness and value of their work are very much framed by the product they make, a cured sausage made from pig. As Gillian Riley (2007) explains in *The Oxford Companion to Italian Food*, pigs have a long and complex place in Italian culinary history.

Of particular importance in this context is its place in rural, southern Italian communities, where "the pig's value in the domestic economy of the poor is . . . clear" (397). She continues: "In peasant society, being unable to afford to rear a pig was the ultimate stigma of poverty, and the distribution of cuts of meat at pig-killing time was a ritual of obligation, not only to helpers but to those less fortunate" (397).[3] Read in this context, Soppressata Weekend takes on added meaning as it contrasts the economic conditions that led many of these men's families to leave Italy with a visible sign of their subsequent success in the United States. As these men transform large quantities of pork into hundreds of soppressata, they not only create what they believe to be a bridge to their familial and cultural past, they also juxtapose that past with evidence of a more prosperous present and future.

Thus, when men produce food, whether Sunday morning breakfasts and weekend barbecues or ritualized activities like Soppressata Weekend, it is a "special occasion" that stands in stark opposition to the day-to-day work performed by women. Because "ritual is, above all, an assertion of difference" (Smith quoted in Bell 1992, 102), it functions to identify legitimate occasions when men can embrace activities that are otherwise devalued as women's work. As is the case with special occasions that make women's work in the kitchen more communal and thus more visible (holidays, festivals, etc.), this same logic provides a safe way for men to enter this space as well. Rather than being identified with women's work when they shift from consuming to preparing food, men are invited to differentiate their culinary forays from the day-to-day work performed by their female counterparts by characterizing it as special.

Within Italian-American families, the gendered assumptions that inform the work of feeding the family are rooted deeply within Italian culture. In their study of food practices among several individuals and families in Bologna, Douglas Harper and Patrizia Faccioli (2009) underscore the symbolic and emotional value of food within Italian communities. Speculating that "making special foods and eating them together as a family is the cultural ideal" (64), they focus on the work both of producing foods—which often involves narratives of grandmothers, mothers, daughters, and granddaughters working together in the kitchen—and of consuming foods—which often occurs around a large table of extended family and friends. Much of their study does little to challenge the traditional gendering of food that feminizes its production and masculinizes is consumption. For example, after considering the impact of the contemporary feminist movement on Italian households, Harper and Faccioli conclude that "the extraordinary changes in

modern Italy have not fundamentally altered the emotional structure of the family and the role of food in family dynamics" (110). Instead, they endorse what sociologist Laura Balbo calls *la doppia presenza* (the double presence): "The 'double presence' is a recognition that women retained domestic duties when they entered the labor force" (126). Similarly, in her study of family and food in twentieth-century Florence, Carole Counihan (2004) identifies shifts in how much time younger women actually spend cooking, while acknowledging that "they still felt that cooking was essential to their identity as women" (175).

Despite significant changes in the latter half of the twentieth century, traditional gendered assumptions about women's roles in the family remain deeply ingrained in American culture. As Suzanne Bianchi (2011) explains, "being a good mother, devoted to one's children, is a core identity that does not change when women take on more hours of paid work" (20). Instead, many scholars argue that women's increased presence in the workforce conflicts with an "ideology of intensive mothering," which "is a gendered model that advises mothers to expend a tremendous amount of time, energy, and money in raising their children" (Hays 1998, x). Such an ideology is linked to what Mary Blair-Loy (2005) identifies as "the *family devotion schema*, a cultural model that defines marriage and motherhood as a woman's primary vocation" (2). Such assumptions reinforce the message that women, regardless of their work status outside of the home, maintain primary responsibility for caring for their families, including the work of producing food. Given this fact, how is it that a group of men who otherwise seem to embrace these gendered assumptions in their everyday lives can come together once a year to do the kind of work that they typically expect of their wives and mothers?

To answer this question, and to understand how Soppressata Weekend both exposes and reinforces the performative nature of normative gender roles, I turn to the work of Judith Butler (1990), who argues that "gender is performatively produced" (24) through "the *stylized repetition of acts*" (140; emphasis in original). To the extent that one's biological sex and gendered identity align according to cultural norms and expectations, this performance—"gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds [that] constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (140)—is assumed to be a natural and stable part of one's identity. However, Butler argues that the performative nature of gender is exposed through parody, most visibly "within the cultural practices of drag, cross-dressing, and the sexual stylization of butch/femme identities" (137). These and other practices that imitate or exaggerate normative gendered attributes and behaviors reveal not only that they are moments in which gender is performed but also that

all gender identifications are created through performance. Thus, normative gender identities are created and sustained as men and women perform their expected roles in society, including in relation to the production and consumption of food. By extension, these performances are disrupted and revealed to be performances when men and women step outside of their prescribed roles and act in ways that contradict them. Even as these moments are framed as exceptional or special, as in the case of Soppressata Weekend, they are nonetheless significant, as they disrupt performances of normative gender identities and therefore require framing and contextualization that contain their disruptive potential.

Soppressata Weekend is framed in several ways that make it "safe" for this group of men to step outside of their typical routines and partake in a kind of work that they would traditionally identify with women. For example, it shifts the location of this work from the domestic kitchen into quasi-public spaces. As mentioned above, until 2012 Soppressata Weekend took place at the Tacony-Mayfair Sons of Italy hall. This is significant not only because it provides a space for men to take responsibility for producing food in a venue other than the private domestic kitchen but also because it immediately connects their decision to perform this task with their desire to use it as a means of creating a sense of ethnic heritage. Focused less on feeding families, the activities of Soppressata Weekend are more closely tied to the broader mission of celebrating what is perceived as Italian-American culture and traditions. Thus, the local Sons of Italy hall, whether in Pennsylvania or New Jersey, as was the case in 2012, provides an important backdrop for distinguishing the work undertaken by these men from that performed by women on a daily basis.

This distinction was also enhanced when day 2 of the weekend was relocated for several years to a local deli in order to use its high-capacity stuffing machine. Like the Sons of Italy hall, this location contrasts with the domestic kitchen in important ways. Not only does it cross the public/private divide, it also brings the men's work into a professional setting. Like the restaurant kitchen, it is a professionalized space in which men's participation in food preparation not only is authorized but can be celebrated. Consequently, it stood in contrast to the routine work performed in isolation by women in their domestic kitchens. While in 2012 the event moved to a different Sons of Italy hall, one of the factors that made this possible was that the men had purchased their own professional-grade sausage-stuffing machine. Still working in the legitimizing space of the hall and now utilizing their own professional-grade meat grinder and sausage-stuffing machine, the men could comfortably distinguish their work from that undertaken by their mothers and wives in the domestic kitchen.

Such a distinction is enhanced by other facets of the work, including an assembly-line approach. As explained previously, the first task to be performed is preparing the meat for grinding. This involves setting up multiple tables down the length of the hall where men work with approximately 350 pounds of pork (the quantity of meat alone separates this work from that performed daily in a domestic kitchen). Most of the men assume their positions on either side of these tables and get to work trimming the meat and chopping it into approximately two-inch squares. At the far end of the tables, several other men take charge of setting up the meat grinder to begin processing the meat that has been collected in large aluminum trays. Meanwhile, Nick, the "keeper of the recipe," sets up his "lab," complete with spices and scales. He begins measuring out the spices and consults with his son about the weight of the ground meat and how it should be divided into trays of equal weight and separated into two batches (one for sweet and one for hot soppressata). The younger men who track data, led by Nick's son Domenic, also like to calculate the "meat-to-fat" ratio by comparing the weight of the meat with which the group began with the total weight of the ground pork (in 2012, approximately 360 pounds of pork yielded 300 pounds of ground meat).

This assembly-line approach carries into day 2 as the work transitions to stuffing the spiced ground pork into casings. Once again, long tables are set up across the length of the hall with the stuffing machine at one end and a scale at the other end. While there is always some discussion (sometimes heated debates) about the best way of doing this work, eventually several men work the sausage stuffer while the other men cut the soppressata into lengths and tie them securely at each end. At the other end of the table sits the man responsible for weighing each soppressata and tracking this information. Jokingly referred to as "quality control," he will often report when the team has produced a "perfect" sausage that weighs in at exactly one pound. Such consistency is important when it comes time to calculate the cost per soppressata and divvy up the weekend's yield.

Another framing device that distinguishes Soppressata Weekend from the type of daily, domestic food preparation traditionally assigned to women is its emphasis on specialized knowledge. In their study, Harper and Faccioli (2009) found that men often had one specific role in the meal preparation process, namely, choosing and buying the wine: "Several women said that choosing wine requires a special kind of knowledge that men uniquely possess" (145). Specialized knowledge is also highlighted in another section of their book, *The Italian Way: Food and Social Life*, when Harper and Faccioli focus on various methods for preparing specific foods. In discussing curing meats they explain:

> Before the recent invention of refrigeration, meat was preserved by curing. . . . While . . . dry curing is simple on the surface, it depends on skill and knowledge. Too much salt and drying produces tough, salty meat that one would eat in desperation; too little salt and the meat will spoil. To make a food as exquisite as Italian *prosciutto* . . . takes artfulness in technique and production. (174–175)

The importance of such knowledge to the process of preparing and curing meats is also evident at Soppressata Weekend, from Filomena, our Canadian cousin with whom my father consulted initially on the recipe and curing process, to the Italian immigrant men who were brought to the event by Nick in those early years. It is also evidenced as men share their techniques for curing and storing the soppressata. Too little time for pressing and curing and the soppressata will be inedible; too much heat or improper storage and they will spoil.

Like selecting the best wine for a meal, making soppressata requires specialized knowledge. This is not to suggest that the work that women perform in the kitchen does not require knowledge and skill but, rather, that such work is often viewed as natural or innate for women, not requiring special training or education beyond what is provided to young girls by their mothers and grandmothers. Whereas at Soppressata Weekend the salt and spices used to cure the meat are precisely measured using a scale, I remember my grandmother telling people who asked her for detailed recipes or exact quantities that she just knew how much of each ingredient was required. No measuring cups and spoons; no exact recipes or precise measurements; it seemed as though *nonna* always knew by instinct the right amount of each ingredient.

Finally, the masculine ambiance of Soppressata Weekend is reinforced by some additional subtle and not-so-subtle conditions. As mentioned above, there is an unwritten though widely acknowledged and enforced rule that this is a male-only event. On the surface, this environment allows for the exercise of unconstrained masculinity, as evidenced by the freedom with which bawdy jokes are told and off-color language is used. This year, when two younger men whose wives had recently had babies veered into talk about breastfeeding, sleeping patterns, and sharing domestic duties, several men taunted them and complained that such topics were not appropriate. This was a space for "men to be men," and tips and tactics for childrearing were clearly out of bounds. Whenever these young men returned to these topics, they were teased and chided for being "whipped" by their wives.

Another way in which masculinity seems to be reinforced is through the playful sexualization of the work at hand. Particularly on day 2, it appears

impossible to avoid sexual jokes, particularly when it comes to the shape, size, and girth of the phallic soppressata. Not surprisingly, the stuffing process invites any number of crude references and sexual innuendos, most of which are aimed at affirming the sexual prowess of the joke-teller or questioning the virility of its intended target. While most of these jokes are framed through familiar codes of normative heterosexuality, in some instances, they adopt homosexual or homophobic undertones. There is typically a fine line between masturbatory jokes that emerge as men "stroke" or "massage" the soppressata and jokes that suggest homosexual subtexts to such actions, particularly when a man is jokingly accused of getting too much pleasure from his work.[4] This year, Domenic, who was responsible for creating the right amount of space between soppressata as they came out of the stuffing machine, found himself the target of jokes when he explained that he would "use a whole fist" between individual links. While all such joking is light-hearted and takes place in a convivial atmosphere (of course, one that presumes that this is a space not only reserved for men, but more specifically for heterosexual men), it nonetheless reveals the complex sexual undertone that exists just beneath the surface of the event.

In this way, Soppressata Weekend can be read in relation to theories of homosociality. Jean Lipman-Blumen (1976) defines homosociality as "the seeking, enjoyment, and/or preference for the company of the same sex," distinguishing it from "homosexual" by explaining that "it does not necessarily involve . . . an explicitly erotic sexual interaction between members of the same sex" (16). Like the football players who compete in the Super Bowl, the men who participate in Soppressata Weekend do so, at least in part, out of a desire to bond with other men. According to Sharon Bird (1996), such homosocial interactions "are critical to both the conceptualization of masculine identity and the maintenance of gender norms" (122). While this is accomplished in spaces that segregate men from women, such segregation requires that normative codes of gender and sexuality be reinforced within them. In other words, as men choose to segregate themselves from women, they must reinforce their masculinity and heterosexuality because it is in such spaces that they can be called into question.

Ultimately, a close analysis of Soppressata Weekend reveals its complex and conflicting connection to normative gender identity. On the one hand, it is readily apparent that the work of making soppressata can be differentiated in concrete and tangible ways from the daily task of feeding the family. In fact, situating it in stark contrast to this work may prove valuable to those participants who want to maintain a gendered division between the special occasions on which they participate in the preparation of food

and the daily routine that assigns this work to women. On the other hand, even as this particular event is coded and framed in ways that allow participants to reinforce their masculinity and presumed heterosexuality, the very fact that such coding happens reveals the fragility of such identities. By stepping outside of hegemonic masculinity, these men reveal the performative nature of gender identity even as they work to contain this reality.

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## Notes

1. My own presence in the kitchen as a boy who identified very much with my grandmother and often worked by her side on such occasions suggests how any generalizations about gender roles should be read as normative but must also be complicated by taking into account divergences from such norms. This also provides an important framework for my analysis of Soppressata Weekend through the lens of normative codes of gender and sexuality, which I do later in the essay.
2. To place my personal experiences with Italian-American foodways within a broader context, see Malpezzi and Clements (1992, 221–246).
3. To underscore this point, Riley (2007) cites two sayings from Calabria: "'*Cu' ammazza lu porcu sta cuntentu'nu annu, cu'si marita sta cuntentu 'nu jornu'* (He who kills a pig is happy for a year, he who marries is happy for a day)" and "'*Allu riccu le mora la mugliere, Allu poveru le mora lu puorcu'* (The rich man mourns his wife, the poor man his pig; a loose translation)" (397).
4. For a similar image, see the beginning of Nancy Savoca's film *Household Saints* (1993), which follows three generations of Italian-American women in post–World War II New York's Little Italy.

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# Book Reviews

*New York Longshoremen: Class and Power on the Docks.*
By William J. Mello.
Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010.
256 pages.

Historical studies of the Port of New York and New Jersey have always reflected the fractious, fragmented, and militantly inscrutable nature of the great port itself. The early to mid-twentieth-century waterfront employers, labor leaders, local politicos, and racketeers who eschewed committing anything significant to paper flummox historians in our time, just as they did prosecutors and civic reformers in their own. Rank-and-file dockworkers—from defenders of waterfront hierarchs to dissidents intent on their overthrow—zealously observed a daunting code of silence, a practice many upheld decades into their hard-won retirements. The absence of materials required to craft a "master narrative" of the port's history demands of scholars a methodological resourcefulness that, at its best, reopens the New York waterfront as a site of enduring fascination.

In *New York Longshoremen: Class and Power on the Docks*, William J. Mello offers a version of the waterfront story "historical in substance" but "political in essence," (3) with politics understood in terms of the contest between rank-and-file dockworkers seeking "greater control of the longshore labor process" (8) and the state-sanctioned "restrictions and regulations that limited the role of class organization in American life" (8). This tactic demystifies the port's image as a uniquely "lawless frontier," as *New York Sun* journalist Malcolm Johnson defined it in a Pulitzer Prize–winning 1948 exposé. Mello recasts the New York waterfront instead as one highly contested site in a broader labor and political struggle sharing common stakes: the future of autonomous and politically potent industrial unionism in the United States.

The strength of Mello's approach lies in his grafting of forces familiar to historians of labor and politics in twentieth-century United States—especially the national wave of repressive antiunion measures exemplified by the 1947 Taft–Hartley Act—onto an industrial setting customarily viewed as anomalous for its chronic oversupply of workers, the casual and corrupt nature of its hiring system, and the unsavory character of leadership at the mob-ridden International Longshoremen's Association (ILA). World War II and its Cold War aftermath dictated a port featuring orderly labor relations and a federal authority ever ready to intervene: Marshall Plan shipments, for example, could not be subjected to the vagaries of a fractious New York Harbor. Mello avoids conventional waterfront narrative motifs: This is no "Pirates of the Hudson" tale but rather a soberly empirical case study of business and political elites relentlessly arrayed against a working-class "subculture of resistance" in the port.

For Mello, that subculture descended from a late-1930s insurgency led by Pete Panto, an Italian-American South Brooklyn dockworker who bravely challenged both local racketeers and the Irish-American–run ILA, whose "life-President" Joe Ryan ceded control of Red Hook's enormous locals to the Italian Americans so long as his sacred terrain along Manhattan's West Side remained untroubled by outsiders of any

description. Panto led meetings and rallies that drew up to 1,500 longshoremen in support of local union democracy, resulting in his disappearance and murder at the hands of Brooklyn mobsters in the summer of 1939. Soon graffiti would sprout along the Brooklyn waterfront asking "Dov'è Pete Panto?" (Where is Pete Panto?) His body was discovered two years later in a Lyndhurst, New Jersey, lime pit.

Panto's martyrdom may have inspired a subculture of resistance, but its hushed tones and secretiveness reconfirmed the efficacy of waterfront violence, the time-honored default mode of social control. "The Brooklyn waterfront was terrorized" (39), recalled a communist organizer of the post-Panto years. Then, in October 1945, a dramatic, portwide wildcat strike—led by rank-and-file elements protesting dangerous working conditions and Ryan's longstanding collusion with shippers—ignited a decadelong insurgency against the waterfront reign of terror. Mello provides detailed accounts of this work stoppage and subsequent actions (in 1948 and 1951) that likewise brought the port to a standstill, yet he struggles with a built-in narrative dilemma: While Ryan remained a constant as figurehead of the old order, the opposition now lacked a Pete Panto, a conspicuous resistance leader representing a coherent set of motives, alliances, and tactics. The murky character of postwar "left-led" forces centered in Brooklyn, featuring a revived Rank and File Committee backed by the American Labor Party and especially by the Communist Party, present the author with yet another methodological dilemma, since the party's enforcement of its own code of silence rivaled that of waterfront bosses.

If left-wing waterfront resistance was going to come from anywhere, it had to hail from Italian Brooklyn. The port's labor force was overwhelmingly Italian American and Irish American; the latter wanted no part of any left-led insurgency. "I was a rebel, but they're commie rebels. That's the difference" (Fisher 2009, 93), as John Dwyer—the Greenwich Village pier hiring boss who did battle with "King Joe" Ryan during the 1945 strike and for nearly a decade thereafter—dismissively recalled of the Brooklyn leftists with whom he refused to cooperate. Both Ryan and the Irish-American waterfront reformers who bitterly opposed him viewed Italian Americans—and the much smaller cohort of black dockworkers likewise centered in Brooklyn—as inordinately susceptible to the Reds' appeal, despite the militant anticommunism of Anthony "Tough Tony" Anastasia, the ILA's Brooklyn kingpin. "As for the Brooklyn walkout that's strictly communist inspired," Ryan insisted of the 1951 wildcat strike, hoping, Mello argues, "to drive a wedge between Manhattan and Brooklyn longshoremen" (60).

But what if that wedge had been driven years if not decades earlier, when the port's distinctive character as a nonfederation of discrete ethnic fiefdoms—spanning two states—was consecrated? No treatment of class formation in the port would then be sufficient absent a consideration of ethnicity and ethnic politics, from Hudson County, New Jersey—where unstable postwar Italian–Irish "fusion" tickets deposed Irish autocrats in Hoboken and Jersey City, resulting in even greater waterfront violence over the spoils—to Brooklyn, where Italian Americans wholly controlled the borough's enormous waterfront locals and posed a serious challenge to the dominant Irish Democratic machine as it retreated inland. In 1946 a procommunist attorney (and likely party member) and leader of the Rank and File Committee named Vincent James Longhi ran for Congress—on the Republican ticket!—against Ryan's powerful crony John Rooney and managed to garner 46 percent of the vote (Fisher 2009, 210–211).

Longhi—who lived until 2006—represented a vital link to Panto and to the borough's Popular Front cultural scene, which notably included Longhi's friends Woody Guthrie (Longhi 1997) and playwright Arthur Miller (Miller 1987). Partly at Longhi's behest, Miller drafted a waterfront-themed screenplay, *The Hook*, in which Brooklyn's African-American and Italian-American dockworkers join forces in rebellion against the ILA leadership, the doomsday scenario Ryan was spared on the waterfront of history. Though his own career as a dockworker was brief, Longhi's absence from *New York Longshoremen* is puzzling because the kind of working-class resistance he championed is the foundation of Mello's study and because his visibility as an Italian American (Longhi even took Miller along on a trip to Sicily where he visited with extended family members of Brooklyn Italians) offered a culturally conscious model for Italian-American waterfront radicalism that has otherwise proved so elusive to scholars.

Mello works from a labor-historical tradition that foregrounds analyses of impersonal economic forces and elite political interests—twin engines of class formation—over attentiveness to the affective, intimate, contingent, and local; that is, the sites where ethnicities are made. Few places on earth have ever been so densely "ethnic" as the Port of New York. Almost entirely foreign born or second generation as late as the 1940s, how did Italian-American dockworkers transform grievances experienced locally into a class-conscious "subculture of resistance" against authoritarian adversaries near and far? In New York City practice this mandated engagement with communists, despite the likelihood that—as labor-studies scholar Vernon Jensen wrote in 1974 in explaining why West Side Irish-American longshoremen derailed Brooklyn radicals by closing ranks around Ryan to end the 1945 strike—dockworkers were susceptible to "mass movements, but perhaps not to class movements" (Jensen 93). Most of the instigators of Brooklyn waterfront radicalism cited by Mello—from the Panto era through the 1940s—subsequently either identified themselves or were identified by historians as communists. Mello himself characterizes the group around *The Docker's News*, an enduring pamphlet-format organ of left-wing activism, as communist organized. I dare not dismiss Mello's contention that longshoremen built a class-based resistance movement of their own: Just how such a movement navigated the densely sectarian leftist subculture of 1930s–1950s New York City remains the great unknown in the port's tangled, troubled history.

Reviewers, including this one, are well advised to concentrate on the book before them, not the one they might wish had been written. By its own lights—especially from the external power-politics side of his formulation—Mello's analysis is often highly insightful and even disarming, nowhere more so than in his treatment of the ill-fated effort by reformers and political elites to supplant the ILA with a new dockworkers union in the early and middle 1950s. The American Federation of Labor expelled the ILA in 1953, and Ryan was "retired" and indicted in that same year. The resulting new union—known at first as the ILA-AFL and then later rechristened the International Brotherhood of Longshoremen—squared off against the ILA in a series of certification elections. The fledgling union was championed by Dave Beck of the Teamsters, among others whose assistance did not necessarily indicate its independence from some of labor's most unsavory right-wing elements. Staunch support for the new union by New York's Republican governor, Thomas E. Dewey, should have proved even more

discomfiting. Dewey's conspicuous role in this highly divisive struggle exemplifies Mello's theory that external political forces stifled working-class resistance on the waterfront by dictating the terms of rank-and-file self-advocacy, attempting to create, in Mello's words, "an alternative system of control for the dock labor process" (68).

Most scholarly and popular treatments of this tumultuous episode—my own included—contrast the justness of the "rebel" union's crusade with the irredeemably corrupt ILA. Mello persuasively counters: "There were few ideological differences (if any at all) between the ILA and the newly organized AFL dock union. Both unions were highly conservative" (77); both, that is, were militantly anticommunist. Yet longshoremen across the port were ardently hostile to *all* outsiders: An external political campaign to prevent a left-led union from covering the waterfront was nearly redundant. If in fact dockworkers shared a conviction of resistance, that resistance, perhaps more aptly termed profound suspicion, extended to any and all agencies—of the Left or Right, church or state—promising changes in the hiring system, eradication of the mob from the piers, or the introduction of union democracy to an industry where pistols remained a far more common sight than ballots.

Waterfront tribalism was the devil everyone knew, which is why the ILA was recertified by the rank and file in three elections between 1953 and 1956; the roguish union's reembrace by the AFL was consummated in 1959. The reformers' lone tangible achievement (apart from *On the Waterfront*, the 1954 film largely inspired by the rebel cause, five decades of misleading criticism notwithstanding) was the establishment of the Waterfront Commission of New York Harbor by an act of Congress in 1953. Designed to wrest control of hiring from mob-connected pier foremen, the Waterfront Commission's job-registry practices were universally derided by the rank and file: Whether the commission was more concerned with blacklisting radicals—as Mello contends—or screening out criminals, the agency quickly devolved into yet another crony-ridden waterfront outpost, a bureaucrat's racket almost wholly disconnected from the political and shipping industry elites it was putatively created to serve.

This is where the story of the New York waterfront customarily begins to tail off, as technological innovation—containerization—rapidly shrank the port's workforce, shifted its epicenter to newer terminal facilities in Newark and Elizabeth, and marked the ILA's still-lavishly compensated officialdom as superannuated in the extreme. Yet, as Mello reminds us in later chapters of *New York Longshoremen*, the port remained a site of great contention, as dockworkers demanded social responsibility from shippers reaping ever-greater profits from automation. And in Brooklyn, "a numerically small contingent" (156) of Italian-American and African-American longshoremen forged in the 1960s a series of "Unity Slates" that parlayed demands for greater union democracy into a modicum of electoral success in the borough's flagship Local 1814. Though "left-wing dockworkers were never capable of presenting a viable electoral challenge for control of the ILA" (156), as Mello finally concedes, their prophetic witness to hope for a revitalized labor movement, like that offered in *New York Longshoremen*, is "political in essence," part of an ongoing process shaped and served well by spirited historical debate.

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## *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture: The Idealism of the Sovversivi in the United States, 1890–1940.*

By Marcella Bencivenni.
New York: New York University Press, 2011.
287 pages.

Thanks to the proliferation of scholarship on the Italian-American working class, Vito Marcantonio, Carlo Tresca, Bartolomeo Sacco, and Nicola Vanzetti now hold their rightful places in the narrative of U.S. history. But "great men" alone do not make a movement, nor do they create the history of a community. In *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture*, Marcella Bencivenni uses a wide-angle lens to focus her vibrant and multifaceted study about Italian radical life in the United States, exploring the many other individuals who made up the world of Italian-American radicals. In short, she argues that cultural tradition trumped the details of ideological differences and linked distinct groups, parties, and factions. In doing so, Bencivenni challenges scholarship that amplifies the divergence of the Italian immigrant Left and instead highlights the connection between what she identifies as the five strains of *sovversivi* (subversive) activism: the press, literature, poetry, theater, and iconography.

Bencivenni incorporates primary sources of literary texts and visual materials that give her cultural analysis of class the necessary heft needed to make the book's synthetic points convincing and to engage in two historiographical discussions. First, the study introduces important new findings to immigration history by unearthing the buried stories of generations of *sovversivi* in the United States. In this regard, Bencivenni adds refreshing arguments to scholarship on Italian Americans. Not only does she clarify how, when, and why waves of Italians to the United States brought together previous experiences from their homeland, she also considers the similar ways different radical groups sustained political allegiances once they arrived. Second, *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture* gives insight into the intricacies of the American Left. Bencivenni's fluency in Italian (she has done the translation work for the book herself) highlights the organicism of Italians' transnationalist and internationalist mindset and its basis in cultural, political, and religious institutions in Italy and the United States.

The seven chapters are organized thematically, and each follows a roughly similar chronological framework that spans the mid-nineteenth century through the

Great Depression. Bencivenni covers the nature and use of print culture in shaping the *sovversivi* outlook and how leisure and literary "class war" were used to bolster community identity. Her profiles of figures such as poet Arturo Giovannitti and the cartoonist Fort Velona—to whom she dedicates entire chapters—are especially remarkable for their originality. Throughout the book, Bencivenni revisits the argument that, despite the presence of different strains of radicalism during the period, the early interplay between anarchists and socialists (in Italy and in the United States) shaped the development of syndicalism and other movements. By the early twentieth century, a pattern of association among *sovversivi* was set. And, regardless of a group's particular doctrine (socialist, anarchist, trade-unionist, antifascist, communist), they shared a common critique of the world in which they lived. Their concerns appeared in the press, poetry, art, and literature and included the problem with the *padrone* system, capitalist and imperialist exploitation, and the ways that gender and racial prejudices undermined the goal of emancipation. Bencivenni argues that the *sovversivi* led their community without necessarily becoming recognized leaders such as the middle-class *prominenti*. Moreover, their leadership was based in a Western humanist tradition that helps explain the commonalities she discerns.

The connection Bencivenni makes between Enlightenment ideas and immigrant *sovversivi*'s internationalism is quite significant. The point is central to understanding transnationalism and internationalism but, by and large, has been missed by scholars focused on the entanglement of twentieth-century leftist politics. While the Old Left, in general, and the Italian immigrant *sovversivi*, in particular, were more clearly tied to the belief in progress and a specific type of educational intervention (one that stemmed from Enlightenment thought), the New Left's emergence at the same moment as poststructuralism made it more comfortable with a relativistic radicalism. Bencivenni documents how the *sovversivi*'s mindset played a part in many issues, including the establishment of the Università Populare in Italy and in the United States—the basis of which was to promote "laic, scientific, and nondogmatic education" (57)—and branches of Francisco Ferrer's Modern School, which had similar underpinnings and connections to anarchist strains of the movement. An Enlightenment base also explains the anticlericalism that *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture* covers. The sophisticated argument includes an account of the ways Italian-American radicals relied on cultural Catholicism to create leftist symbols and propaganda metaphors.

The amount of material that Bencivenni includes in this book is impressive. At times, the presentation—for example, in her discussions of the Italian-American radical press—is encyclopedic in terms of a wide breadth but a shallow depth. Overall, the originality of *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture*, both in terms of new evidence (e.g., the contribution of findings on Italian immigrant theater and the account of Arturo Giovannitti) and noteworthy perspective on familiar topics (e.g., how an inclusion of Italian immigrant proletarian fiction lengthens the chronological field of the genre), makes this a great book that will benefit well-established scholars, newly minted Ph.D.'s, and graduate students thinking about distinct avenues of research.

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*Freedom's Orator: Mario Savio and the Radical Legacy of the 1960s.*
by Robert Cohen.
New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
544 pages.

Best known as the fiery leader of the Free Speech Movement at the University of California at Berkeley in the 1960s, Mario Savio (1942–1996) is the subject of a long-overdue biography, *Freedom's Orator: Mario Savio and the Radical Legacy of the 1960s*, by Robert Cohen. Drawing upon previously unavailable Savio papers, along with oral histories from family, friends, and fellow activists, Cohen sheds new light on Savio's upbringing, philosophical development, and the full arc of his political activism.

Cohen builds a strong case that Savio, who practiced an egalitarian leadership style, shunned dogma, and lived by an unshakable moral code, qualifies as the most transcendent white leader of the New Left in the United States.

With a restrained and balanced tone, Cohen gives us a masterly analysis of the complex forces that led up to and comprised the Free Speech Movement, which was a catalyst for the explosive growth of the New Left in the United States and throughout the world. He breaks new ground by exploring the harsh personal challenges Savio faced throughout his life, including sexual abuse as a child, incarceration, academic expulsion, mental illness, a developmentally impaired child, and divorce. Striking a blow against the *Big Chill* (1983) stereotype that maintains that New Left activists eventually made their peace with the political establishment, Cohen's book shows us that as Savio recovered from personal crises, he struggled against U.S. military intervention in Central America, anti-immigrant legislation, tuition hikes, and attacks against affirmative action. By using a generous selection of Savio's speeches and writings, Cohen offers a critique of the ultra-left sectarian politics that contributed to the demise of the New Left. Savio's own words also challenge conservative commentators who belittle the democratic idealism of the 1960s by defining the decade only by its excesses. Although Cohen could have explored the ethnic dimension of Savio's life more rigorously, *Freedom's Orator* reveals the profound ways in which Savio's Italian-American background shaped his political development.

Savio's father was born in Sicily in 1928; however, we aren't told where, and it is unclear whether his mother was an immigrant. Cohen recounts that Savio's first language was Italian, without specifying whether he spoke any kind of regional dialect. While his father served in the U.S. Army during World War II, his maternal grandfather, an avowed Fascist (neither his family name or birthplace are mentioned), ruled the family roost. When Savio's father returned after the war, he demanded that only English be spoken in the household, in order to accelerate his son's assimilation into American culture. Later, in grade school, Savio's teacher taunted him by singing his name in rhyme. To spare his son any further humiliation, his father legally substituted his middle name for his first name, and Mario became Bob until he reclaimed his original name while attending the University of California at Berkeley.

Savio's family was devoutly Catholic—two of his aunts were nuns—and he identifies his Catholicism as a wellspring of his radicalism. As an altar boy, he believed he would one day become a priest. He was influenced by the dramatic

changes emanating from the Second Vatican Council. While highly critical of institutional Catholicism, Savio summed up the positive moral aspects of his religious education as: "Do good and resist evil" (37). What he observed and experienced in the summer of 1964 in Mississippi, while registering African Americans to vote, sealed his commitment to radical politics. There he was so outraged by the violent Jim Crow system that he felt compelled—even to the point of risking death at the hands of segregationists—to fight it. In a 1995 interview, he described the perspective he brought to the Free Speech Movement after his stay in Mississippi as a kind of secularized liberation theology.

Toward the end of his book, Cohen states: "In the 1980s Mario experienced an ethnic self-awakening seeing that his identity was not the bland middle class of white America but working-class Italian." Cohen provides a few sentences about Mario's visit to Italy, where he joined a parade in honor of the Italian antifascist resistance, gave speeches in front of radical audiences as a guest of the Italian Communist Party, and "began to reclaim a pride in his Italian heritage" (285).

Unfortunately, Cohen does not adequately address Savio's identity crisis or his psychological issues. Savio suffered bouts of depression throughout his life, spent extensive periods as an inpatient in a Los Angeles psychiatric hospital, and made a suicide attempt after his mother died. Given what we learn about Savio's identity crisis and its connection to his ethnicity, this period of reconciliation with his Italian background certainly merits a deeper exploration than is offered here.

Savio experienced a form of ethnic alienation very common to Italian Americans who have been involved in progressive politics. Right-wing politicians inside and outside the Italian-American community have directed Italian-American resentment toward falling wages, failing services, and deteriorating neighborhoods, toward people of color, immigrants, gays, and others at the margins of society—a place many Italian Americans have just left. In league with the mass media, conservative ethnic leaders perpetuate an image of the Italian-American community as being universally conservative and not one that reflects the diversity that exists among Italian Americans.

In 1984, I heard Savio speak at Columbia University. I was surprised to hear him open with, "I'm Mario Savio, and I'm a Sicilian American." He paused for a moment, looked at the crowd, and added, "You know, I probably wouldn't have said that in the old days." Those words echoed in my mind after his death. They gave me a sense that Savio did indeed value his ethnic identity, and they served to refute those who insisted he had none and was merely a homegrown American product.

Despite some shortcomings, Cohen's book is a significant work that examines a critical period in U.S. history, the victories and defeats of left-wing radicalism, and the relationship of Italian Americans to politics. Savio's morally based, nondogmatic, democratic leadership—in short, his enduring legacy—speaks with a special relevance to a new generation of activists seeking to build a countervailing force capable of checking a resurgent Right that seems hell-bent on rolling back workers' rights, civil rights, and the reforms of the New Deal.

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*Frank: The Voice.*
By James Kaplan.
New York: Doubleday, 2010.
786 pages.

*That Old Black Magic:*
*Louis Prima, Keely Smith, and the Golden Age of Las Vegas.*
By Tom Clavin.
Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2010.
224 pages.

*Amore: The Story of Italian American Song*.
By Mark Rotella.
New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010.
320 pages.

"Music has always been and continues to be one of the primary forms of Italian American expression and the area of perhaps its strongest contribution to the common culture because it involves the spheres of classical as well as popular music," observe Robert Connolly and Pellegrino D'Acierno, in their essay "Italian American Musical Culture and Its Contribution to American Music" (1999, 387). Three recent titles focus on Italian-American music making during an era that Connolly and D'Acierno characterize as "the long farewell to bel canto," from the 1930s to the early 1960s, when Italian-American pop singers, and especially crooners, exerted "a certain hegemony over American popular singing" (417–418). The peak years of Italian-American prominence in American popular music also were those in which the children and grandchildren of immigrants "entered mainstream American life and culture," as Mark Rotella observes in *Amore: The Story of Italian American Song* (xvi). "To listen to American pop music" from that era, Rotella writes, "is to listen to the voices of Italians as they assimilated into American culture" (xviii).

James Kaplan's *Frank: The Voice* is another addition to the voluminous documentation of the life and career of the most famous of Italian-American vocalists. Has any American singer been written about as extensively as Francis Albert Sinatra? Is there anything more to be said about an artist who, as Kaplan acknowledges, is "perhaps the most chronicled human in modern history" (720)? Kaplan proves that indeed there is. Even though this doorstop of a book is not a full life—it concludes with Sinatra winning the Best Supporting Actor Oscar for *From Here to Eternity* in 1954—Kaplan has written the best—indeed, in this reviewer's estimation the definitive—study of Sinatra's life and art, a masterful synthesis of existing literature, scholarly and journalistic; new interviews; and astute assessments of Sinatra's recordings. Kaplan employs novelistic techniques that occasionally raise the reader's eyebrows, particularly in the lengthy, sexually candid recounting of Sinatra's turbulent relationship with Ava Gardner, but his narrative approach and his vivid prose, which has its own brand of swing, also make the very long book immensely readable.

Kaplan portrays Sinatra as an Italian American with a strong sense of *italianità* and a keen sensitivity to ethnic slights. The author, who is Jewish, deeply identifies

with Sinatra as an ethnic American who experienced prejudice from WASP America. He quotes newspaper accounts in which journalists referred to Sinatra as a "greasy" Italian and as a "wop" singer, the blatant bias startling to encounter today, when Italian Americans, though still subject to cultural stereotyping (often self-inflicted), have assimilated and are generally regarded as bona fide Caucasians. Kaplan situates Sinatra's left-wing, Popular Front–era politics (and his later Democratic Party liberalism) in the context of his own sense of ethnic injury, his reflexive identification with underdogs, and his hostility to WASP conservatism. Kaplan reminds us that at one time Sinatra was a rebel figure in American popular culture. During the McCarthyite 1950s, conservative newspaper columnists repeatedly attacked Sinatra as un-American, conflating his ethnicity, his assertive sexuality, and his politics.

That Sinatra was put upon by bigots, however, doesn't alter the fact that the man's character had "spectacular" flaws (720), as previous biographies, most notably Kitty Kelley's sensationalistic *His Way: The Unauthorized Biography of Frank Sinatra* (1986), have established. He exploited and betrayed friends, lovers, and musical associates; as Kaplan observes, "the story of Frank Sinatra's life is one of continual shedding, both of artistic identities and of associates and intimates who had outlived their usefulness" (138–139). This behavioral pattern was rooted in his childhood, with his passive and ineffectual father, Sicilian-born Martin Sinatra, and his domineering mother, Natalina Garaventa, known as Dolly, whose family came from a town near Genoa. Sinatra's birth was traumatic; he was yanked from his mother's womb by a forceps-wielding doctor who tore and scarred the left side of Sinatra's face, neck, and left ear. Sinatra retained a lifelong bitterness over the circumstances of his birth: "They just kind of ripped me out and tossed me aside," he remarked to a girlfriend (5). Dolly, "a woman he seems to have hated and loved, avoided and sought out, in equal measures, throughout his life" (6), alternately coddled and abused—sometimes physically—her son. "If the primary relationship was up for grabs, so was every subsequent relationship," whether romantic or professional (10).

The "Mafia connections" his critics decried were real; Sinatra had lived near and known gangsters when he was growing up in Hoboken, New Jersey, and throughout his career he palled around with hoodlums. (Kaplan, however, definitively debunks the myth that Mafia coercion won him the role of Maggio in *From Here to Eternity*. It was Ava Gardner's insistence, not a horse's severed head, that convinced Columbia studio chief Harry Cohn to give Sinatra the part.) He disingenuously claimed that gangsters were simply people whom he encountered in his line of work: They owned and patronized the nightclubs where he performed. But in 1950, Sinatra came to the attention of Senator Estes Kefauver and his Special Committee on Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce. Kefauver had photographs showing the singer in the company of Charlie "Lucky" Luciano and other notorious criminals. Kefauver's chief attorney wanted Sinatra to testify on camera, which as Kaplan notes, "would have blown the singer's career right out of the water" (459). But Sinatra's attorney persuaded Kefauver's chief investigator to let him testify, in "absolute secrecy," in a law office in Rockefeller Center. Sinatra was evasive in his testimony, denying he had had business relationships with Luciano or any other mobsters. Kefauver's investigator was convinced Sinatra was lying, but he realized the singer would never admit any complicity with gangsters. (Nor did he have any hard evidence of such involvement.)

The investigator recommended that Sinatra not be called to testify publicly, and Kefauver, concerned that his hearings were turning into a media circus, agreed.

*Frank: The Voice* presents in unsparing detail Sinatra's character flaws and bad behavior, but Kaplan, unlike lesser biographers, and especially Kelley, shows how this deeply flawed individual, through force of will, tenacity, and artistic genius, overcame daunting setbacks to establish himself as the premier American male singer of the twentieth century. Kaplan ably recounts Sinatra's career, from his earliest days as a Bing Crosby imitator to his stints with the big bands of Harry James and Tommy Dorsey, to his 1940s stardom as the idol of screaming bobbysoxers (the fan hysteria, Kaplan reports, was largely orchestrated by Sinatra's then-manager), to his precipitous decline in the late 1940s, culminating in his resurgence as the mature chronicler of erotic longing and loss in the 1950s who, collaborating with the gifted arranger Nelson Riddle, recorded such brilliant and enduring albums as *Songs for Young Lovers*, *In the Wee Small Hours*, and *Only the Lonely*.

Kaplan draws substantially from *Sinatra! The Song Is You: A Singer's Art*, Will Friedwald's 1997 authoritative analysis of Sinatra's musicianship, but his own critiques are insightful and judicious. He provides an engrossing account of Sinatra's 1953 recording of "Young at Heart," a good but not great Carolyn Leigh and Johnny Richards composition that "was a paean to rebirth, the ideal soundtrack to Frank Sinatra's matchless comeback" (674). Kaplan notes, "everything about this recording was perfect." The then-cutting-edge recording technology, Sinatra's "diction, phrasing, and pitch-perfect tone, not to mention the gorgeousness" of the instrumental backing and Nelson Riddle's arrangement, transformed an unexceptional song into a pop classic.

Louis Prima, the New Orleans–born son of Sicilian immigrants, didn't reach the rarefied artistic heights that Sinatra attained. But, like Sinatra, Prima was unapologetically "ethnic" in an era when few performers of any background stressed their ethnicity. His innovation was to blend elements of *italianità* and African-American idioms, at first jazz and, later in his career, rhythm and blues and rock 'n' roll. His exuberant, carnivalesque persona and performing style have influenced such disparate artists as the American rock star David Lee Roth and the Sicilian trumpeter, vocalist, and bandleader Roy Paci. Sinatra and Prima exuded a sexuality that WASP America found both exciting and unsettling, but Prima was a far more antic and ribald figure than the soulfully erotic Sinatra. Tom Clavin, in *That Old Black Magic: Louis Prima, Keely Smith, and the Golden Age of Las Vegas*, quotes a promoter as saying, "When Prima shouted, 'Let's have a jubilee,' a lot of those sex-starved dames would practically have an orgasm. I think they thought he was shouting, 'let's have an orgy' in that hoarse, horny voice of his" (40).

Whereas Sinatra was subjected to ethnic bigotry as an Italian American, early in his career the dark-skinned, kinky-haired Prima was sometimes regarded as racially indeterminate, a "mulatto," or even a light-skinned African American. In 1934, a New York nightclub owner, thinking Prima was black, refused to hire him. Prima performed at Harlem's Apollo Theater, whose audiences loved him, and the music industry publication *Billboard* called his group "a hot Negro orchestra" (41). Clavin observes that "Louis Prima sang and moved like a black entertainer filled with the combined spirits of jazz, blues, and pop" (41). Prima, who had been influenced by African-American

musicians since his childhood and socialized comfortably with them, almost lost an important job in Las Vegas in 1954 because he was angered by the mistreatment of a black performer.

Like Sinatra, Prima loved and respected jazz musicians. (Both men learned crucial lessons from them about vocal timbre and phrasing, rhythm, and swing.) Prima's major influence was Louis Armstrong; while growing up in New Orleans, he frequently heard Armstrong play, and he often cited the older man as his hero. Clavin underestimates Prima's musicianship, noting that he never attained the brilliance of Armstrong. But how many Satchmo-influenced trumpeters have? Prima's jazz credentials were hardly negligible. He was a skilled trumpeter who, in the decades before his apotheosis as the Dionysius of Las Vegas, led swing groups and big bands, and he also was a composer whose "Sing! Sing! Sing!," recorded by Benny Goodman, became one of the biggest hits of the swing era. Prima also made a number of fine jazz albums, including several with the virtuoso clarinetist Pee Wee Russell. But the recordings for which Prima is best known—besides his signature tunes "Just a Gigolo" and "That Old Black Magic"—are his macaronic mixes of African-American musical language and Italian-American comedy. The ethnic references in his song lyrics, in English and pidgin Sicilian, delighted Italian-American fans. Consider the titles: "Baciagaloop (Makes Love on the Stoop)," "Felicia no Capicia," "Zooma Zooma," and his paean to a pizzeria waitress, "Angelina" ("I eat antipasta twice/Just because she is so nice").

*That Old Black Magic* centers on the roles Prima; his wife, vocalist Keely Smith; and their bandleader, saxophonist Sam Butera, played in developing Las Vegas into a major entertainment center during the 1950s and early 1960s. Their Vegas sojourn began inauspiciously, with the Sahara Hotel offering them a two-week engagement in the Casbar Lounge, a side room that held only 150 people. But in 1953, the newlyweds Prima and Smith were living hand to mouth, so they jumped at the opportunity and made the most of it: Two weeks turned into a six-year engagement. Audiences responded enthusiastically to their act, which exploited the peculiar chemistry between Prima and Smith: he all irrepressible energy and bawdy humor, as he cavorted wildly, blew his trumpet, and sang, while Smith, assuming an air of stolid indifference, stood stock-still while she sang, refusing to acknowledge his antics except with the occasional dry retort or put-down. (The act, as Clavin notes, was the prototype for Sonny and Cher's.) Clavin somewhat overstates the importance of the Prima–Smith act in establishing Las Vegas as a show business mecca; as Kaplan observes, Sinatra played a far more critical role: "In a very real way, Sinatra built Vegas: not only was he present at the creation, but he was responsible for it" (656). But Prima and Smith were signifiers of uninhibited fun and hipness before the modern rock era arrived with the Beatles: "In the years before the British Invasion, their act, 'The Wildest,' represented what was captivating, romantic, and downright sexy in American music" (Clavin 2).

*Amore*, Mark Rotella's impressionistic history of Italian-American popular music, follows the schema set forth by Connolly and D'Acierno (1999) in their essay for *The Italian American Heritage*, beginning with opera and Neapolitan song, passing through the crooners and on to middle-of-the-road pop, doo-wop, and rock. Each chapter is devoted to a particular song and its singer, with Rotella using the songs

to make larger points about Italian-American immigration, culture, sexual mores, and assimilation. He concentrates on the Italian-American pop recorded from 1947 to 1964, from the end of the big bands to the Beatles, an era he calls "the Italian decade" because "it was during this time that Italian Americans entered mainstream American life and culture" (xvi).

Rotella frankly admits his impulse is nostalgic: "Why do I yearn to recapture the experiences of my parents and grandparents?" He longs for that era because "there really was a distinctive Italian American style—cocky and tender, tough and vulnerable, serious and playful, forward-thinking and nostalgic—and it is found nowhere so powerfully as in the music" (xviii). Rotella's portraits of Italian-American pop singers are more descriptive than analytic and for the most part lively and engaging. Most of the chapters are just the right length; the forgotten crooner Alan Dale (born Aldo Sigismondi in Brooklyn) doesn't merit more than the four pages Rotella devotes to him. Several profiles, however, are frustratingly brief. Rotella interviewed Sam Butera and 1950s pop star Frankie Laine not long before their deaths, but both chapters are less substantial than their subjects deserve. Regarding the best-known artists—Sinatra, Prima, Tony Bennett, and Dean Martin—Rotella adds little to what already has been written about them. Too often, Rotella's nostalgia for the time when "there really was a distinctive Italian American style" clouds his critical judgment. Many of the singers whom he profiles—Perry Como, Martin, Mario Lanza, Vic Damone, Al Martino, Connie Francis, and others—made recordings that were sentimental, insipid, burdened with syrupy orchestrations, and rhythmically inert. The Italian-American singers whose work represented a fruitful encounter between their own cultural backgrounds and African-American music, which in the 1950s came to dominate American popular music—Sinatra, Bennett, Prima, and rockers such as Dion Di Mucci—made music that remains vital, long after the passing of the Italian-American decade.

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*Italoamericani tra Hollywood e Cinecittà.*
By Flaminio Di Biagi.
Genoa: Le Mani-Microart's Edizioni, 2010.
175 pages.

In the last few decades, Italian Americans have become a surprisingly popular subject of scholarship in Italy. After decades of virtual neglect, the mother country seems to have developed a desire to understand the culture of its cast-off progeny. This is not to say that the relationship between Italian Americans and Italians is any easier now than it used to be. In fact, in his conclusion, Flaminio Di Biagi quotes one prominent Italian critic who states that there is a "cesura culturale" (cultural gap) between the two groups. The critic goes so far as to unequivocally state that "gli italo-americani non sono italiani . . . ci imbarazzano, sopratutto quelli che provengono dal Sud" (Italian Americans are not Italians . . . they embarrass us, especially the ones who come from the South) (142). Sadly, it would appear that for many who espouse what Di Biagi calls the "Italian point of view," understanding does not mean accepting.

Cinema is one of the main avenues of communication between populations; through films we learn about one another's cultures. Of course, the images that are conveyed in films do not always correspond to what we can call reality. At the very least, "reality" is always too multifaceted and complex to be represented by any one cultural product. At worst, the stereotypes that are too frequently produced and propagated by films feed the fires of misunderstanding that lead to cultural friction. When this occurs, as has happened with Italian Americans, how can we dispel the pernicious stereotypes and correct the record? In the preface to *Italoamericani tra Hollywood e Cinecittà* (Italian Americans from Hollywood to Cinecittà), Fred Gardaphé suggests that the Italian Americans' successful integration into "American" culture has led to a "cultura di confusione" and that by embracing the mainstream culture so eagerly, they have inadvertently enabled the creation and transmission of damaging stereotypes. We therefore need to educate the public about the facts and the fictions of Italian-American culture (8).

Di Biagi's book, structured in two separate parts, aims to examine representations of Italian Americans in Hollywood films (the first part) and in the films of Italy's Cinecittà (the second part). Some of the themes treated in the first part are films directed by Italian Americans such as Frank Capra and Martin Scorsese; actors from Rudolph Valentino to the more recent Danny Aiello and James Gandolfini; images of Italian Americans in other films produced in Hollywood; "exported" Italian stars such as Sophia Loren, Marcello Mastroianni, and Gina Lollobrigida; a surprising list of Italian-American actors who, in Hollywood, are not generally identified as such (e.g., Burt Young and Kevin Jordan); and stereotypes inadvertently disseminated by Italian films that have been released in Hollywood such as *Il postino* (*The Postman*) and *La vita è bella* (*Life Is Beautiful*). Di Biagi also mentions that currently Hollywood offers images of "anetnica," that is, the absence of ethnicity, embodied by actors such as Leonardo DiCaprio, Téa Leoni, and Rene Russo.

In the second part, Di Biagi informs us that while Italian Americans have been featured regularly in Hollywood films, this has not been the case with films produced in Cinecittà. Equally, Di Biagi points out that while Hollywood has occasionally

produced positive representations—he offers the example of *Moonstruck*—Cinecittà has been less kind. For example, in Italian films we frequently see that while American relatives can represent the hope of a large inheritance, they are even more frequently represented as a source of trouble or embarrassment.

In both parts of the book, after a very brief overview, Di Biagi provides a survey across the decades starting from the 1920s to the present time. In each decade, the author offers a plethora of films that have either featured an Italian-American character or have been directed by an Italian American and that illustrate a general trend in the representation of the group as a whole. For instance, we are reminded that it is in the 1930s that the image of the Italian American as a social deviant is solidified. The classic film examples he cites are *Little Caesar* with Edward G. Robinson, directed by Mervyn Le Roy (1931), and *Scarface* with Paul Muni, directed by Howard Hawks (1932). The 1970s, with the release of *The Godfather*, also prove to be a watershed era. Similar to the effect created by Le Roy's film, Coppola's blockbuster proved to be highly influential in embedding an image of Italian-American criminality in the minds of the public in America and globally. This trend is mirrored in the films of Cinecittà as well, and Di Biagi notes that the Italian-born knockoffs trade in the heavily exploited clichés and stereotypes of the Hollywood originals. In any case, the films produced in Italy rarely offer an Italian-American image other than the buffoon of the 1960s and 1970s *commedia all'italiana* and the *mafioso* of the 1970s, and then usually in the form of a minor character, with the possible exception of Giuliano Montaldo's *Sacco e Vanzetti* (1971). Di Biagi briefly mentions one possible cause: Not wanting to wash the nation's dirty laundry in public, the Italian government viewed emigration as a subject to be avoided, along with labor conflict, poverty, and other controversial social themes (138–139).

The concept of this book, to examine the cinematic image of the Italian American as represented in the United States and in Italy, is certainly full of potential. Nevertheless, while the idea may be compelling, the strategies adopted for its execution leave us less than satisfied. There is no doubt that Di Biagi has an enviable knowledge of the subject. He offers an abundance of titles, even obscure ones. However, this turns out to be bewildering since the resulting book reads like a catalog of mini film reviews that follow each other relentlessly, providing little more than plot summary and the context of the cliché or stereotype involved. It might have been preferable to offer fewer titles and more analysis and commentary. Di Biagi fails to deliver a sustained discussion of any topic. This ultimately leads to the unfortunate impression that the book lacks a central core; indeed, the first and second parts both end with conclusions as if they were two separate books. A quibble I have is that the Hollywood film titles are given only as they were translated for their Italian releases. And while Di Biagi does offer the original English titles in the index, this is confusing and inconvenient for the reader who must then go searching in order to understand which American original is being referenced, especially since the translated title often offers no hint as to the original. If, on the other hand, this has been done because the book was destined exclusively for the Italian market, then that implies that the American reader has been ignored. Either way, the American reader is at a disadvantage.

The book leaves one perplexed as to the target audience. With insufficient development and even less synthesis of the subject, it can be of little use to the academic

conducting research. Perhaps it might be useful to the student fluent in the Italian language who is embarking on a film studies project and who is looking for a point of entry into the subject or for the general reader interested in an overview of Italian Americans as represented in films.

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## Film Reviews

*In altro mare.*
By Franco La Cecla.
A.S.I.A. Production/Cineteca Bologna, 2010.
56 minutes. DVD format, color.

*Il mare di Joe.*
By Enzo Incontro and Marco Mensa.
Associazione Nazionale Famiglie Emigrati, Delegazione Regionale Sicilia;
Scuba Film Production; Ethnos, 2009.
60 minutes. DVD format, color.

The fluctuating fortunes of the U.S. commercial fisheries have been a consistent topic of observation, commentary, and documentation, be it from government, the media, artists, writers, or the academic community. While motivations for these efforts vary—it is indeed a significant preoccupation—there is no denying that those who work the water provide all of us with connections to the sea that are seemingly timeless and deeply revealing of the human condition. Certain groups of European immigrants galvanized this sentiment, arriving in the United States to participate in the country's burgeoning commercial fisheries and hoping to reverse the economic privations that affected them in their home countries. Starting in the late nineteenth century, an ethnic mosaic began taking shape in American fishing communities, spanning from the Atlantic coast, to the Gulf of Mexico, to the Great Lakes, to the Pacific coast. Not surprisingly, Italians took their place in this unfolding occupational drama. They brought not only the skills, energy, and environmental insight required for commercial fishing but also the family life, religiosity, foodways, and language that accompanied this occupational tradition. Along the way, Italian immigrant fishermen needed to reconcile numerous cultural and economic quandaries. Given these circumstances, it is understandable that such communities appeal to the documentarian's imagination.

Two recent films, *In altro mare* (In other sea) and *Il mare di Joe* (Joe's sea),[1] fit squarely in this documentary tradition, chronicling the connections that link Sicilian and other Italian fishermen to the places they create for themselves in the United States. But these films are structured differently. In *Il mare di Joe*, filmmaker and naturalist Enzo Incontro prominently inserts himself into the film—both in his voiceover and on camera—and takes us on his odyssey to trace the life of Joe Bonanno, whose legendary fishing experience took him from the island of Marettimo, Sicily, to Monterey, California, and north to Alaska. Unlike *Il mare di Joe*, which often takes the form of travelog, *In altro mare* is a more robust social critique, examining the formation of the Italian fishing community of Gloucester, Massachusetts, and the challenges it has faced in the wake of collapsing fish stocks in the Northwest Atlantic. Notwithstanding these differences and the narratives they frame, each film firmly establishes the sea's powerful, indeed pervasive, influence in Italian coastal communities and the ways in which this cultural template goes unabated when one is transplanted. As Joe Bonanno says in *Il mare di Joe*, "Salt flows in our veins, we can't do anything about it." Although these films emerge from the social/cultural

documentary tradition and its ever-increasing merger with environmental documentaries, it is equally important that viewers recognize how these films overlap with the content and cinematographic pedigree established by Luchino Visconti's powerful handling of Sicilian fishing in his neorealist film *La terra trema* (*The Earth Trembles*) (1948).

Each film emphasizes how the fishing experience at certain Italian locations—Terrasini, Lampedusa, Marettimo—shaped some immigrants' expectations in coming to the United States, as well as in handling inevitable struggles—both economic and physical (commercial fishing being consistently ranked as one of the most dangerous occupations in the United States). Italian traditions were, and continue to be, instrumental in ameliorating these stresses. *In altro mare* opens and closes with scenes from Gloucester's well-known St. Peter's Fiesta, and ample footage in both films depicts deeply valued family events and devotional exercises, underscoring the vital importance of faith and kinship networks in sustaining this way of life. Neither film shies away from burdens placed on women, whether it is the loneliness of separation during fishing voyages, working in Monterey's canneries, managing a fishing family's financial affairs, or being a spiritual bedrock. Italian values and affiliations reinforce occupational resiliency, sometimes in such subtle utterances as Joe Bonnano's tender, grateful devotion to his wife and tacit acknowledgment of her role in his fishing success, and, at other times, in the distinctly modern guise of the Gloucester Fishermen's Wives Association (GFWA), whose efforts, under the leadership of Angela Sanfilippo, have been a potent lobbying force.

To their credit, these films are not formulaic accounts of Italian immigrants simply achieving economic success in the U.S. commercial fishing industry. Although the financial rewards and possibilities of moving to the United States are duly noted, so are the problems. This comes through in particularly compelling terms when footage from *In altro mare* shows ex-Gloucester fishermen—who have returned to Italy—reflecting on their experience. They readily admit that opportunities in their homeland were limited ("Terrasini was beautiful, but gave me nothing," says one returned immigrant) but add that the unrelenting work schedule, different weather conditions, and competitive economic climate in the United States were nothing to envy. Vexed by the compromises they face in transitioning from Italy to the United States—particularly when reflecting on the more humane pace of commercial fishing in Mediterranean waters—one fisherman declares how the United States requires one to have a "business mind . . . [you] remain poor if you work for others." These qualitative distinctions are addressed in footage that rotates between the industrial pace of Gloucester's fisheries and its impersonal, computerized fish auction and the less aggressive, more sensitively wrought artisanal fisheries of Terrasini, where carefully arranged fish await their place in a traditional auction setting, a scene suggesting a less commercially frayed connection to the sea.

There is no mistaking the pivotal role that Italian tradition—indeed, more typically, Sicilian tradition—plays in consummating the U.S. fishing experience of those portrayed in these films. But viewers will be struck by how these fishing people are caught in the crosscurrents of ecological changes and environmental politics that afflict fisheries throughout the world. Incontro depicts how sardine fishing brought Marettimans to Monterey as early as 1917; however, declines in this fishery led Joe Bonanno to seek salmon in Alaska during the later twentieth century. Bonanno's maritime roots reach all the way back to Sicily, but the tenuous environmental circumstances

that engulfed his working life are evident as he tours the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary or meets with an Alaska fisheries official before the start of the salmon season. Likewise, in *In altro mare*—which is less focused on a single figure than *Il mare di Joe*—we gain similar insight when Gloucester fishing-boat captain Baldassare Noto remarks on the challenges of making a living amidst declining stocks and more stringent catch regulations—"Now it is over in Gloucester." His affable personality stands in stark contrast to the GFWA's Angela Sanfilippo and her frustration with the federal government and the circumstances that threaten her beloved fishing community. These vignettes are starkly illuminated by footage of Gloucester fishermen returning dead bycatch to the sea in compliance with federal regulations. In a not too subtle critique, *In altro mare* ends with ex-Gloucester fishermen in Terrasini contentedly greeting the camera, perhaps with less money than they had in the United States, but possibly with a more measured, sustained relationship to the sea and with a renewed perspective on how their Mediterranean inheritance sustains what they valued most in their human relationships.

Broadly speaking, these films remind us that the sea is central—indeed, highly defining—to Italian transnational identity. Although this legacy is typically touted from the perspective of Italy's well-known actors in global history, the figures in these films show how such dynamics ripple deep into the ranks of ordinary Italians and Italian Americans. In fostering movement around the globe, the seas and their resources have endowed Italians with environmental and culturally syncretistic perspectives that not all groups can claim. But as much as the oceans call, Italy also beckons its people to return. Throughout U.S. history, Italian immigrants have had some of the highest rates of return migration back to their European home, and each of the two films underscores this enduring practice. Indeed, Italian women who migrated to the United States were particularly noted for maintaining these ties, a tradition exemplified not only by Angela Sanfilippo and her Gloucester Fishermen's Wives Association but across the United States, as evidenced by Carol McKibben's work (2006) on Sicilian women in the Monterey fishing community.

Both of these films are rich in ethnographic detail and historical documentation. The mix of contemporary and historical footage, still shots, and oral testimony will prove useful in any number of educational settings and can be effectively integrated in these venues with a range of historical, anthropological, fiction, and nonfiction writing.[2] Furthermore, both films add to a pattern of public history and public humanities projects in Monterey and Gloucester that have focused on the Italian-American fishing experience—projects that have taken form as permanent and temporary museum exhibits and oral history collections.

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## Notes

1. Incontro and Mensa's film is variously identified as *Il mare di Joe* and *Joe's sea* on the DVD label and *The sea of Joe* in the film's title sequence. To minimize confusion, this review uses the film's Italian title.

2. For historical, anthropological, fiction, and nonfiction writing on the subject, see Kurlansky (2008), McKibben (2006), Norkunas (1993), Orlando (2004), St. Peter's Fiesta Committee (2001), Swiderski (1987), and Testaverde (2004).

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## *Columbus Day Legacy.*

By Bennie Klain (Navajo).

A TricksterFilms, LLC Production, 2011.

27 minutes. DVD format, color.

*Columbus Day Legacy*, by Navajo director Bennie Klain, offers insight into this federal holiday as it is observed in Denver, Colorado—Colorado being the state where it was first proclaimed an official celebration. The documentary opens with a series of remarks by Native-American activists, scholars, artists, and Italian-American cultural activists about the meaning of the holiday. The common denominator for both groups is the idea that Columbus Day—and, for that matter, its street parades—bears a highly symbolic and ideological value, yet it also contributes to furthering the historical oppositional narrative of oppressed versus oppressor. The documentary draws a definite line between Native-American and Italian-American perspectives on the issue: First, we are presented with a radio interview of American Indian Movement leader Russell Means and political science professor Glenn Morris. Then we are introduced to the testimonials of Italian-American activist Micki Lava Clayton and to the archival reconstruction of Italian immigration and mining history in Colorado. The documentary culminates in the 2007 parade (also marking the 100th anniversary of the Colorado holiday), which in some sense is a metaphor for indigenous peoples' history on this continent: Resistance to and peaceful demonstration against the celebration by the Transform Columbus Day Alliance are met with utmost contempt and violence by the local law enforcement. Once the protesters are out of the way (quite predictably, the movement leaders undergo temporary detention), the parade continues unhindered. The photographic images, the soundtrack, and the editing of these last sequences in

particular make *Columbus Day Legacy* a highly accomplished documentary that, thanks to its immediacy and clarity of language, drives the general audience to ponder the ideological implications of what is often conceived of as a harmless, ethnic celebration or just a day off of work.

The film participates in ongoing public and scholarly discourse about the representation of U.S. history, especially in schoolbooks and community-centered performances of ethnic identity. More specifically, the documentary situates itself within ongoing discussions about indigenous peoples' misrepresentation, mainstream definitions of American identity, and the position of white ethnicity. The contrast between Native-American and Italian-American standpoints compels us to question common knowledge and opinions about Columbus Day celebrations. We are reminded that what is widely considered a national day of pride for Italian Americans has become, especially in this regionally specific study, a day of contestation between two different ethnic groups. In fact, one of the documentary's strongest points is that it brings to our attention the controversial issues of assimilation into U.S. mainstream culture and the politics around reclaiming one's own unique, original identity, especially in a public, community-centered way.

Interestingly, the power relations examined here involve two groups that have both been discriminated against for centuries: One identifies itself as the original peoples of this land, and the other considers itself the proud children of immigrants who contributed to the growth of the nation. In this sense, the subtext of *Columbus Day Legacy* sheds significant light not only on how racial discrimination works against different groups but also on the ways in which such groups strategically use their sense of belonging to the land as a tool for claiming identity.

Unfortunately, the documentary does not expand on the epistemological and spiritual depth of indigenous notions of territorial identity and the sense of place, nor does it dwell on traditional views—except for a few statements by Troy Lynn Yellow Wood and artist Alistair Bane—about the strong spiritual significance of indigenous ways of life. In so doing, it emphasizes contemporary Native-American activism and civil organizing against centuries of stereotyping and social injustices and thus takes for granted viewers' knowledge of indigenous peoples' "land-based" cultural identity and sense of time. Albeit concisely, *Columbus Day Legacy* seems to do a better job with Italian-American history (both archival and oral): In fact, besides presenting a rich gallery of black-and-white photographs of Ellis Island landings and Colorado mine history—including the 1914 Ludlow massacre of striking coal miners—it offers a few testimonials of second- and third-generation immigrants now actively involved in Denver's Italian-American community. In this sense, *Columbus Day Legacy* is a political documentary project that invites us to consider the long-term, social, cultural, and ethical consequences of the European first invasion.

The visual design of the first part of the documentary summarizes quite eloquently the story of Columbus's arrival as it is typically portrayed in U.S. elementary-school books. The children's song accompanying these images ironically hints at the over-simplified terms in which the educational system depicts the events of 1492. For what did Columbus's arrival bring about if not the geopolitical, ideological remapping of a continent and, as Native-American activists claim, a whole set of ideas of supremacy and power? Racial discrimination and new notions of American identity forced the

country's legitimate inhabitants and those who came after them to partake in the imagination and forging of a community where one's own past would not be as important as the history of the nation that came to be.

As the documentary clearly shows, the ensuing ideology of Manifest Destiny justified killing, seizing of lands, and the eradication of indigenous belief systems and cultural values in the same way as ideas of ethnic and racial supremacy contributed to sketch out hegemonic tensions among groups who shared a history of oppression. The Denver parade encloses this history by constructing a space where Italian Americans take pride in their own heritage, yet do so at the expense of native people. For example, during the radio show, Russell Means, Glenn Morris, and Italian-American organizer George Vendegna tackle debates around the parade's reenactment of Gen. George Armstrong Custer's cavalry. For the indigenous leaders the reenactment of this historical moment emphasizes a quintessential expression of desire for power and conquest over Native Americans that cannot but put the Italian-American community in a bad light, even though they were not historically part of it. In short, the indigenous perspective suggests that in addition to its racist implications, Columbus Day (and its celebrations) legitimates and perpetuates the history of a misnomer, whose *fons et origo* is to be found in a geographical error that not even Columbus acknowledged. Or, as Russell Means argues otherwise, the name *Indian* comes directly from the Spanish *En Dios* (in God), which further highlights the colonial connotation of the word itself.

Although in different terms, both the indigenous and the Italian-American communities presented in the film argue for a revisitation of U.S. history whereby they can rescue their own sense of identity (that is, what it means to be indigenous or Italian American today) and become visible on their own terms. In this regard, according to the Native-American community, Columbus Day should become Native-American Day. Conversely, Italian Americans look at the celebration of this holiday as a key moment in the American calendar to acquire and reiterate their own visibility and, as Micki Lava Clayton maintains, to reinstate their assimilation into U.S. society. Interestingly, this continued celebration (yet not its original early twentieth-century version) is still informed by the spirit of the white ethnic revival of the 1970s. Hence, in order to understand those Italian Americans who publically embrace their identity today, viewers should take into account earlier ways in which this ethnic group—and, for that matter, its movement toward a dominant white ethnic status in America—was seen as nonwhite. The film, to some extent, skirts over these ambiguities—asking viewers to gloss this trajectory through the comments of a few informants.

The release documents appearing on the documentary's website (www.nativetelecom.org/columbus_day_legacy) report that Klain's challenge was "to begin with an equal representation from both sides of the conflict." It is worth noting that the documentary is the result of a communal effort between two different film crews (the concluding credits bear the names of cinematographers Marko Slavnic and Nancy Schiesari, both from the University of Texas at Austin): one working with the Native-American and one with the Italian-American community, respectively. Overall, Klain succeeds in his endeavor: In fact, the documentary offers quite a balanced representation of the ways in which such a symbolic moment in the month of October generates animated discussions about colonial relations on both sides, especially at the grassroots level.

As the production website explains, each group presents its own side of the story in the first person; both Native-American and Italian-American testimonials are so moving and genuine that, as an audience, we may feel at a loss for words. But the film also voices the concerns of those who actually question the binary terms in which this issue is usually framed. In fact, according to Troy Lynn Yellow Wood, "It is not an Italian–Indian difference: It's about the truth." Italian-American activist Glenn Spagnuolo and other leaders of the Transform Columbus Day Alliance—an international coalition based in Denver—are adamantly against the celebration of Christopher Columbus himself, yet they acknowledge the importance of this historical figure among Italian-Americans. So, one viable solution to the problem may be the transformation of this national holiday into a day of reconciliation and collective reflection, which, Russell Means reminds us, already happens in other parts of the country.

Spagnuolo's disavowal of the current Denver style of celebrating Columbus may seem out of place in this film, but it is particularly relevant to note in this context. Further, his work is part of larger movements across the country whereby Italian-American activists, scholars, and artists are reclaiming Columbus Day to support progressive politics. For instance, although not mentioned in this documentary, there has been a movement of Italian Americans in the San Francisco Bay Area who for years have been advocating against the celebration of Columbus Day and its legacy of racism. On Columbus Day in 1999, at Josie's Cabaret and Juice Joint in San Francisco, a group of gay and lesbian activists and artists met to "Dump Columbus" in the name of Italian-American radical politics. The first event featured, among others, writer Tommi Avicolli Mecca and future California State Assembly member Tom Ammiano. A few years later, in 2002, the second such event was organized by Avicolli Mecca, James Tracy, and others of what became known as the Italian-American Political Solidarity Club. The event was held at St. Boniface Church in the Tenderloin District of San Francisco. The Dump Columbus, Embrace Humanity event has been held annually ever since. In 2008 Manic D Press published an anthology, *Avanti Popolo: Italian-American Writers Sail Beyond Columbus*, edited by the Italian-American Political Solidarity Club and stemming directly from the annual October event. Such actions resonate with the efforts and principles of the Transform Columbus Day Alliance, a group whose ultimate pursuit is to revolutionize the holiday from the inside out, that is, to reveal and undo the colonial, genocidal, and historical misconceptions behind it. Even if viewers may come away from the documentary with the image of two groups struggling for and against this national holiday, the more moderate positions exemplified by the Italian-American Political Solidarity Club and the Transform Columbus Day Alliance help unpack the fundamental complexity of the holiday and underscore the need for a dialog among Native Americans, Italian Americans, and the state structure that sanctions the holiday.

*Columbus Day Legacy* is straightforward, provocative, highly informative, and at the same time carefully crafted and edited. Although the film succeeds in great part in offering balanced perspectives, at times a stronger feeling of empathy for the Native Americans emerges: Besides being explained by the director's own ethnic identity, such a point of view is reinforced by Bane's powerful paintings and reflections on the genocide, as well as by the concluding shots of police violence against the protesters. But it is also true that *Columbus Day Legacy* sheds light on the understudied

history of Italian Americans in Colorado, including a massacre that official history hardly remembers, as is the case with most memories and stories of organized labor in this country.

Furthermore, the documentary touches upon the idea of blending opposing points of view on Columbus's legacy and finding a compromise that will allow indigenous peoples and Italian Americans to retell American history outside the grammar of the invasion. In this sense, the film may be viewed as a resourceful pedagogical tool in the classroom: Besides illuminating for us the history of this national holiday within the context of Denver's indigenous and Italian-American communities, it prompts reflections and debates about the political meanings of ceremonial functions among multiethnic communities. In fact, it ignites questions about the legitimacy of freedom of speech and of protest, especially in a situation where the symbolic power of a name, "Columbus," does nothing but revive the scars of colonial history as well as reinforce long-standing power relations. Yet, far from giving way to an anti-Italian sentiment, *Columbus Day Legacy* reflects upon and acknowledges the validity of each side of the story. As such, it teaches viewers that it is time to look at this holiday as an opportunity for dialog and, as Glenn Morris puts it, for "mutual respect with one another." Fighting off the oppositional binary of "us against them," this film highlights the need to forge interethnic dialog among minority groups that propose new paradigms of cultural and political coexistence.

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*The Tree of Life*.
By Hava Volterra.
Ruth Diskin Films, 2008.
76 minutes, DVD format, color.

A father dies. A daughter grieves and in so doing realizes her father had never spoken of his family's past. She decides to search for his and, by extension, her own roots in Italy, a journey resulting in the documentary *The Tree of Life*. The film begins with a home movie of the director, Hava Volterra, as a child with her father, while Hava, as an adult, narrates. Throughout the film we see her on camera—in Los Angeles, Israel, and Italy—as she searches for her family's past. Her voice-over narration continues through the entire film, with her occasional reappearance serving as a visual unifying link in the story.

The historical part of the documentary is particularly beautifully presented. Volterra describes how her family can be traced back to Renaissance Italy, when an ancestor finds an economic niche for himself as a loan-banker. The use of animation and puppets—paired with superb musical choices and juxtaposed with the more conventional use of interviews with scholars—is well balanced and visually interesting. Scholars—such as Roberto Bonfil, Sergio Della Pergola, Alessandra Veronese, Anna Foa,

and Fabrizio Lelli—from Italian and Israeli universities make brief comments about various members of this distinguished family, which includes Meshullam of Volterra, Rabbi Moses Haym Luzzato (conventionally abbreviated as RaMHaL), Luigi Luzzati, and Vito Volterra. We are shown a *condotta*, or loan-bank contract, from an archive in Florence, as well as a travelog and letters to Lorenzo de' Medici written by Meshullam of Volterra.

Of particular interest is the connection to the RaMHaL, who, in a sense, represents the split personality of the Italian-Jewish scholar and who is revered today by three very different Jewish groups (Hebraists, Hasidim, and Mitnagdim). The use of puppetry to tell the story of the RaMHaL is brilliant. And yet it focuses on his Kabbalistic writings, without balancing this with what is more generally understood as his more important writings, those that helped modernize the Hebrew language and shape contemporary Jewish ethics.[1]

The segment on Luigi Luzzatti, an economist who was elected to the Italian Parliament in 1870 and who, after 40 years of working to modernize Italy, became its first Jewish prime minister in 1910, utilizes archival photographs to tell his story. Moving forward in time, for the segment on Vito Volterra, a professor of mathematics at the University of Rome, we enter the world of film, as well as the world of Mussolini and fascism. The World War II footage used to depict this period of Vito Volterra's life is masterfully utilized, as viewers are visually reminded of the fascist-era Italian Racial Laws of 1938 and the Nazi invasion of northern Italy a few years later.

All the historical material is intersected with the contemporary personal voyage of Hava Volterra as she travels from her home in Los Angeles to Israel to Italy. For this reviewer, these travel segments themselves are the weakest part of the film and might have benefited from being cut or edited further. During her trip to Israel, Volterra convinces her aunt to help with her project of exploring the Volterra family roots; specifically, she convinces her aunt to return to Italy and try to reunite with the northern Italian family that had hidden the Volterras during the Nazi occupation.

Back in Israel, Volterra interviews her father's colleagues and students at Hebrew University, where he was a professor. He and his siblings had moved to Israel after World War II; her uncle and her father became professors, and her aunt became a *kibbutznik* and a puppeteer. We learn that although her father was an educated and articulate man, he never spoke about his life in Italy and his family's history. Why? We don't really get an answer other than a musing comment from the director that perhaps he felt betrayed by his parents—people who had built a world that had failed.

What the documentary is missing is a discussion about the religious and ethnic continuity of this branch of the family. Italian Jews, even today, who are particularly committed to the continuity of their Jewish identity often move to Israel, given that the number of self-identifying Jews in Italy is relatively small as a result of intermarriage, emigration, and the Holocaust. The weakening trend in Italian Judaism is made starkly clear in the segment of the film depicting a cousin of the Volterra family, Fiorello LaGuardia, mayor of New York City from 1934 to 1945, who was a practicing Episcopalian although his mother was Jewish. So, when Hava Volterra asks the charming Rabbi Elia Richetti of Venice to chant a symbolic memorial *kaddish*, or mourner's prayer, for her father, the viewer who comes equipped already with a history of Jews in Italy may sense that he may have been singing it for her entire family

since she seems to be the end of the family tree. It is up to the viewer to understand that the world that failed was the world of complete acceptance of the Jews as Italians—as much as Jews contributed to Italian life on every level, the Racial Laws of 1938 and the Holocaust established that they were not "true" Italians. The film suggests that it was this lack of acceptance of Jewish Italians that led Volterra's father and his siblings to emigrate to Israel.

Although the film's historical focus is not as wide-ranging as I might have liked, its insight into the interrelations between Italy and Italian Jews over many centuries would make it a positive addition to college courses on Italian Jewry. More broadly, it raises questions connected to self-identification of a minority group and the challenges of the continuity of the identity of that group in the twenty-first century.

—SARA REGUER
*Brooklyn College, The City University of New York*

## Notes

1. The RaMHaL (1707–1747) was born in Padua and received an excellent Jewish and general education. His Hebrew was magnificent, and he wrote both poetry and dramas. He also wrote a book of ethics, *Mesillat Yesharim* (*The Path of the Upright*), which became one of the most popular books in the yeshivot of Eastern Europe. A third facet of his creativity got him into trouble: Claiming that he communicated with a holy being, or "magid," he recorded his mystical revelations. The community to which he belonged banned his further writing on Kabbala. As a result, he left Italy, spent some time in Amsterdam, and finally moved to Acre, where he died before his fortieth birthday.

*Mal'occhio.*
By Agata de Santis.
A Redhead Productions Film.
52 minutes. DVD format, color.

*Mal'occhio* (The evil eye) tells the story of first-generation Italian Canadian Agata de Santis's search for information about her family tradition of belief in the evil eye. With her own voice-over narration, the director traces her journey from her first inquiries using the Internet and library research to her journey to Calabria, Italy, in search of answers to her questions. Along the way, she interviews her family; her (Italian-Canadian) neighbors in Montreal; Italian Americans in New York; several scholarly experts, including Italian cultural anthropologist and *mal'occhio* researcher Raffaele Ferrara; and a folk healer in Eboli who has a lively practice of evil-eye removal. Each interviewee offers an interpretation, opinion, and new details until a complex but consistent mosaic of this belief system emerges. Viewers get a sense of the variety of beliefs that exist among Italians in Italy and in North America; the film's protagonists emerge as vibrant individuals with different backgrounds and motives, and there

are several wonderful scenes of the rituals involved in the diagnosis and removal of the evil eye and the verbal formulas and prayers associated with them. Many of the conversations take place in Italian or an Italian dialect, making the film interesting from a linguistic point of view as well as an ethnographic one.

However, the film is not without its shortcomings. The most salient is that the director's inquiry is entirely framed by her focus on whether what she calls a "superstition"—a term that is entirely outdated and rejected by most contemporary ethnologists on either side of the Atlantic—is "real." De Santis repeatedly asks herself whether she "should" or "should not" believe in the evil eye—as if belief were somehow equivalent to faith and subject to an act of will. Ethnological studies of belief recognize its contextual, emergent, and fluid nature, distinguishing it sharply from Christian notions of faith, which are characterized by a deliberate, chosen commitment to a religious creed. Furthermore, ethnologists who have studied the evil eye attest to its *social* reality: Even though a gaze cannot by itself cause harm, envy can be a powerful force of social control, especially in small-scale societies characterized by dense networks and face-to-face interaction. Unfortunately, the director's interview questions were framed by this misconceived focus on belief, such that she asks even the experts she interviews whether or not they believe in the *mal'occhio*. At times one senses their discomfort: Professor Ferrara, for instance, cites Ernesto de Martino's "non è vero, ma ci credo" (it's not true, but I believe it), an aphorism that captures the ambivalence of belief, in attempting to address her question, but the director glosses right over the allusion. Perhaps de Santis was not familiar with the reference, but that in itself signals the presence of a serious lacuna in her knowledge. Sam Migliore, professor of anthropology at Kwantlen Polytechnic University in Surrey, British Columbia, and author of *Mal'uocchiu: Ambiguity, Evil Eye, and the Language of Distress* (University of Toronto Press, 1997), clarifies the problem of belief when he identifies ambiguity as the key to understanding it; but unfortunately the film cuts to another scene before he is allowed to fully develop his thought. The film would have been much more interesting and ethnographically sound had de Santis focused on this ambiguity of belief. In the end, we witness the director herself experiencing a headache cured successfully by an evil-eye removal spell, and thus she "chooses" to become a believer.

Another flaw in the documentary is a lack of depth in the contextualization of evil-eye belief as part of a larger worldview characterized by the concept of "limited good," the idea that one person's good fortune necessarily takes away from everyone else's because the amount of good in the world is finite. The absence of any symbolic analysis of rituals and amulets, either from the point of view of practitioners or from a scholarly viewpoint, is also disappointing, as practitioners themselves are often quite articulate about how certain amulets or cures work. Ultimately, these shortcomings make *Mal'occhio* unsatisfactory for educational use. However, the film could be useful in sparking conversations and personal narratives about this belief and its associated practices, especially when supplemented with more scholarly materials, and segments of it could also be used very effectively to illustrate typical curing rituals and formulas in an Italian or Italian–North American context.

—SABINA MAGLIOCCO
*California State University – Northridge*

# Digital Media Review

*Italian-American Traditions: Family and Community.*
http://www2.hsp.org/exhibits/Balch%20exhibits/italian/italian.html
(accessed periodically from October 13, 2011, to May 14, 2012)

The recently redesigned website of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP) features a link to the cover page of the exhibit *Italian-American Traditions: Family and Community*. However, the link to the exhibition itself is broken. (You can reach the landing page at both http://hsp.org/history-online/exhibits/italian-american-traditions and www.hsp.org/node/2838.)

Although the exhibit is not accessible via the HSP site itself, if one searches for the terms "online exhibit" and "Italian-American traditions Balch" on Google, the online exhibition immediately comes up at the top of the list (http://www2.hsp.org/exhibits/Balch%20exhibits/italian/italian.html). Clearly, such inaccessibility is less than ideal.

*Italian-American Traditions* is called an online exhibit. This is, however, a misnomer since it is merely a scan of an exhibition catalog that accompanied a Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies gallery exhibition in 1985: A paper copy of the catalog is part of the HSP library collection. For readers who are unaware, the Balch, located at South Seventh Street in Philadelphia, closed its doors and merged its manuscript and photographic collections with HSP in January 2002. As a direct result of this acquisition, HSP now has one of the largest ethnic-history research collections in the United States.

The history of the original Balch exhibition lies in the preface written by Mark Stolarik, the institute's president at the time. The exhibition was co-sponsored by the Balch Institute and the Italian Folk Arts Federation of America, itself an outgrowth of the Italian Folk Art Project. The Folk Art Project was begun in 1977 at the Nationalities Service Center of Philadelphia under the leadership of Elba Farabegoli Gurzau, who was an established presence in the Italian-American community promoting Italian folk arts for decades. The exhibition was a collaborative effort, as Balch projects tended to be, involving advising scholars, graduate research assistants from the University of Pennsylvania's Folklore and Folklife Department, local Italian Americans, Italian-American organizations, and other major institutions such as Temple University's Urban Archives, and the support of the Pennsylvania Humanities Council. With Grace Russoniello as the guest curator, the exhibit's focus was on Italian-American daily life, emphasizing cultural and aesthetic practices and religious and family life. The longer-term institutional goal was to collect and maintain an Italian-American Research Collection that would range from paper ephemera to artifacts. When the Balch closed, all the museum artifacts were deaccessioned. Although an effort was made to donate the Italian-American artifact collection to one institution, the attempt was unsuccessful, and a public auction of the items was eventually held.

Even with the comprehensive subject of the catalog/exhibit, there are only six pages to scroll through online. The catalog text is a brief overview of the great wave of Italian immigration during the late nineteenth century. It relates a standard tale

of immigrants arriving and establishing communities, ending with mention of the resurgence in ethnic pride during the 1960s. There are references to commonalities in the Italian immigrant experience that were shared across communities. The focus is said to be on Pennsylvania's Delaware Valley. However, when mention is made of Roseto, which is in Northhampton County in the Lehigh Valley, and Scranton and Wilkes-Barre, in the Lackawanna River Valley in the anthracite region, the regional approach falls apart. The text appears to be a compilation of the exhibition panels. The online catalog is not dated, but an online library search lists the publication date as 1985. Further, the photographs accompanying the text are disappointing due to their small size—they only enlarge slightly when clicked on. Unfortunately, even the usefulness of the photographs for further research is problematic since there is no collection identification attached to any of them. Thus, the catalog is primarily useful for its photographs and references that give clues to HSP's manuscript holdings that pertain to Italian Americans.

Other Balch catalogs have also been scanned and mounted on the current HSP website. These Balch catalogs as well as newer online exhibits found at the HSP History Online link, although not exhibition catalogs, all resemble antiquated gallery exhibitions. That is to say, they feature documents from the HSP's collection for which an unproblematized linear story text was developed. Moreover, there is no interactivity involved, and therein lies the problem with all of these so-called online exhibits.

A few historical societies (e.g., the Chicago History Museum, formerly the Chicago Historical Society) and some museums (e.g., the Walker Art Center, the Exploratorium, and the Victoria and Albert Museum) are in the vanguard of web-savvy institutions that not only understand the value of attracting visitors via the Internet but that have participatory engagement as their goal. Many institutions seem to lack the leadership, staff, budget, and/or interest to develop an interactive web model that puts visitors' needs first.

In fact, the only truly interactive link on the HSP website is PhilaPlace.org, which I created and directed as the Director of Education and Outreach at HSP. When we launched the site in December 2010, *PhilaPlace: Sharing Stories from the City of Neighborhoods* was heralded by digital humanities professionals as a model of interactivity both for its use of HSP's collections and for the way it allowed ordinary people to share their own stories and photographs, thus creating a dynamic online collection. It follows social-media theorist Seb Chan's (2012) dictum: "Museums will not be able to properly understand and integrate 'digital' into their organizational DNA until they have substantial born-digital collections." Since its launch, PhilaPlace has been relegated to the HSP's back burner, an action that speaks to the institution's priorities.

The problems with the *Italian-American Traditions: Family and Community* online exhibit underscore the larger issues concerning HSP's digital presence: disinterest in or misunderstanding of how essential an interactive interface is for an institution's future. As long as HSP stays this course, its web presence will remain primarily as it is today, an online resource for its library holdings and manuscript collections. The HSP website and its exhibits will not attract new and media-savvy visitors interested in history and culture who routinely search for what is interesting via the Internet.

Instead, it will remain a locus of research for scholars and genealogists who are already aware of the wealth of its collections.

—JOAN L. SAVERINO
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# Contributors

CLAUDIO CICOTTI teaches Italian Literature at the University of Luxembourg. He has written articles on the literature of the 17th, 18th, and 20th centuries as well as on philology and lexicography. His principal area of scholarship is currently migration literature and autobiography. He initiated and coordinated the research project *Presence, History, Memories of Italians Living in Luxembourg and in the Great Region*. He is coordinating the research project *Textuality of Italians Living in the Great Region and Integration* (TIGRI).

PETER NACCARATO is Professor of English and currently serves as chair of the Humanities Division at Marymount Manhattan College. He earned his Ph.D. from the State University of New York at Stony Brook. His recent scholarly work is in the area of food studies, focusing on the role of food and food practices in circulating ideologies and sustaining individual and group identities. With Kathleen LeBesco, he co-teaches an interdisciplinary seminar titled "Edible Ideologies: The Politics of Food." LeBesco and Naccarato have also co-authored *Culinary Capital* (Berg Press, forthcoming) and co-edited *Edible Ideologies: Representing Food and Meaning* (SUNY Press, 2008). Their chapter on food programming on the Travel Channel was recently published in *Blue-Collar Pop Culture* (Praeger, 2012), and in the summer of 2012 he taught a course titled "*Mangiamo!*: Food in Italian and Italian-American Literature and Film" at the Umbra Institute in Perugia, Italy.

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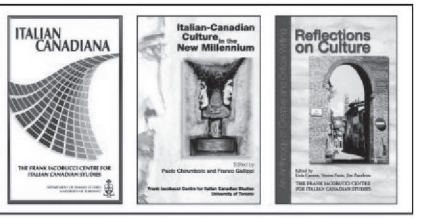

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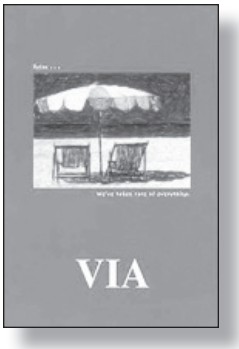


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