

A FICKLE SOUNDSCAPE:
THE FISHERMAN'S FEAST IN BOSTON'S NORTH END

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ABSTRACT

Michele Segretario: A Fickle Soundscape: The Fisherman's Feast in Boston's North End
(Under the direction of Michael A. Figueroa)

The sounds the Italian-American community in Boston uses to celebrate the Fisherman's Feast enact one of the most impressive spatial transformations. In this thesis, I present the results of my field research I conducted between 15 and 21 August 2016 in Boston's North End during the annual religious feast worshipping the Madonna del Soccorso (Our Lady of Help), which dates back to a sixteenth-century tradition from Sciacca, Italy. I contextualize this southern Italian cultural practice within new geographies, focusing on the symbolic transformations occurred and the role of sounds, musical included, in defining cultural hybridizations and new places of cultural identity related to the country of origin. I classify these sounds into nine specific categories based on their function or on their nature: sounds of transition; sounds from the Renaissance era; sounds from the Italian opera; sounds from the Neapolitan tradition and 1950s-60s Italian pop music; sounds tied to the Italian military and fascist tradition; sacred sounds; sounds of motor coordination; sounds from 1950s American pop music. My central question is: "How does this community select its sounds?" I argue that feast's participants strategically concern themselves with survival, adaptation, and domestication of space, as well as creating an alternative space to overlap onto the everyday space of the North End. A space of negotiation, contact, and interface that pertains to mythic village of origin, in Sicily, and the North End, which still today is perceived as a "new" space, even after 106 years.

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INTRODUCTION

Early in the morning on August 15, 2016, I met Louis Strazzullo at Cafè dello Sport on Hanover Street, in Boston's North End. Louis is the current President of The Madonna del Soccorso Society, the association that has organized the Fisherman's Feast every summer since 1910. The annual religious feast takes place in the North End and dates back to a sixteenth-century tradition from Sciacca, a Sicilian town in southern Italy. The Fisherman's Feast is a celebration worshipping the patron of Sciacca, the Madonna del Soccorso (Our Lady of Help), and is still celebrated by Sciacca's fishermen. During our meeting, Louis told me about The Madonna del Soccorso Society: its structure and hierarchy, its relationship with the Catholic Church of Sacred Heart, how the society collects and redistributes its donations, and the way it arranges the upcoming celebration of the Madonna, which was starting in three days and running from Thursday until Sunday. He advised me to go to the Society building on Lewis Street that afternoon, where he would introduce me to the other members. In that precise moment, my field research among the Italian-American community in the North End began.

In this thesis, I investigate the Fisherman's Feast, highlighting the symbolic transformations that have occurred since the first Italian settlers began to celebrate the Madonna del Soccorso, and the role of music in defining this shift, as well as this specific cultural hybridization. I study the building of Italianness outside Italy, how this cultural identity is related to the country of origin, and how this practice of southern Italian culture is contextualized within new geographies, both cultural and sonic, through the continuities and

discontinuities within the feast's soundscape. In the first chapter, I provide an overview of Italian immigration to the United States and the structure of The Madonna del Soccorso Society, as well as of the Fisherman's Feast, based on what I witnessed during my field research. The second chapter includes an analysis of the data I gathered in the field. I argue that the early settlers began to give a new function the celebration of the Madonna. They no longer followed the Sicilian tradition as practiced in Sicily at that time, and still today, for the purpose of assuring the protection of the community from natural disasters. Instead they have switched to a celebration of Italian identity through music, aimed at affirming their appropriation of the neighborhood and emancipating themselves within the new cultural context of the U.S. This process of re-adapting the ritual is still ongoing with the early settlers' descendants, who no longer live in the neighborhood and for whom the *festa* (feast) is animated by a drive toward the North End rather than Sciacca, the mythic village of origin.

I discuss the results of ethnographic fieldwork that I conducted in the North End from the 15th to the 21st August 2016, on the basis of a multi disciplinary approach. Specifically, I use tools borrowed from ethnography, sound studies, and ecology, to propose an interpretative model where I combine the information that I obtained from the interviews to the members of the community, with the analysis of the relationship between the feast's soundscape and geography. "How does this community select its sounds?": this is the question that inspired this thesis. Starting from this question, I demonstrate that both the early fishermen of the North End and their descendants had been involving in a continuous process of building a fickle soundscape, a sonic object that went through a lot of transformations since the first fishermen from Sciacca began to celebrate the Madonna del Soccorso in the North End, whose sonic expression is functional to get to a mythic place and to make it

habitable. This mythic place assumed different connotations over time: from the village of origin in Sicily, to Italy, back to the historicized North End. During my fieldwork, I conducted thirteen interviews with the members of the community, I shot videos and pictures of public activities—like processions, blessings, musical events, etc.— and private activities as well. With private activities I mean those actions where only the members of The Madonna del Soccorso Society, or even just some of them, are allowed to participate.

The fact I was a Sicilian among a Sicilian community in the U.S. played a crucial role in the way the members of the community accepted my presence during the feast days. As I discuss later, they often began to interview me, asking my opinion as a Sicilian about the way they were interpreting the tradition, unraveling the existence of a persistent drive toward an idealized traditional model. On the one hand, my Sicilian heritage provided me a special access to the community, both in terms of space and because of my familiarity with the Sicilian festive systems related to the Roman-Catholic religion both from personal and scholarly experience.

On the other hand, my experience as a Sicilian and ethnographer within an American-Sicilian community, posed some theoretical and analytical challenges. I had to learn how to handle what was for me a new “ethnographic object,” with its continuous alternation between multiple identities: Sicilianness, Italianness, Italian-Americanness, and Americanness. And how to frame the gestural and sonic codes that the Fisherman’s Feast borrowed from the Italian and Sicilian tradition, within a new setting, where they assumed new meanings. For example, the apparent symbolic distortion given by a non-Italian speaking community performing shouts of invocation in Italian to address the Madonna, as well as Italian music to celebrate her. Or the presence of fascist songs in the ritual, which caused me an initial

disorientation, since this repertoire is a sort of taboo for the Italians, because of the tragic events that occurred under Mussolini's regime. Subsequently, these challenges gave to my investigation its specific angle and character. The use of the fascist repertoire within the Fisherman's Feast, for example, became one of the central points of this thesis. It allowed me to describe the feast's shift toward ideology, and to suggest the existence of a musical network facilitated by the fascist network developed in the U.S. in the interwar years.

Finally, despite the fact that there is a substantial scholarship about the Italian diaspora in the U.S., only a few authors have addressed the Italian-American religious festivals, while the scholarship about the sonic aspects, and above all the soundscape, of the Italian-American communities is almost non-existent. When I met Joseph Sciorra in his office at the Calandra Institute, in New York, he complained of the lack of an ethnomusicological support to the research he had conducted in the North East and in the New York area, and in the field of the Italian-American festivals in general. His frustration about the absence of investigations and scholarship inherent the sounds of the Italian-American communities motivated me to begin to fill this gap.

This contribution of scholarship is complementary to the works of Donna Gabaccia (1998, 2000, 2005) about the Italian and Sicilian immigrants to the U.S, and Augusto Ferraiuolo (2006, 2009), Robert Orsi (1996, 2002), and Joseph Sciorra (1999, 2015) about the Italian religious festivals in the U.S. These works had been my main secondary sources, which I used as a compass from the moment I have decided to embark this fascinating journey through the sounds of the Italian diaspora.

CHAPTER 1: THE FISHERMAN'S FEAST

*Ma sogno notte e dì la mia casetta, la mia
vecchietta che sempre aspetta... L'amore del
paese e della mamma è una gran fiamma che
brucia il cuor!*

—Claudio Villa, “Terra straniera”

*But I dream all the time about my little house,
My little old lady who always waits for me...
The love of my village and my mom
Is a great flame burning in my heart*

Geographies and initial conditions of the Sicilian settlement in the Boston's North End

In 1958, Claudio Villa released his single “Terra straniera” (Foreign Land), a song about Italian migration, which became very popular in Italy. At the dawn of modern Italian popular music, Claudio Villa needs only four lines to sing the sonic paradigm of the Italian migration. A crooner, his vocal technique is still laced with *bel canto*, the sonic paradigm of the Italian migration, which crystalizes the emotional tension generated primarily by three elements: home, family, and village of origin. The protagonist of the song realizes that, suddenly, he doesn't miss his beloved anymore. What he really misses now is his little house, his mom, and his *paese* (village). The sense of nostalgia toward the homeland is a common characteristic of people in diaspora, but what had been characterizing Italian diaspora is the emphasis on village identity instead of national identity. In “Terra straniera,” the village is configured as an active entity, capable of spreading love, which triggers a dialectic process among its inhabitants. This made the Italian diaspora a plural phenomenon, made of people with different cultural backgrounds, who produced what Donna Gabaccia called “many diasporas” (2000).

In 1910, when Sicilian Fishermen in Boston began celebrating the Madonna del Soccorso, they were not the only ones to bring Italian traditions to the neighborhood. Other Italians, coming from different villages in the south, also began to celebrate the patron saints of their homeland: Saint Anthony from Montefalcione, Saint Joseph from Riesi, Santa Rosalia from Palermo, Saint Mary from Anzone, and several others. All of these celebrations were run by corresponding societies, most of which still exist today, and were related to “ethnic enclaves based on the village of origin” (Ferraiuolo 2009: 49). From 1880 to 1930, the Italian population of the North End grew from a few hundred to almost 45,000 people (Ferraiuolo 2009: 48). While the first settlement was largely composed of Northern Italians, subsequent waves of immigration comprised primarily Southern Italians from Sicily and Campania. Through the chains of migration, hundreds of families joined their relatives and friends in the North End, contributing to various enclaves whose perimeters were well defined. Data about the Italian immigration in the North End reflects the proportions of what might be considered one of the largest exoduses in modern history. About twenty-seven million Italians left their homeland during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with fourteen million leaving during the Great Migration of 1876–1915 (Gabaccia 2005). Unlike the Jewish or African diasporas, in which people were forced to emigrate, Italians were not forced to move. Or better, they were not directly forced to leave the country, but rather pushed out by social and economic hardship, as well as by politics. Their voluntary departure from Italy in order to improve their condition was imbued with a clear and urgent necessity to defuse a destructive dynamic. Approximately four million Italians immigrated to the United States during the Great Migration, and many of them were Sicilians (Gabaccia 2005: 146). To better understand the reasons for this spatial split among the Italian settlers, it is

worth recalling the political and geographic conditions in Italy at the end of the nineteenth century.

Italy was politically unified in 1861 and, up until that year, had been only a geographic entity. Positioned at the crossroads of foreign domination for centuries, including Austrian, Spanish, and French control, it had been split into several dukedoms and kingdoms, whose cultural legacy turned on the region following unification. Even after 1861, one's sense of identity remained confined to a regional scale, and what we today call dialects were languages, pivots around which the various inhabitants of the peninsula articulated their world view, and which didn't take into account any nationalistic feeling. Even until the end of the nineteenth century, Italians were largely unable to communicate among themselves. Thus, the geography of the Italian settlement in the North End, with its several Societies of Saints connected to different towns in southern Italy, is the result of a village-based diaspora.

Italian immigration to the United States slowed significantly in the wake of World War I, due to American government restrictions on European and Asian immigration and the advent of fascism. Mussolini had started to pass laws that limited emigration and encumbered the process of obtaining a passport, favoring emigration to the African colonies of the Italian Kingdom and to allied Germany (Gabaccia 2005: 146). Despite this, the rise of fascism represented the first real moment of nationalist feeling among Italians abroad. Above all, this was happening in the US, "where hostility to Bolshevism made Mussolini an attractive figure and where immigrants' sensitivity to immigration restriction and anti-Italian prejudice caused them especially to welcome signs of Italy's emerging greatness" (Gabaccia 2005: 149). Thus, historical and social conditions favored the development of Italian identity and *Italianness* among immigrants to the US—perhaps even before Italians in Italy developed such identity.

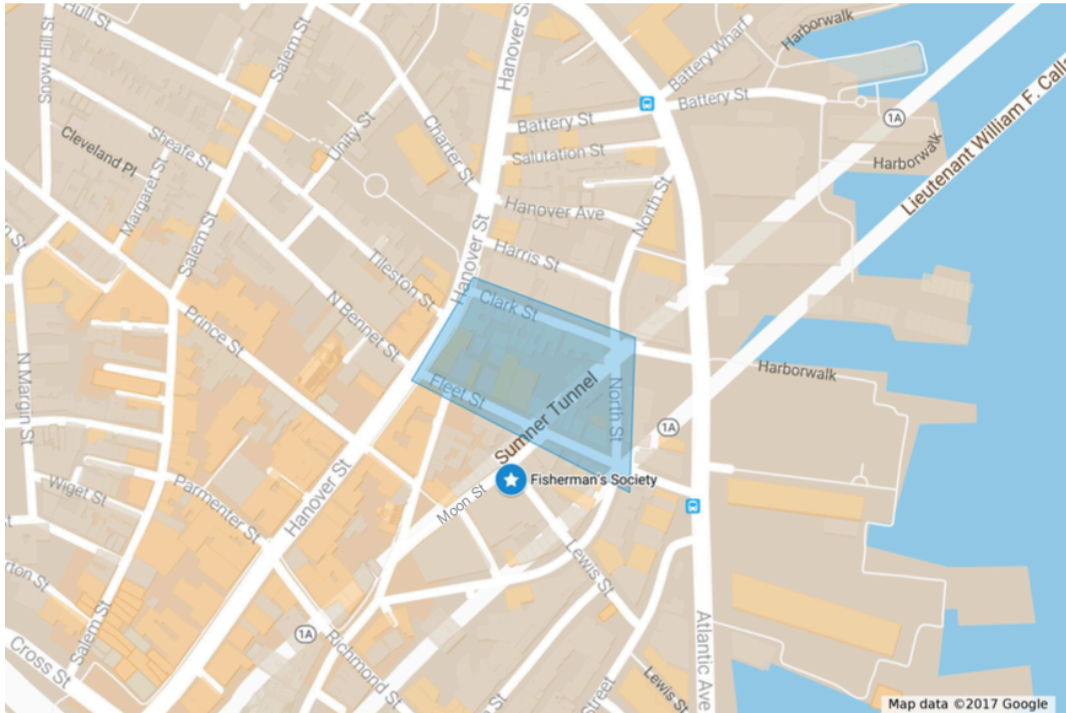
The deep impact of such events also reverberated in the music produced about Italian migration. The fascist regime began to promote a different image of the Italian emigrant, an image of power, conquest and liberation from slavery, aimed at supporting the African colonial campaign. There was no more room for nostalgia for the *paese*, or for the mother figure. A new tone arose in those years, a new vision of emigration, which is encapsulated in the lyrics of songs like “Ti saluto vado in Abissinia” (Farewell, I am Going to Abyssinia):

<i>Si formano le schiere e i battaglion</i>	The legions and battalions are forming
<i>Che van marciando verso la stazion.</i>	They are marching toward the train station.
<i>Hanno lasciato il loro paesello,</i>	They left their little village,
<i>Cantando al vento un gaio ritornello</i>	Singing a joyous refrain in the wind

The emigrants¹ depicted by the regime sing “a joyous refrain” while they are leaving their villages. But, through this dialectic inversion, the denial of any form of nostalgia toward the *paese* is only a way to further enshrine the central role of the village within the Italian diaspora. In the years after the fascist regime, the content of Italian popular songs about migration returned to address the same themes of loss, which had characterized them in the past. The same feelings that had already underpinned the experience of Italian settlers in Boston’s North End prior to World War II. Specifically, two characteristics of the Italian diaspora overlapped in the North End settlement: 1) the immigrant’s ancestral attachment to the village left behind, and 2) the footprint of that deep sense of Italianness developed by migrants right after World War I and that would be emphasized by the rise of the fascist regime in just a few years. These are the conditions under which the Fisherman’s Feast and The Madonna del Soccorso Society developed.

¹ Although the song refers to soldiers, they should be considered emigrants too, as well as colonists. The fascist regime promoted a new model of colonialism, which replaced the old distinctions between demographic, plantation, and commercial colonies. The fascist colonization was intended as “the transposition of all the productive elements of the country of origin into the colonies” (Podestà 2007: 69; translation mine). Mussolini’s ambition was building a new Italy in Africa (69).

The Fishermen and the Club



Map 1 - Boston's North End. The blue area indicates the Sicilian settlement, while the star is the Fisherman's Society Building at the intersection of Lewis St. and Moon St.

The Sicilians from Sciacca, one of the larger groups in the North End, lived on North Street, Fleet Street, and Clark Street, in an area very close to Boston Harbor, given that they were fishermen. The Sciacca Fishermen's Society, like the other societies of saints in the North End, started as a mutual aid institution, to help the transition of the Sciacca people to the new world. Today, the society has transformed into a nonprofit organization whose target is no longer limited to the people from Sciacca but rather to helping the whole neighborhood. All of the money from offerings and sponsorships are passed to the neighborhood's schools, the Church of Sacred Heart, a religious landmark of the community, and to families in financial hardship.

Louis explained to me in detail the current structure of the organization he is leading. The Madonna del Soccorso Society is composed of eighty-five male members, and only

people from Sciacca or those with roots in Sciacca are eligible to become members of the society. The assembly of members elects the President, who appoints two Chairmen to help him throughout his mandate in the annual organization of the Fisherman Feast and in overall management of the Society. At the end of the fourth year, the two Chairmen are both nominated for President, although only one of them may be elected. Louis, however, is an exception to this rule, as he has never been Chairman nor has he been elected—he was simply unanimously appointed as President. Louis is only thirty-three years old, and the way he was appointed President is an abrupt change from the Society’s conservative rules. It seemed to me an attempt to project the society toward modernity.

Once I arrived at the society’s building that August afternoon, I met Marie Catanzaro, from whom I learned more about the society. Marie is the daughter of Vincent “Cowboy” Catanzaro, also known as “Forever Chairman.” Vincent Catanzaro was Chairman for fifty years, until the mid 1990s, when the society decided to modify its internal rules by placing a four-year limit on the positions of President and Chairmen, and by prohibiting former Presidents from becoming Chairmen. Marie is one of the many women who help the all-male fishermen's society arrange the feast. Women aren't allowed to be members of the society, according to its male-dominated structure and hierarchy, and they are not officially in charge of any institutional role within the organization. But during the 1940s and 1950s, this norm was broken, and women established their own society, an auxiliary within The Madonna del Soccorso Society. That experiment lasted less than a decade, and, although women are once again excluded from society membership, they provide fundamental logistical support during the feast, particularly in collecting offerings during the processions through the North End’s streets. When I asked Marie about the Fisherman’s Feast, she immediately answered: “The

basic line is family, and this building is our connection,” touching the external brick wall of the society’s building as she spoke. In just a few words, Marie had sketched an interpretative model that explained not only the inner and multilevel connection among the members of that community, families which form a bigger and unique community (termed “family” by her), but also the important role of the building itself in keeping this connection alive and strong.

The Madonna del Soccorso Society building, which they also call “the club,” was built by Sciacca fishermen in 1951–52 on Fleet Street and Lewis Street, using money earned from selling the “extra fish.” I learned this from Leonardo Gilardo, a seventy-year-old military veteran, fisherman until the age of forty-five, and former President of The Madonna del Soccorso Society, which he led during the mid 1990s. The “extra fish” was the surplus amount of fish over what was allowed by law, in order to regulate prices. Leonardo showed great interest for my research, and he was eager to share the history of his ancestors and their bond with the Madonna and the sea. During my field research, he would become an essential informant, allowing me to observe the community from a privileged position. When he found out I was from Sicily, he asked me to show him the position of my own town on the map, realizing that it is only one hour by car far from Sciacca. Then, he asked me if I was able to speak Sicilian, and I answered by switching from English to Sicilian. He began calling the other members of the community to come close to listen to those sounds that reminded them of their ancestors and the everyday life they conducted in the North End, up until a few decades ago. Despite the fact that the oldest members of the community no longer speak Sicilian, some of them still embed a few Sicilian words within their English. I felt like I had already passed my exam. After that, Leonardo introduced me to the Society’s private sphere,

and the key to this extraordinary experience was Sicily. He began to treat me like an insider. First, he introduced me to almost all the members of the society and explained the interconnections among several families. Then, he invited me to the private dinners that the community arranges in the club's basement in the days leading up to Sunday. The Madonna del Soccorso Society's building has two levels: the first floor, called the *sala* (hall), and the basement. The *sala* is on higher ground and is connected to Lewis Street through a wide stairway (Figs. 1 and 2). It is a spacious rectangular room, measuring approximately 40 x 13 feet, with pictures of the founding members displayed on each wall and a statue of the Madonna positioned in front of the main entrance. The *sala* also includes two storage rooms and the society president's office. The basement, a bigger space connected to the *sala* through internal stairs and with a backdoor on North Street, is a social space in which society members arrange collective dinners, meetings, and parties. This area of the building was recently renovated. Until the summer of 2015, when I had the opportunity to visit the club for the first time, the basement was filled with memorabilia related to the feast—pictures, objects, newspaper clippings—proudly displayed in some older wooden china cabinets, which have since been removed; thus, the basement no longer functions as a museum of memories for the Fisherman's Feast's longevity and success, but has been transformed into an event space.



Figure 1 - The Madonna del Soccorso Society's building on Monday afternoon, three days before the feast begins (photograph by author).



Figure 2 - The Sciaccia Fishermen's Society's building on Thursday afternoon, before the exit of the Madonna (photograph by author).

The new function of the basement meets the needs of embracing the present over a fetishization of the past. It's a strategy that insists on the same line traced by the society the moment it subverted its ancient and strict rules by appointing Louis as President without any

formal election. Now, the basement houses various types of celebrations, is open to the public, and serves as a source of revenue for the feast. Its new bar area has been particularly successful in this endeavor, as it is the only one in the neighborhood with a license to serve alcohol. What was previously a private space, designed to preserve the community's memory, has recently become a center of social life for the neighborhood. Also, DJ performances are occasionally hosted in the basement. When I visited it, on Monday afternoon, it was still set up with laser lights and big speakers from the night before, when a crowded party had run late into the night.

The role of the building in establishing a lasting connection among the members is of paramount importance if we consider that only about 10% of the society's members are still living in the North End. The majority of community members are now spread all over the country because of changing economic and social conditions; but, during the week of celebrations for the Madonna, they all gather at the Boston's North End, at the club, to celebrate their patron saint. Moreover, a process of gentrification has transformed the North End into an almost exclusive neighborhood today, inhabited by young professionals and with very high rent rates. Having ownership of the building allowed the Fisherman's Society to make their tradition sustainable, while other saint societies eventually dissolved because they could no longer pay the rent for their buildings.

The Festa

The Fisherman's Feast spans four days, from a Thursday to a Sunday. In the days leading up to the beginning of the feast, the society's members organize dinners and parties at the club, arrange the space for vendors, and prepare everything necessary for carrying out the best feast possible. Early on Thursday afternoon, all the members gather at the basement

to “sign up.” They dress in a sort of uniform, wearing black pants and a white t-shirt with the symbols of the feast and their first name printed on the front. They gather around a table while one of the chairmen distributes envelopes by name. The envelopes contain a white and blue ribbon, whose shape changes each year, and the members pin these on their t-shirts.

During the distribution of the ribbons, the noise in the basement mirrors the tension in the room. Loud whistles and a bell are used to draw everyone's attention and keep order among the members. This is a very private ceremony, where non-members are not normally allowed to attend. While I was filming the distribution of the ribbons, a society member loudly whistled three times to get the attention of the others. He repeated, “All non-members have to leave!” three times, swinging his arms toward the exit door and looking at my camera for the third time. I realized only then that he was addressing me. I was the only non-member in the basement. Instinctively, I stopped filming while my mind immediately began running fast to find a good way to explain that I didn't mean to be inappropriate, and that I was there because I had been invited to attend the ceremony. But someone else spoke first, “He's ok. He can stay,” I heard from behind me, not realizing exactly who it was.

After the last ribbon has been distributed, everyone goes to the *sala* for the induction. During this short ceremony, the oldest member inducts new members into the society through a formalized ritual performed in front of the statue of the Madonna, by reading an induction incantation from a small note. At the end of the ceremony, the newcomer is welcomed with loud applause from all members. The group is now ready for the last ceremony before leaving the club: the blessing, given by the priest of the Church of Sacred Heart. This is a solemn moment, where all members are composed and silent during the priest's prayer, while a big crowd is waiting outside the building. The blessing lasts just a

few minutes, at the end of which the president breaks the tense atmosphere by triggering a loud call and response with the other members, as shown below.

President

“*Viva la Madonna!*” (“Hail Our Lady”)

“*Viva la Madonna!*” (“Hail Our Lady”)

“*Viva la Madonna del Soccorso di Sciacca*” (“Hail Our Lady of Help from Sciacca”)

Members

“*Viva!*” (Hail!)

“*Viva!*” (Hail!)

“*Viva!*” (Hail!)

This is the most prominent signal sound of the whole feast and is performed several times throughout the four days of celebration; it is also triggered by other members and by the women in the community who are participating in the procession. I learned from some informers that this is one of the oldest sounds related to the Madonna. These shouts are performed through a particular emission that produces a guttural sound. The sound is similar to those commonly heard in the road food markets of southern Italy, yelled out by sellers to promote fish and other goods, and which is called *abbanniata* in Sicily. The early fishermen who arrived in Boston must have been very familiar with the *abbanniata*, which is still a prominent soundmark in Sicily,² and they must have used it, first in their homeland and then when they moved to Boston, to promote their fish. Beyond its functional aspect related to selling, the *abbanniata* is a sort of seller's emotional rush, inspired by happiness, frustration, or anger (Bonanzinga 2011). In this case, the shout is given a new function: it is no longer used to focus attention on the fish, but on the Madonna, maintaining the same vocal technique but with different contents.

At this point, all members leave the *sala*, joining the crowd gathered on Lewis Street. A woman, standing on the stairs of the building's main entrance, starts singing Schubert's

² I use the term “soundmark” according to Raymond Murray Schafer's definition: “a community sound which is unique or possesses qualities which make it specially regarded or noticed by the people in that community” (1977: 101).

“Ave Maria”³ accompanied by pre-recorded music, while the current and former presidents finally carry out the statue. The whole community accompanies the transition of the statue from inside the building to outside with a great emotional charge, crying and hugging each other. After a full year, the statue again leaves its permanent chapel on Lewis Street. At the end of “Ave Maria,” a burst of firecrackers and the sound of the North End Marching Band signal the beginning of a new seasonal cycle. Young members equip the statue with two long poles that will help them carry it along the streets of the North End, while one of the chairmen, Dominic Strazzullo, officially opens the feast. Before starting the procession, the other chairman, Kenny Palazzolo, reads the names of any members of the society who have died within the last year, calling their families close to the statue and giving them bunches of flowers. During this phase of the ceremony, the previous excitement turns again to sober emotion, according to a pattern of alternation between tension and release, private and public, which will be displayed often in the coming three days.

The commemoration and respect for the dead is one of the central elements of this celebration, even from a visual point of view. The building in front of the Fisherman’s club is covered by rectangular blue banners bearing the names of the passed members, and, during the procession, the carriers stop in front of their houses to pay their respects, while the marching bands play the sacred music Gaetano Giarraffa’s “Hymn to the Madonna”⁴ and Schubert’s “Ave Maria.” Such references to the deceased members are constantly in the background of the Fisherman’s Feast. The community establishes a dialectical relationship

³ Schubert’s piece is also performed by the marching band during the procession (see p. 27). It is not surprising the use of the German’s composer “*Ave Maria*” in this kind of setting, since Schubert’s “*Ave Maria*” is performed very often in Italy within the Roman-Catholic liturgy, specifically during weddings, since Storck’s original words has been replaced by the Latin lyrics of the “*Ave Maria*” over the years.

⁴ See p. 33.

with the afterlife, evoked both through formalized and pre-determined ceremonies, such as those already described, and improvised actions that occur at various moments during the feast. The Fisherman's Feast pairs the worship of the Madonna with other ritual forms that usually take place in different moments within the calendar year.

After all these moments of rituality, the whole Italian-American community is ready to celebrate the Madonna del Soccorso through one of the most powerful tools of spatial appropriation: the procession. The leader calls the carriers' attention, using formalized commands in order to coordinate the lifting of the statue. He screams: "On the arms! On the Shoulder!," This is a soundmark of the feast, and it is audible very often since the carriers set down and lift the Madonna multiple times during the procession. While the statue is moving the some members of the society trigger occasionally the same call and response described earlier.⁵ The statue of the Madonna is carried to the Christopher Columbus Waterfront Park for the Annual Blessing of the Fishing Waters (Fig. 3).

Until the 1970s, the "fishing boats would come into the harbor and they would get the blessing for the year to remember. Unfortunately, the Sicilian fishermen and the fleet are gone, so we are here today to remember their tradition and bless the water where they once fished," says chairman Palazzolo during his speech at the waterfront. Within the complex ritual enacted by the fishermen, the narrative dimension is realized through a process of symbolic transformation. What was once a ritual intended to propitiate a better outcome of summer fishing, and to assure the safety of the fishermen during their work at sea, became a commemoration of a past long gone.

⁵ See p. 13.



Figure 3 - The statue of the Madonna at the Christopher Columbus Waterfront Park (photograph by author).

And the passage from the one to the other is enshrined by the adoption of a new segnic system.⁶ The flowers thrown on the water's surface transform the harbor into a grave, and the Annual Blessing of the Fishing Waters becomes an extension of the commemoration already performed in front of the club. The latter was addressed to a “recent” afterlife, and the former to a mythic one. One of the consequences that I noticed during my field research was the diminution of symbolic dynamism. For the early Sicilian fishermen in Boston—as well as for fishermen in general—the sea had a double meaning within their cosmology. It was at once a generative element, assuring the subsistence of the group, and also a disruptive element, as a bringer of death. With the significant shifts in this community’s social and economic realities in the intervening years, by the late twentieth century the sea has stopped vacillating between these two poles and simply embodies contradiction: it has become just a flat surface, useful for receiving flowers and tourists' yachts.

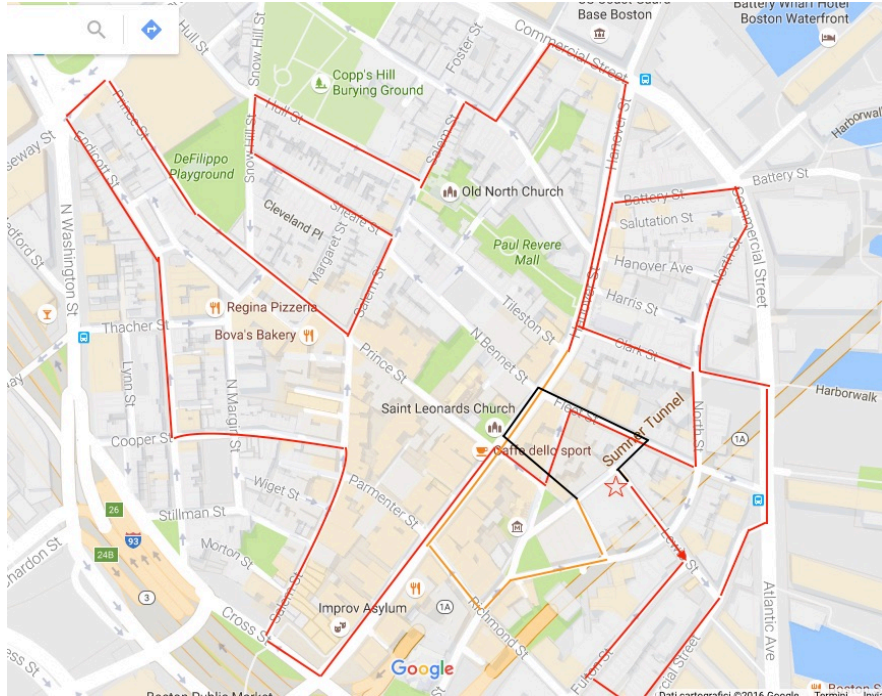
⁶ A segnic system is formed by: 1) a code; 2) all the messages that can be exchanged within a given group of signs; 3) all the individuals and social groups that use that segnic system (cf. Rossi-Landi 1972: 28).

Where and what is the engine that has been driving the Fisherman's Feast over the last forty years, since the fishermen of Sciacca have disappeared? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to analyze what happens in the last three days of the feast.

Friday and Saturday are two days of shows and entertainment with the reenactment of the Sciacca Carnival, performances of opera arias, *commedia dell'arte*, and live music from the American tradition: doo-wop, soul, and rock 'n' roll. Sunday is the day of the Grand Procession, a ten-hour event that takes place around the whole North End. The statue of the Madonna leaves the society's building around noon, both preceded and followed by two marching bands who use the route shown on Map 2.

The Grand Procession moves along the perimeter of the North End, and it crosses Hanover Street four times. Hanover Street is the heart of the North End, where Italianness is articulated through the celebration of Italian cuisine. It is a grand display of Italian food, hosting many Italian restaurants, pizzerias, cafes, and bakeries. In demarcating the boundaries of the North End, the procession will implement again the dialectic between public and private space, and between inside and outside. The relationship between the feast's ritual actions and the space in which they are performed is essential to understand not only what happens in the North End during those days, but the strategy used by the Sicilian immigrants to adapt in that neighborhood.

Matteo Meschiari emphasizes the role of the ecological approach in understanding human cognitive processes through his *landscape model*. He starts his investigation by proposing an effective synthesis between the considerations of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie*, and Northrop Frye's *The Anatomy of Criticism*, coming to identify three basic actions through which cognition is triggered:



Map 2 –Grand Procession route

If we cross Deleuze's and Guattari's sentence with Frye's one, we obtain three geodetic points which are very useful: 1) the action of demarcating the territory; 2) the building of a (even) mental shelter; 3) the process of acculturation which bring human beings to transform nature in a «completely human form.» (Meschiari 2010: 56; translation mine).

The demarcation of the North End's perimeter and the building of the fishermen's club are at the basis of the strategy through which the founders of the club tried to domesticate the spatial, social, and economic characteristics of new reality—a reality that was so different from that in their own village of origin, and that had been forcing them to continuing efforts of adaptation. But the process of appropriation of the neighborhood, enacted by the early fishermen and continued by their descendants, takes place on a sonic level as well. The domestication of this new American space and the nostalgia for place of origin are realized through a complex symbolic system, which uses the sounds I described

earlier. During field research, my central question was: “How does this community select its sounds?” Starting with this question, I compiled the chart shown below.

Fisherman Feast Soundscape

Chart of Sounds

1. Sounds of transition: firecrackers, shouts of invocation to the Madonna
2. Sounds from the Neapolitan tradition and 1950s-60s Italian pop music: “Anema e core,” “O sole mio,” “Mamma,” “Nel blu dipinto di blu.”
3. Sounds tied to the military or fascist tradition: “Il bersagliere,” “Marcia reale,” “Faccetta nera.”
4. Sacred music: “Inno alla Madonna” (“Hymn to the Madonna,”) Schubert’s “Ave Maria.”
5. Coordination sounds: “On the arms! On the shoulders!”
6. Sounds from the Renaissance and commedia dell’arte (Emilio del Cavaliere; Fabrizio Barroso)
7. Sounds from Italian opera
8. Sounds from the carnival of Sciacca
9. Sounds from 1950s American pop music

These sounds constitute the Feast’s soundscape, and through the observation of the Grand Procession, it is possible to define their functions. I will discuss below each type of sound, noise, or musical repertoire performed during the feast. Sounds from the first five types are closely associated with the procession and articulate its several phases. The sounds of transition fall under the expressive typology of ritual noise. The shouts of invocation, as discussed earlier, are produced by anyone wanting to celebrate the Madonna, at anytime during the procession. The members of the community use those shouts to release their

tension and frustration in this particular moment of transition toward a new cycle, for which they have been waiting a whole year, as explained below.

The firecrackers are used twice, on Thursday and on Sunday, when the Madonna is carried outside its chapel in the Society building. They produce an unusually loud and long noise while moving up Lewis Street to the main entrance of the society building. They announce to people that the Madonna is ready to be carried around the North End and mark the beginning of the two processions. The shouts of invocation to the Madonna and the firecrackers fall within the typical production of ritual noise usually obtained through objects not directly related with music making and is a common characteristic of rituals belonging to the anthropological category defined by Van Gennep (1909) as rites of passage: weddings, funerals, passage to adulthood, seasonal feasts, healings, and others. The Fisherman's Feast is the liminal period of a seasonal transition. It is not uncommon that, during these particular moments of transition toward a new cycle, some people experience their collective symbols by discharging "tensions and [bringing] the group into a deeper level of mutual understanding" (Turner 1982: 40). The shouts to celebrate to the Madonna play this cathartic role, they allow the community to discharge their collective tensions by "the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc., from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses" (Turner 1986: 44). The shouts performed during the procession facilitate the switch from the community to what Victor Turner defined as "communitas," an unstructured community where there is not any specific distinction between all members.

Briefly, the production of noise signals the presence of a transition, and the emergence of a state of chaos; crisis due, this is framed within the worship of the Virgin

Mary. But, what exactly constitutes the *passage* within the Fisherman's Feast? To answer this question, it is worth briefly tracing the history of worship of the Holy Lady of Help, dating back to 1306 in Palermo, Italy. Augustinian monk, Nicola La Bruna, who was at that time near death because of a critical illness, was healed following the apparition of the Virgin. Worship of the Virgin, dubbed “Holy Lady of Help,” then spread across Italy and Europe, promoted by the Augustinian monks. The connection between the Virgin and her healing properties assumed different characteristics depending on the location. One of the most important centers of worship is the town of San Severo, where landowners venerated the Virgin in May, during the period of seasonal feasts, to protect their fields and assure a lush harvest. Here, the healing properties of the Virgin were used in a transitive way, to “heal” the field from winter in order to protect the population from famine. In Sciacca, however, the worship of Our Lady of Help⁷ is tied with liberation from the plague, which reached the town in 1626. From that moment, the Madonna del Soccorso became the patron of Sciacca and the

⁷ Bartolomeo Birrittaro and Giuliano Mancino build the statue of solid marble of the Madonna del Soccorso in Palermo in 1503. The Fisherman's Feast's website offers a fascinating story about the miraculous transportation of the marble statue from Palermo to Sciacca in the 16th century. The fishermen from Sciacca decided to use their fishing boat to carry the statue in their hometown, circumnavigating Sicily, since there was not any railroads connecting Palermo, on the north coast, and Sciacca, on the south, and the statue was very heavy. The story continues saying that “over two hundred fishermen were needed to carry the statue to the dock where it was then placed on the largest fishing boat available. With such a heavy load as the solid marble statue on board, the fishing boat was barely able to stay afloat let alone move along the seas under its own power. Using their fishing nets and drop lines the fishermen secured their boats to the vessel carrying the statue and in tug boat fashion carefully escorted the statue of the Madonna out of Palermo, across the seas and headed home to Sciacca. Upon entry into the harbor of Sciacca, the fishermen were greeted with tumultuous applause and gratitude. In recognition of their sacrifice and in gratitude to the fishermen the town of Sciacca rewarded the fishermen with the sole honor of carrying the statue of the Madonna. Till this day, the only people allowed to carry the statue in Sciacca are the fishermen of the town.” (<http://www.fishermansfeast.com/about.html>). It is worth noting that, while the Fisherman's Feast's websites gives some other information about the historical background of the worship of Madonna del Soccorso in Sicily, some data come into conflict with those reported on the Italian websites addressing the same feast and worship (<http://www.basilicamadonnadel Soccorso.it/cennimadonna.html>; <http://www.festadelsoccorso.info/storia>), as well as some inaccuracies. For example, the vision of the Nicola La Bruna, Prior of the an Augustinian monastery in Palermo, is never linked with Sciacca on the Italian websites. Also, the miracle of the Madonna rescuing a boy from the hands of Satan, is always connected with the city of Palermo in the Italian versions of the story. The Fisherman's Feast's website is more Sciacca-centric than its Italian counterparts.

everyday life of the whole community in Sciacca was inextricably linked to the Virgin, from whom they asked for help in various moments of collective suffering, such as an earthquake in 1817.⁸ The worship related to the Madonna del Soccorso, therefore, implies primarily a request of protection to emerge from natural disasters, epidemics, or famine, unscathed. Or, more broadly, it seeks to protect the transition from the sowing season to the harvest. Among the Sicilian fishermen community in Boston, the Madonna was invoked to ensure a prosperous fishing season, but she also assumed a significant role in protecting the community from marginalization and hardship brought on by adaptation in the U.S.

The other sounds shown in the chart of sounds are used for the latter scope, to display the very articulated identity of the community, which swings between Sicilianness, Italianness, and Italian-Americanness, as well as Americanness, as explained in more detail in Chapter 2. The sounds of Neapolitan and Italian traditions are played by the marching bands during the processions of the Madonna. “O sole mio” is a sort of anthem of the feast. The marching band plays it countless times, using a swing arrangement that triggers a call and response between the trumpets playing the chorus and the crowd onomatopoeically imitating the trumpets. The carriers stop frequently at precise landmarks, of which there are three types:

1. The houses of society members or their relatives who have passed away in the last year;
2. Bars, cafes, restaurants, pizzerias, or private houses where the society collects monetary offerings;
3. The other societies’ clubs and the Church of Sacred Heart.

⁸ “Another miracle occurred in 1817 when Sciacca experienced severe earth tremors throughout the city. The people feared that the old wooden church of St. Augustine might collapse and bury the statue of their beloved Madonna. The fishermen carried the statue into the Town Square away from any falling objects. Suddenly from 3:00 to 8:00 P.M., drops of sweat fell from the forehead of the statue. At 8:00 when the Madonna stopped sweating the earth tremors ceased. Every year when the fishermen carry the statue through the streets of Sciacca the Madonna starts to sweat when she reaches the spot in the square” (<http://www.fishermansfeast.com/about.html>).

One of the objectives of the procession is the collection of offerings. The mechanism for monetary offerings is also formalized. All the money offered to the Madonna is attached to ribbons. The women have a very important and recognized role in collecting the offerings from passersby, which they then attach to the ribbons they are holding that are connected with the top of the statue (Fig. 4)



Figure 4 - A woman attaching the offerings to the ribbon connected to the statue (photograph by author).

The residents of the North End give their offerings by unrolling long ribbons from their houses' windows or balconies. More substantial offerings are usually given by the owners of bars or restaurants, who put their money directly on the Madonna. When the statue stops in front of a commercial entity, the owner is already waiting on the doorstep holding a “calendar,” which is a sort of necklace made of banknotes collected during the past year specifically for this occasion. The carriers gently lift up the structure surrounding the statue and permit the donor the privilege of entering within a somewhat private space to place their calendar on the Madonna. At the end of the Grand Procession, the statue of the Madonna will

be completely covered with money when it arrives at the society's building, and only the head will remain visible.

Military and fascist songs are played during these last two types of offerings. from residents and from commercial establishments. As marching bands play the military march "Il bersagliere," which is the official march of the Bersaglieri, an Italian military corps, people unroll their ribbons or place their calendars on the statue. Before the carriers leave, the marching band—and so the society—thanks the donor by playing the "Marcia reale" and sometimes the song "Faccetta nera." This is perhaps the most controversial moment of the entire feast, because the "Marcia reale," ("Royal March") and even more so "Faccetta Nera" ("Little Black Face"), are musical pieces that were used by the Fascist regime. The former, composed by Giuseppe Gabetti, was the anthem of the Kingdom of Italy from the unification, in 1861, until the Armistice on September 8, 1943. It was also played throughout the regime at every formal occasion and always followed by "Giovinezza," the official anthem of the National Fascist Party. (Sachs 1987,94) "Faccetta Nera" is a song written by Renato Micheli in 1935, with music by Mario Ruccione, and was used as fascist propaganda regarding Italy's interest in Ethiopia. In particular, it was used to denounce slavery still practiced in that area and to justify military intervention and the subsequent campaign of African colonization.⁹ When I asked Louis what kind of sound he associates with the Feast, he didn't hesitate in answering, "the 'Marcia Reale'." The whole community identifies that piece of music with the title "Number One," since that was for many years the number of this piece of music in

⁹ Besides its connection with the fascist interest in Ethiopia, the use of "*Faccetta nera*" appears problematic in Boston 2016 because of its clear sexist references, other than racist. The "little black face" mentioned in title is the face of a "pretty Abyssinian" woman who will be liberated from slavery to be submitted to "another law and another king/Our law is love slavery." There is no any reference to the liberation from slavery of male Abyssinians. "*Faccetta nera*" follows the colonialist tradition creating a parallel between the exploitation of the African continent with the sexual exploitation of the African women.

Gaetano “Gai” Giarraffa’s score book, also called the “green book.” Giarraffa was the admired conductor of the Roma Band,¹⁰ a marching band which accompanied the processions of fishermen in the North End for several years until Giarraffa died.

Sacred music, specifically “Hymn to the Madonna,” composed by Giarraffa, and Schubert’s “Ave Maria,” are played when the carriers stop in front of the houses of passed members. This music is also played when the Grand Procession stops by the other society’s clubs, where the fishermen pay respect to the other saints by invoking their names as they usually do with their Madonna. This is a way of strengthening their relationship with other Italian-American groups in the North End. But invocation of the various saints’ names triggers a metonymic chain, leading directly to the village in Italy with which each saint is connected. In other words, the procession, with its multiple stops, actually maps a new geography on the whole neighborhood, where specific landmarks (other societies’ buildings) become towns, proclaimed as such by a precise sonic code. That is how the Church of Sacred Heart is transformed into the Palermo Cathedral: the carriers shout “Viva Santa Rosalia” (Hail Saint Rosalie!) in front of the statue of the patron saint of Palermo, which has been brought outside the church to wait for the Madonna and the other saints and towns. It is through this spatial and sonic strategy that the fishermen implant southern Italy within the perimeter of Boston’s North End. This ritual is similarly practiced by the other societies throughout the entire summer, during their days of feast.

While this massive procession is traveling through the North End, other activities occur in the area close to the society building, upon a stage that has been set up on North Street. It is in this setting that the sounds of rows 6–9 of the chart of sounds are used: sounds

¹⁰ The North End Marching Band is a descendant of the Roma Band (see p. 31).

from the Renaissance era, Italian opera, the Sciacca Carnival, and American popular music traditions. Opera singers performing Italian opera arias are hosted on the stage attached to the club, along with other live performances of rock and roll, soul, doo-wop, and 70s disco, as described in Chapter 2. Here, I would like to address briefly the reenactment of the Sciacca Carnival and performances of the Renaissance era, because these elements are new within the Fisherman's Feast, and both are ideas of the youngest member of the Fishermen's Society, Pascal Gangi. Pascal began to add new elements to the feast about two years ago and decided to invest his efforts in the reenactment of another distinctive tradition celebrated in Sciacca, the Carnival. He also promoted a *commedia dell'arte* show, staged by a crew called *Pazzi Lazzi* and accompanied by a lute-player and a violinist performing Renaissance dances from Fabritio Caroso's *Il Ballarino* and Emilio de Cavaliere's and Laura Guidiccione's "Ballo del Granduca."¹¹ Pascal is the only member of the Society to speak fluent Italian and he travels to Sciacca every year. There, he learned how to build the mechanized floats used for the parades. He used this knowledge to recontextualize the tradition in the North End, building his own float adorned with the mask of *Peppe Nappa*, the symbol of the Sciacca Carnival. Carnival is a fascinating and ancient ritual that dates back to the Roman *Saturnalia*, celebrations of the earthly pleasures of life where excess, subversion, parody, and chaos recall the orgiastic dimension that is typical of end-of-the-year feasts (Bonanzinga: 2014). While these rituals were performed in ancient Rome in December, on the occasion of the winter solstice, Carnival marked the passage from winter to spring in the agricultural contexts, the transition from death to rebirth of nature. Even today, the use of mask and

¹¹ Curiously, Caroso's book describes Milanese dances and Cavaliere's composition is from a Florentine wedding in 1589. The Fisherman's Feast is a container of Italianness, whose contents are not only related with the Madonna, or Sciacca, or Sicily, but with Italy in general.

disguise promotes a subversion of the roles and hierarchies that mirrors the moment of crises and anxiety for the new season, simultaneously suggesting the regenerating value of excess, happiness, and fun. Pascal Ganci and his team handcrafted a float shaped as a boat, named Sciacca, decorated with Peppe Nappa and other symbols of Sicily on it (Fig. 5). After almost forty years since their last boats were in the Boston Harbor, a Sciacca fisherman's boat re-emerges in the North End.



Figure 5 - Peppe Nappa on the boat "Sciacca" (photograph by author).

On Saturday afternoon, the *papier-mâché* boats lead the carnival parade on Moon Street, accompanied by the same pop-dance music played to celebrate carnival in Sciacca, and with young dancers dressed in Brazilian costumes preceding and following the float. Besides the significant presence of Portuguese and Brazilian communities in Boston, the use of Brazilian costumes to celebrate carnival is a further re-enactment of what happens in Sciacca, as well as in many Italian Carnivals, where it is not uncommon to see people dressing Brazilian costumes, according to a form of hybridization which refers to the well-known carnival celebrated in Rio de Janeiro.

The variety of sounds used in the Fisherman's Feast allows us to understand the complex network of connections between the various identities and places that are underpinned by the feast, and how the community now negotiates them. On the one hand are Italy, Sicily, and Sciacca,¹² which express a local and national identity; on the other hand, America and the North End, which are connected to the former elements through the Italian-Americanness.

Today's Fisherman's Feast has become a very expansive event. Since the 1980s, the Society has decided to invest all its energies in increasing the popularity of the feast, attracting tourists, cultural operators, and media coverage, with the goal of becoming the main event of the North End. To do so, they need to book good artists for the afternoon and evening shows, advertise the feast as much as possible, rent professional audio-video equipment, and find the money to make the effort sustainable. The Society is able to cover the costs through sponsorships, offerings, merchandising, selling raffle tickets, and renting vendors' spaces, the fees of which are based on the size of the stand. According to Therese Diecidue—wife of Sal “Bosco” Diecidue, former president of the society and a very influential person—beginning in 1986–87, the business aspect began to prevail over the religious aspect, “which is not so prominent in the Fisherman's Feast.” She told me that, until a few years ago, the inhabitants of the North End used to attend the feast by sitting at tables positioned along the sides of the roads, right in front of the entrances to their houses. There, they had food and beverages together with their friends, whom they invited to join the feast. This was a very distinctive aspect of the feast, which today has disappeared because those

¹² Not to mention Brazil.

same spots are now occupied by the vendors and bars, and the people who now live in the North End are wealthy non-Italians.

If the Fisherman's Feast has transformed over the last forty to fifty years, the strong connection between the feast and music seems consistent. As shown in the chart of sounds on page 22, with the exclusion of the sounds in the first row, there are two main producers of the feast's soundscape: the marching bands and the artists who are booked to perform on the stage. When I asked Therese why the Roma Band discontinued performing for the Fisherman's Feast after Giarraffa had passed, she explained to me that the new Irish conductor who succeeded Giarraffa introduced "new" instruments, such as the piccolo flute, which gave the band a more military-oriented sound. Also, the marching band started to add to their repertoire music taken from TV shows or Disney movies, like the "Mickey Mouse March," which the Italian community considered inappropriate and disrespectful to the saint. Trying to restore the traditional sonorities connected with the feast, Therese and her husband Sal decided to put together a new band in the middle 1990s. Bringing together some elements from the glorious Roma Band with new musicians, they formed The North End Marching Band, and which still accompanies today's procession.

Curiously, there are some salient differences in Jennifer Caputo's description of the same episode. In her analysis of the Roma Band's history and repertoire (Caputo: 2002), Caputo traces back the birth of the North End Marching Band as part of a conflict within the Roma Band itself. The "new Irish conductor" mentioned by Therese must be Richard (Dick) Bamberg, "the first non-Italian leader" (Caputo 2002: 59), who became the business manager

of the Roma Band in 1997 (Caputo 2002: 59).¹³ According to Caputo, who had conversations with Mark Letizia, one of the leaders of the North End Band, and Dick Bamberg in 2002:

There was another disagreement among band members in 1999 when a few musicians did not return on time to play after a break during a festival. Dick chose to fire the musicians who returned late (and a little drunk), and they decided to form their own band, called the North End Band. A few members of the Roma Band left to join the North End Band because they did not think the musicians should have been fired. Others feel that some of the band members may have left because they think a non-Italian should be running the Roma Band. (Caputo 2002: 60)

This version of the story highlights the non-Italianness of Dick Bamberg, instead of the issues related to the repertoire mentioned by Therese, even if she started our conversation just mentioning Bamberg's Irish roots. Bamberg non-Italian roots must have played a crucial role in generating a conflict within the Roma Band, "the oldest and the most renowned feast band in Boston" (Caputo 2002: 55). Above all within a setting like the Fisherman's Feast, and the religious festivals in the North End in general, where ethnic identity becomes an essential character to get access to certain levels of the various organizations.

Although the Roma Band is still the most popular marching band in the North End and embodies the Italian-American spirit of that neighborhood, until the 1970s, there were also other marching bands that performed during the Fisherman's Feast. Jim Bono, another member of the The Madonna del Soccorso Fishermen's Society, is a great connoisseur of the musical aspects related to the Feast. Jim talked to me about two important characteristics of the feast that were present until the 1970s. The first was a competition between the marching bands that performed standing on two opposite stages. The second was a musical network with the New York area, from which artists like Gilda Mignonette and Joe Masello were booked to perform during feast. When Jim talks about the marching band, he does so with a

¹³ Although Bamberg's origin is not mentioned by Caputo, he is the only non-Italian leader in the history of the Roma Band traced by her analysis.

deep sense of nostalgia. He says that the marching bands—formed by Italians only—were stimulated by the musical competitions to develop an excellent sound; symphonic marches and opera arias constituted most of the repertoire. According to Jim, the sound of those years is lost, largely because it was replaced by other and more attractive forms of entertainment that are tied to the Americanization of the feast and its commercialization.

CHAPTER 2: CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY

Introduction

The connections between the many constitutive elements of the Fisherman's Feast and the historical aspects that characterize the Italian diaspora provide a unique network of meaning, within which the descendants of the fishermen from Sciacca still act. It is helpful to recall briefly some of the elements discussed in the previous chapter, in order to analyze them within a wider symbolic system.

We observed that the Italian settlement in Boston's North End mirrors the political fragmentation that continued to characterize Italy during the years of the Great Migration. The villages of origin played a crucial role in defining a migrant's identity, since the idea of a nation, with an ethnic group sharing a language and culture, did not yet exist for Italians. The Italian settlers were grouped into ethnic enclaves associated with the villages in Italy. Everything was built around family, and each enclave was a paradigm of the concept of family with its inter-connections. Through the Fisherman's Feast, the early settlers developed some skills that made it easier for them to survive in a new and far place, Boston's North End. We should not forget that they were active fishermen. They must have struggled to learn the new sea and felt a sense of disorientation once they switched from the Mediterranean Sea to the Atlantic Ocean; the waters were different, as were the currents and fish species. Moreover, they were Italian immigrants in the nineteenth-century U.S., contending with the effects of capitalist labor exploitation and ethnic

marginalization (see Gabaccia 1988, 2000; Puleo 2007). Within this framework, the Fisherman's Feast was, and still is, a tool that let this community to affirm their identity and the appropriation of the neighborhood. Over the ensuing century, the feast would transform through a process that highlighted the symbolic dynamism of the signifiers involved in the ritual, in order to address the needs of a changing community, once its members began to leave the neighborhood and establish themselves elsewhere and in different professions.

In this chapter, I analyze the symbolic shift that occurred within the Fisherman's Feast, paying attention to the tension between continuity and discontinuity. I argue that the early settlers began to celebrate the Virgin, compelled at first, by the idea of their mythic village in Sicily, and second, by an imagined Italy. In comparison, the descendants who celebrate the Fisherman's Feast in the twenty-first century are compelled by the heaviness of everyday life, the same life of which their ancestors dreamed, to reclaim the utopian space of the North End, where everything began. In both cases, the use of music allows the communities to achieve their goals.

The ritual forms enacted every summer by The Madonna del Soccorso Society go beyond the celebration of Christian worship; they generate a multi-level dialogue among the community, its memory, and the neighborhood. This dialogue has been developed in two distinct phases and according to two different poetics. The first phase started in 1906, when the fishermen from Sciacca began to celebrate the Madonna; while the second phase has been going on since the 1980s, when the fishermen and their heirs left the North End, following the gentrification of the neighborhood.

Space, place, and adaptation

At the beginning of 20th century, the North End had already become a neighborhood inhabited mainly by southern Italians, who had taken the place of earlier Irish, Russian, and

northern Italian settlers. The North End had become an agglomeration of several southern Italian communities since late 1800s, each with its own traditions and language. These communities had been developing their Italianness since coming into contact with each other in the new land (Ferraiuolo 2009: 50-51). In his book *Music as Social Life* (2008), Thomas Turino explains how “music, dance, festivals, and other public expressive cultural practices are a primary way that people articulate the collective identities that are fundamental to forming and sustaining social groups, which are, in turn, basic to survival.” (2) For the early fishermen, using their feast to transplant their village to the North End was an attempt to articulate their group identity and to subvert their subordinate position within the power hierarchy. It was an effort to affirm their possession of the neighborhood, and therefore also their survival. Slowly and cyclically, the fishermen refined a strategy, based on a pre-existing religious traditions imported from their village of origin. To this strategy they assigned a task that was alien to the rituality of the community remaining in Sicily: the reconciliation between the community and the new space. For the Sicilian community in the North End, the need to affirm their identity in relation to the neighborhood took priority over worldly and spiritual protection; they were asking the Virgin for social protection instead. Using the Grand Procession to trace a line along the boundaries of the North End, they meant to establish a fair threshold of respect for their dignity as immigrants, workers, and human beings, as well as their right to call the neighborhood their home. Paradoxically, the successful outcome of such a strategy, which was tenaciously enacted for almost eighty years, led the fishermen and their descendants to leave their homes in the North End once they began to climb the social ladder and improve their quality of life. This was an important change within the community, which started to spread not only beyond the neighborhood, but also throughout the U.S. The second, third, and fourth generation Italian-

Americans continued to run the feast, but with a different urgency and developing a different dialogue with the neighborhood. Also, the emerging ambition of the new organizers to make the Fisherman's Feast the main event of the North End brought new elements to the feast, which contributed to its transformation over time. These events marked the beginning of the second phase of the Fisherman's Feast. This is why Jim Bono revealed to me during his interview that he feels that the original sound of the feast has been lost, as the marching bands and Italian-American singers performing Neapolitan songs are no longer the focal point of the Feast. Yes, that sound may have been lost, but other sounds arrived, which made the soundscape an intricate mirror of alternating Americanness and Italianness. Before talking about the role of sounds in shaping this new hybrid identity, I investigate the nature of the transformations that have occurred in the Fisherman's Feast.

Augusto Ferraiuolo observes that "the feast"¹⁴ gradually became referential and then self-referential: the feast celebrates a past that is now mythical as well as the historic past of the ethnic enclaves" (2009: 201). But, is this all or is there something else? Is the mythical past the only reason that people are still driven to the North End from all over the United States, every year for the last forty years, and with an ever-increasing enthusiasm? Is the aspiration to organize "the biggest event in the North End," which is also a non-profit event, enough to justify the continuity of this tradition? The descendants of the fishermen from Sciacca are also driven by their faith in the Virgin to continue this tradition. But, was it not the worship of the Virgin, even in the homeland, the way this community negotiated its survival in this world and in the afterlife? Are these people still doing that?

The festive system of the Fisherman's Feast, as I witnessed during my field research in

¹⁴ Ferraiuolo is referring to the mechanism of Italian-American feasts, in general, held in the North End.

2016, is articulated around three crucial lines: 1) the absence of a mythic place, now considered both as the country and village of origin; 2) the continuous utopian attempts to bring that mythic place to the neighborhood; and 3) the dialectic relationship between Americanness and Italianness. Michel de Certeau explains how, in spatial terms, the dialectic of absence generates a mechanism of fascination, within which consequences and narrative tensions facilitate processes of house making:

By a paradox that is only apparent, the discourse that makes people believe is the one that takes away what it urges them to believe in, or never delivers what it promises. Far from expressing a void or describing a lack, it creates such. It makes room for a void. In that way, it opens up clearings; it ‘allows’ a certain play within a system of defined places. It ‘authorizes’ the production of an area of free play (*Spielraum*) on a checkerboard that analyzes and classifies identities. It makes places habitable. On these grounds, I call such discourse a ‘local authority.’ It is a crack in the system that saturates places with signification and indeed so reduces them to this signification that it is ‘impossible to breathe in them.’ (2011: 105–6)

Voids, areas of free play, cracks. The discourses to which de Certeau refers are beliefs, possibilities, and myths, which fill the cracks and make those places habitable. The Fisherman’s Feast filled and still fills the void generated by the absence of a mythic place through a narrative related to the Virgin. Now, the alternate space that the early fishermen had built in North End, made by their own houses, their boats, their language imbued with the Sicilian dialect, and the sounds of the neighborhood, has regressed to a unique high-density landmark: the Club. The Club is the last fishermen’s house still permeated by the myth of a faraway land, and it resists the attacks of the “functionalist totalitarianism” (de Certeau 2011: 6) that try to eliminate the anomalies that undermine the “univocity” (6)—in other words, the stability and order—of the system. Once per year, this alternate and imagined place moves outside the building where it has been preserved, together with the statue of the Madonna, and it fills the space of the North End. Until the 1980s, the original function of the Grand Procession and the ritual practices connected

with the Fisherman's Feast were the domestication of a new space, the North End. The early community of fishermen not only went out on the streets of the neighborhood to fill the space with their symbols and sounds, but, as we observed earlier, they established an immediate habitability of the neighborhood by arranging provisional domestic spaces on the streets with tables and food. This was a redundancy of the most formalized and emotional moment of the feast: the exit of the icon of the Madonna from the Club, her formal house and private chapel at the same time, to inhabit the neighborhood. These performative actions used metaphor and metonymy as tools to give birth to a habitability model, which was effective in an unknown and faraway land, as America was perceived by Europeans between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Third and fourth generation Italian-Americans don't fear the threat of the marginalization experienced by their ancestors. They are not scared by an unknown space anymore, for the simple reason that America is now their homeland and so a well-known space, and the North End has been historicized as a sort of big and harmless souvenir. Therefore, the alternate place that they recreate each year is an escape from their current homeland and everyday life. Here is the difference between the ritual process enacted by the early fishermen and that of their descendants. Both affirm the existence of a community, and to do so, the members of the society have never stopped using the same mechanism that governs the magic rituals, and which results in generation of what Jesper Sørensen calls *blended space*, "a temporary and mental discursive construct, in which elements and structures projected from each input space can be combined in a novel way resulting in an emergent structure" (2007: 60). This emergent structure is the result of a new space of negotiation, which still allows the new members of The Madonna del Soccorso Society to experience travel strategies, mobility, enjoyment of places and sounds that are no

longer here and now, but there and then. Whereas the early settlers tried to embrace the new space in which they were living to make it habitable, their descendants move in a space “other” after they have gotten rid, albeit temporarily, of their homes. This space’s current reference model is not constituted by Sicily or Italy alone. The romantic visions of the old North End and America have now joined the imagined space, too. These elements have been merged into a single archetype, a construction that is useful to a different necessity. That is, a better controlled space, with a lower level of unpredictability, where they need not fear of being swallowed up by the same system in which their ancestors’ efforts placed them. They are looking for an escape space where everything is in order, having been previously selected and arranged according to a “safe” narrative, which they inherited from their grandfathers.

Metaphor and metonymy are still active in the feast, but now the goal is the appropriation of an imagined and utopian place, one which is different from that imagined by their ancestors. It is a space where the unsustainable heaviness of everyday life is momentarily suspended. What once were strategies to comprehend the neighborhood through “a process of cognitive and empathic mapping” (Sciorra 2015: 168), have become exit strategies. The descendants of the first settlers are still migrants looking for a better place to live, which they recreate once a year using the same tools of their ancestors: Catholic icons, processions, and sounds. While the first two have remained unchanged for the last one hundred and six years, an analysis of the changes that have occurred in the sounds will give us the possibility to investigate the semantic shift in the feast.

Returning to my main question, “How does this community select its sounds?”, I argue that the fishermen of the North End, both early settlers and current members of the society, built their own soundscape according to the strategic reasons for survival, adaptation, and

domestication of space. The quality of this soundscape changed when the community left the neighborhood. To understand the changes in the soundscape means to understand the functional shift that has occurred in the Fisherman's Feast, and within the community, too.

The making of the Fisherman's Feast's soundscape

According to the community's older members, whom I interviewed during my field research, the sounds that accompanied the Fisherman's Feast during its first phase were selected exclusively from among the following repertoires: Neapolitan song, Italian opera arias, and symphonic marches. All my informants excluded the possibility that any traditional music has ever been used during the feast. Augusto Ferraiuolo, who conducted some research about the use of traditional music in the North End, suggests that the only evidence he found of it was in a late 1800s police report (Ferraiuolo, personal communication). The report mentioned some women from Caserta who had been arrested because they were making noise with their frame drums, which Ferraiuolo supposed were *tammorre*. He struggled to find anything substantial even at the Scalabrini archive at Staten Island, "besides the confirmation that the codification of the Italian-American music occurred between the nineteenth and twentieth century, thanks to artists like Farfaniello and, then, Gilda Mignonette, but we are talking about the classical Neapolitan song" (personal communication). Ferraiuolo used the adjective "classical" to indicate a specific genre, known as *Canzone napoletana* (Neapolitan song), and to separate it from the field of traditional music.

Neapolitan song as a distinctive genre arose in the first half of the nineteenth century. Almost from the beginning, it was involved in a publishing production system, first through anthologies that circulated in Naples, which were also intended for the tourists (*Passatempi musicali*), then through the Piedigrotta Song Festival. The Piedigrotta Festival was more than just

a song festival, as it was embedded in an obscure and secular-religious celebration worshipping the Virgin of Piedigrotta, a Naples neighborhood. The celebration of the Virgin became more and more complex with the passing of time; it was a sort of mosaic made with floats, horse parades, fireworks, and elaborate choreographies. Within this big event, the song festival gave birth to a specific musical genre, Neapolitan song,¹⁵ whose popularity quickly arose not only in Naples, but also in a wide area around the city. Every year, the song declared the winner of the Piedigrotta Song Festival automatically became the most popular song in the area, and its wide dissemination was supported by a “musical publishing business which had reached a significant degree of articulation for those years and for the level of technology available” (Stazio 1991: 121).

It is important at this point to return to the Italian political situation, pre-unification, to outline briefly the role of *Canzone napoletana* within the Italian musical repertoire. As Italy had been divided into several states for centuries until 1861, each one operated as a self-sufficient cultural system, with its own language, traditions, and music. Therefore, Italian traditional music developed on a regional basis, and each Italian region still has its own musical identity, composed of specific traditional genres, styles, ways of execution, dances, types of content, and even musical instruments.¹⁶ Italian traditional music is the exaltation of a specific regional identity, complementary to the national one. Italian nationalistic spirit should be considered non-existent even after the unification of 1861, and at least up until World War I. In his article about the role of Italian opera and Neapolitan song in the Italian diaspora, Marcello Sorce Keller

¹⁵ Songs like: *O sole mio*, *Munastero e santa Chiara*, *Santa Lucia*, etc.

¹⁶ I.e., some representative genres are *Tarantella Siciliana*, *Tarantella Calabrese*, *Tarantella Salentina*: three different kind of *Tarantella* from Sicily, Calabria, and Apulia; *Canzone napoletana*: a *corpus* of traditional songs originated from Naples; the Neapolitan *tammuriata*, or the Apulian *pizzica*, etc.

explains how Neapolitan song became much more than just a Neapolitan phenomenon.

Specifically, he addresses World War I as a catalyst that helped Italians to develop their nationalist feelings and select specific music from the various traditional repertoires as representative of the new nation:

[World War I] was where southerners and Neapolitans came extensively into contact with northern Italians, and for the first time were exposed to choral singing; and for northerners it was the occasion when they came into first-hand contact with Neapolitan song as it circulated by word of mouth among southern soldiers. Up until then only middle and upper-middle class northern Italians had had some knowledge of it, through musical scores performed and sung in the family circle. As a result of such contact, both repertoires, Alpine choral singing and Neapolitan song, came to be considered more generally ‘Italian’ than they had been up until that point, while retaining their regional connotations. World War I was, in this process, a turning point, contained in time and space, one that helped develop the perception that local repertoires could be considered and emotionally related to as more generally ‘Italian,’ even by people who did not belong to their locality of origin. (2015: 250–51)

Neapolitan song went from being a musical genre exclusively confined to a region, to being a genre representative of Italianness.¹⁷ This is the reason Ferraiuolo defined Neapolitan song as “classical” and did not include it among the Italian traditional repertoire. Something similar happened with Italian opera, which was initially the music of the northern Italian middle and upper class, but then ended up becoming one of the most prominent symbols of Italianness, following its success throughout Europe and among several classes within Italy. (Sorce Keller 2015) The marching bands had very important roles in the dissemination of this repertoire, making it accessible to the poorer and less educated people in the villages, where “single arias or even entire operatic scenes were sometimes performed in the main square of villages” (Sorce Keller 2015: 249).

The traditional repertoire that was not selected in this process of defining Italy through music, remained confined within each region, where it maintained a fundamental role within

¹⁷ Neapolitan songs are also performed by gondoliers in Venice.

social contexts of the various villages. Working chants, lamentations, storytellers (*cantastorie*), devotional songs, and social and ritual dances are still dialectically intertwined with communities in southern Italy. There, they form a “broad musical and poetic repertoire that is articulated in forms, genres, and themes, which vary depending on contexts and functions that, from time to time, each chant is being asked to play” (Bonanzinga 2013: 189, translation mine). It is surprising, therefore, that there is no evidence of the use of Sicilian traditional music in the Fisherman’s Feast, nor is traditional music from other regions used in the other feasts celebrated in the North End by the other societies of saints. It appears that these communities did not bring along the music that had articulated and permeated their life up until their migration. One of the possible reasons for this absence could be the fact that Italian migrants were “birds of passage,” a locution which is often used to address “the larger number of transients, not the smaller groups that settled abroad or returned home, [which] defined the particularity of Italy’s diaspora” (Gabaccia 2000: 7). This condition leads to problematize the use of the word “immigrant,” with regard to the Italian diaspora. Most of Italians who left Italy in those years were indeed migrants, since their move was not permanent. Many Italian emigrants considered themselves to be migratory workers and part of a global market, and had a “fervent desire to return to a beloved home” (ibid). They left behind their wives, children, and relatives, because they were not looking for a new place to live, but only for a job that would allow them to sustain their families and respect the rules imposed by the social order.¹⁸ This is the reason why data about Italian immigration in the US during the Great Migration report “men outnumbering women five to one” (Gabaccia 2005: 146). Most of the Italian immigrants were seasonal workers, from spring to

¹⁸ It will require more research to explore the history of the Mediterranean fishing industry, but it is not difficult to assume that the Sicilian fisherman were making much more money catching and selling their fish in the US, where the market was stronger and more efficient than in early 20th century Italy.

the fall, and were involved in a continuous coming and going from Italy. Also, because they were not persecuted, as many people from other countries were, their return to the motherland was easier, and about half of those who emigrated after 1860 returned to Italy (Gabaccia 2000:7). Due to their mindset as birds of passage, most of the Italian immigrants' rituality remained confined within the borders of their country of origin, or more so of their *paese* (village), which remained the only place they considered home and where the traditional repertoires could be used appropriately.

Although deeper investigation is necessary regarding the use of traditional music during the early years of the southern Italian settlement in the North End, it is a fact that in the second decade of the twenty-first century, during which I conducted my fieldwork, no Sicilian music is performed during the celebration of the Fisherman's Feast. And the persistence of Neapolitan music, Italian opera, and symphonic marches is a good reason to conclude that the Sicilian repertoire probably was never used in the Fisherman's Feast, since it is very unlikely that only the Sicilian music would be abandoned, especially within a Sicilian community. Traditional repertoire was not selected among the music to be performed in the North End because of the lack of associated ritual actions, even though those actions continued to be performed in the village of origin. The groups that settled in the North End did not have the chance to build a collective sonic memory rooted in their traditional music for two main reasons: (1) the social contexts in which this music was performed were not imported to the North End,¹⁹ and (2) most of the musicians who migrated to the North End were birds of passage.

When the celebration of the Madonna del Soccorso di Sciacca landed in Boston's North End, its local and regional identity was reframed within a broader national context. Neapolitan

¹⁹ The market shouts (*abbanniate*) discussed earlier, are not considered traditional music by the North Enders nor by the southern Italians.

song, Italian opera, and symphonic marches contributed sonically to create a new setting within which the early settlers started to develop their Italianness. Moreover, these three genres have a close correlation, which ends up generating a powerful semiotic tool to amplify the communication of a rising nationalist feeling. Some of the most popular Neapolitan songs were composed by, or attributed to, opera composers like Mercadante, Donizetti, and Bellini, or poets like Salvator Rosa²⁰ who “acted as the guarantor of high artistic level” of Neapolitan song (Stazio 1991: 198, translation mine). The most popular arias by these composers were performed by sopranos and tenors during the Fisherman’s Feast, as well as by the marching bands, according to traditions in the village of origin. The symphonic marches performed in the marching band competitions were often arrangements of opera overtures or compositions inspired by opera, as still happens now. This is an example of transtextual poetics, where each text is useful to understand the others, a dynamic textual network in which the use of redundancy allows the homogeneous elements to emerge and be recognized. It is in this way that a text, in this case the symbolic contents related to the Madonna and Italianness, enters into a new context, thereby renewing itself (cf. Dusi 2006). The new narrative is constituted by invariant structures that are replicable—the icons of the Madonna, the procession, the marching bands, etc.—and by structures that have been transformed. The reenactment of the Fisherman’s Feast in Boston’s North End is a reinterpretation that has the same dynamic of a re-making, with its specific degree of transformation, and where “the new text, despite its multi-level dependence on the work it transposes and recreates, stages a new textual world, which is autonomous in its poetic

²⁰ The genre of Neapolitan song was enjoying great respect in those years, to a level comparable to the Italian opera. And while none of these composers is Neapolitan, their lives were somehow tied to Naples since its three Royal Theatres—San Carlo, Fondo, e Nuovo—as well as its four conservatoires, made the city one of the biggest center of music production. Gaetano Donizetti, for example, lived for sixteen in Naples. He composed about seventeen operas, among which *Lucia di Lammermoor* for the San Carlo theatre, which he also directed (<http://www.teatrosancarlo.it/en/pages/historical-highlights.html>).

dimension and woven in the new recipient culture” (Dusi 2006: 100; translation mine). Through music, the early fishermen in the North End triggered a process of textual historicization that led them to a mythic production: to an imagined Italy. Because of its immediacy, music was the best medium available to display and convey their Italianness in a foreign country.

The advent of fascism gave the community additional tools, which facilitated the development of the nationalistic aspects within the Fisherman’s Feast. Fascist ideology was extremely popular among Italian immigrants in the U.S. In his *Italian Fascist Activities in the United States* (2000), Gaetano Salvemini analyzes the relationship between anti-fascist and fascist groups in the U.S. and argues that, despite their smaller number, fascists exerted a greater influence over Italian immigrants. Salvemini estimated that, in the 1930s, about 4.6 million Italians in the U.S. had been voluntarily exposed to the continuing fascist propaganda (Gabaccia 2000: 146–47). During the interwar years, fascist ideology spread in the U.S. through a centralized and extensive activity organized by the Central Bureau for Propaganda (CBP). As reported in an *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* article published on November 20, 1925, the CBP’s strategy was “setting up Fascist infiltration into political organizations and mutual aid societies so as to create friendly and spiritual agreement.” The operation, led by the Fascist League of North America and by the local *fasci*, “had the ambition to act as the moving wheel of a vast system embracing all Italian organizations existing in the United States.” The mutual aid societies created to help the transitions of the million Italian immigrants into the new world became pivotal in this process of fascistization. By January 1928, all the most popular societies were integrated “into a single bundle,” including the Sons of Italy, which with its 300,000 members was one of the largest and the most influential in the U.S. (Salvemini 1977: 91).

The societies became openly inspired by fascist ideology and pursued exaltation of

Mussolini's politics. Their activities were structured around newspapers, such as *Il Progresso* (New York) and *Il Grido della Stirpe* (New York, New Jersey, California), and radio stations, like Boston's WCOP, which hosted a pro-fascist broadcast run by Ubaldo Guidi and subsidized by Mussolini (Luconi 2006: 113). Guidi was a fervent supporter and organizer of the Fascist Party, with connections to the Italian consulate in Boston, until he was arrested for fascist activism by the FBI on December, 1942, following the Federal Communication Commission's (FCC's) first wartime action against foreign-language stations. According to the FCC report, Guidi was not the only fascist announcer at WCOP. Franco Gallucci, president of the Massachusetts Federation of the Italian Dopolavoro, an organization that the FCC press "referred to as 'a Fascist front organization'," was another announcer at WCOP, and the "Italian language broadcasting on WCOP had begun under the direction of the late Luigi Flato, who was executive secretary of the Boston Fascio of the Fascist League of N.A.," as stated in a *Broadcasting & Broadcast Advertising* article on December 21, 1942. Massachusetts was one of the states in which fascist activity was most prevalent during the interwar years. Pellegrino Nazzaro's description of fascist activity in Massachusetts is helpful for understanding the dimensions of this phenomenon and the structure of a sort of network that was centered in Boston:

In Massachusetts, Fascist associations were numerous and vociferous. Boston's association was lead by Francesco Macaluso, a lawyer; Fernando Pettinella, captain in the Italian army; Giannetto Bottero, a physician; and Ubaldo Guidi, an accountant. The official newspaper of the Boston Fasci was *Giovinezza* (Youth), directed by Francesco Macaluso. Ten Fascist associations were formed in the state, including Lawrence, Lowell, Worcester, Fishbury, and Portland." (2008: 76)

The 1935 Italian colonial expansion in Ethiopia, moreover, heightened the sympathy of Italian immigrants towards fascism and Mussolini, both of which now embodied a sense of greatness and power of which the Italian immigrants could be proud. At this point, more than \$500,000 had been collected to support the colonial campaign (Gabaccia 2000: 148).

National pride was not the only engine that moved Italians in the U.S. to embrace fascism; there are two more elements that need to be considered to understand better why fascism enjoyed massive support among Italian immigrants. First, American hostility toward communism and labor activism, as well as “the execution and deportation of too many Italian-born radicals” (Gabaccia 2000: 147) undermined the success of the anti-fascist initiative. Second, the Catholic church, through its parishes and schools, had a prominent role in imbuing even the sacred sphere with what Gabaccia calls “positive messages about fascism,” explaining the reasons that Italian Catholic priests felt sympathy for fascism:

Reconciliation with the fascist state was a central issue in the Italian-speaking Catholic world of the 1920s as Mussolini and the Pope negotiated the Lateran Accords that made Catholicism the state religion of fascist Italy. Parish schools used fascist school-books in their Italian classes, and these taught a history of *civiltà italiana* that culminated in the new fascist empire. Peter D’Agostino, historian of immigrant Italian Catholicism in the U.S., has concluded that the church, too, celebrated ‘*italianità*, as they gave devotional sanction to fascism as a form of Americanism.’ (148)

This is the framework within which The Madonna del Soccorso Society began to use in the feast songs of military and fascist inspiration such as “Il bersagliere,” “Marcia reale,” “Faccetta nera,” and “Giovinezza.” Once in the U.S., the Fisherman’s Feast started its shift toward ideology, aimed at re-framing the Italian community with a new identity. But, it would be incorrect to think that this shift led the community “away from ethnicity,” as stated by Robert J. Batule in his essay about the changes of Italian traditional feasts in the U.S. (1999: 75). Nor can we talk about “loss of ethnicity” even when the third and fourth generation of Italian-Americans began to Americanize the feast, as discussed below. The early fishermen from Sciacca used music to reshape their traditional religious celebration

within a new cultural setting; its borders became wider than those within which the Sicilian version of the feast remains confined because of the inclusion of politics.²¹

As discussed earlier, when the early fishermen began celebrating the Madonna del Soccorso di Sciacca in the North End, their goal was to make the neighborhood habitable. The sea played a crucial role within the symbolic system inherent in the Fisherman's Feast, as shown in Chapter 1. But the early fishermen must have quickly realized the presence of another disruptive element, marginalization. The community, at this point, needed to preserve its Italianness and above all display and promote the greatness embedded in that identity. So, they started to develop a nationalistic aesthetic, and they did it through the music of fascism.

In the U.S., the fishermen learned to speak Italian and developed a strategy for dealing with the concept of nation, which was almost unknown among the first settlers when they left Italy. The Fisherman's Feast's soundscape became a perfect synthesis of *italianità* (Italianness) just thirty years after the first celebration in 1906. The great Italian musical tradition was represented by opera arias and symphonic marches; Neapolitan music assumed the role of traditional music on a national scale; Italy's new political identity, as a unified and lush country, as well as a colonial and military power with a leading role in Europe, began to be represented by the use of fascist, nationalistic, and military music.

The Sicilian community in the North End became involved in musical practices quite different from those used in the homeland. This process is in accordance with the notion of

²¹ I do not have enough elements to make an analysis about the level of politicization of the Fisherman's Feast during the interwar years, at this point of my research, but I witnessed the depoliticization of the fascist songs during my fieldwork. Some members of the community are unaware of the fascist origins of that repertoire, while some others consider the political connection almost irrelevant, in favor of a geographical connection: "Yes, but those are Italian songs," was the typical answer I got when I asked questions about the fascist songs.

“marginal preservation” theorized by Anne Rasmussen to describe the practices of adaptation and preservation of communities in diaspora. According to Rasmussen, “the pressures to preserve ‘authentic’ musical practices are differentially allocated between communities in the homeland and those in diaspora” (McDonald 2013: 131, see also Rasmussen 1996). The communities in diaspora act selectively on the musical practices, or repertoires in this case, to fulfill their own necessities in the new land. The re-invention of a nationalistic musical repertoire to worship the Madonna del Soccorso, as enacted in the North End, has little to do with a secularization of the feast, but simply responds to a new identity need.²² Moreover, the isolation of people in diaspora from the homeland keeps the repertoire and the ritual immune to the changes that have occurred in the country of origin (Rasmussen 2009: 530), establishing a sort of pure style that needs to be perpetuated in order to ensure its effectiveness.

Returning to Nazzario’s description about the fascist presence in Massachusetts, the heritage of the network he describes is evidenced by the fact that the same fascist and military songs are still played in Lawrence and in New York during Italian feasts related to Catholic saints, as I learned during my fieldwork there. It seems that the repertoire used by the fascist regime to celebrate itself and the new idea of nation, and the artists that were involved in performing this repertoire, must have benefited from the network built by the fascist propaganda, but this will require further research.


²² The other society of saints in the North End, are involved in the same process, and their religious festivals have common elements with the Fisherman’s Feast. Some of these elements come directly from the villages of origin in Sicily, since these kind of celebrations are structured according to similar sonic and spatial formats, like the procession of a saint through the streets, blessings, marching bands, live music on a stage. Some other must have been developed by the Italian-American communities, since they are very uncommon in Sicily, like the use of fascist songs, or the multiple demarcations of the neighborhood’s perimeter. Also, it is worth nothing that the similarities between the religious festival in the North End occur above all at a sonic level, since they society of saints share the same marching bands.

Metamorphosis of a soundscape

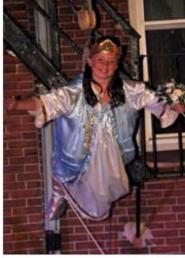
In this section, I analyze how the present generation of Italian-Americans in the North End, negotiates their identity through sounds connected to the Fisherman's Feast. Specifically, I will address the soundscape produced by the concerts that take place on the main stage situated on Moon Street, and in the area of the Club while the Grand Procession is moving throughout the other streets of the North End.

When I arrived at the Club on August 15, 2016, at the beginning of my field research, the society's members were still setting up all that was necessary for the upcoming *festa*, and the first vendors were already erecting their stands. Some members whom I had just met provided me with information about the program and the artists involved in performing that year. As shown in Figure 6, this long weekend, from Thursday to Sunday, is filled with many different types of musical events, which alternate or in some cases overlap with the activities directly connected with the Madonna. The Madonna-related activities take place only on Thursday, with the opening ceremonies, and on Sunday, with the Grand Procession (both are described in Chapter 1). All day Friday and Saturday, however, is devoted exclusively to musical entertainment. I categorize the components of the program of the Fisherman's Feast in 2016 into three different types of shows: those displaying an American identity, those displaying an Italian-American identity, and those typically anchored to the Italian tradition (regional or national).

Jennifer Caputo has already shown how the various ethnic identities in the North End are displayed through the Roma Band's repertoire during the various Italian festivals (Caputo 2002).




The 106th Anniversary of
The Fisherman's Feast




**In Honor of
 Madonna
 Del Soccorso
 Di Sciacca**

THURSDAY - AUGUST 18TH - 6:30PM
 Opening Ceremonies - La Madonna Del Soccorso will leave her permanent chapel on Lewis Street for a solemn Procession to the Christopher Columbus Waterfront Park for the Annual Blessing of the Fishing Waters.



9:00 PM
 Main Stage - Boston's own DooWop Acapella Group **STREET MAGIC** In Memory of **Dominic Ventresca** Greater Metropolitan Realty

FRIDAY - AUGUST 19TH
5PM - Music by **DJ Sal Bartolo**
6:30 - 7:30PM - Main Stage **THE DEFENDERS CONCERT CORPS**
7:45 - 10:30PM
 Two Live Shows by Boston's Own **VINYL GROOVE**
 Go back in time and relive the best music from the 70's, Motown-Philly and classic Disco.




BOSTON'S OLDEST CONTINUOUS ITALIAN FESTIVAL

**THURSDAY, AUGUST 18 TO
 SUNDAY, AUGUST 21, 2016**

In Boston's North End: North, Fleet and Lewis Streets



SATURDAY - AUGUST 20TH 2:30PM
 Join the **Children of the Fisherman's Society** as they Process their statue of the Madonna around the festival accompanied by the **North End Marching Band**.
3:30PM
CARNEVALE DI SCIACCA
 A Handcrafted replica of **Peppe Nappa** will process through the feast.
4:00PM - 5:00PM
 Performance by **Beverly Richards Dance Studio**
6:30PM - 7:00PM
 Performance by **CARLA MANISCALCO**
7:00PM - 8:30PM
 Music by **OVERDRIVE**
9:00PM - 10:30PM
 Performance by **"RAGDOLL"**
 A Tribute to **FRANKIE VALLI** and the **FOUR SEASONS**



Special Acknowledgment
JOHN ZIRPOLO
 Italian American of the Year
 Recipient

SUNDAY - AUGUST 21ST 10AM
 Outdoor Solemn High Mass in honor of La Madonna Del Soccorso
12:30PM - The Grand Procession
 of the statue of La Madonna Del Soccorso Di Sciacca through the streets of the North End accompanied by Marching Bands and Floats
1PM - 2PM - Children's Activities
 on the Main Stage
2:30PM - 4:30PM
THE REMINISCENTS
 will be performing their first Live Show
4:30 - 5:00PM
 Performance by **LAZZI PAZZI** presenting **Carnivale Di Sciacca**
5:30PM - 7:30PM
THE REMINISCENTS will be performing their second live show
7:45 - 10:30PM
 Boston's own DooWop Acapella Group **STREET MAGIC**
8PM - THE FAMOUS FLIGHT OF THE ANGEL! As the statue of the Madonna returns to North street for the finale of the day long procession she is greeted by a crowd of enthusiastic spectators, each waiting for the opportunity to witness the Famous Flight of the Angel. **Yankee Magazine** calls it "truly one of Boston's greatest treasures" and **National Geographic** say's "It's a spectacle NOT to be missed!" As the angel ceremony is completed the spectators below are covered by a snowfall of confetti paper from the rooftops. This years Flying Angel is **ANGELINA PALAZZOLO**. Side angels **AVA TROVATO BONAVIDA** and **SOPHIA FIALKOSKY**

10:30PM - Closing Procession with the return of La Madonna Del Soccorso to her permanent Chapel on Lewis St. and Grand Raffle Drawing
 Grand Prize \$2,000.
www.fishermansfeast.com


**HYANNIS RESORT &
 CONFERENCE CENTER**











Figure 6 - Program of the 106th Anniversary of the Fisherman's Feast in 2016.

What I argue here is that the continuous swing among the various identities, such as those described by Caputo, is not only evident during the processions and through the marching band's repertoire, but also reverberates in the shows that underlie the Fisherman's Feast. Moreover, this swing leads the community to a self-cognitive process, a self-understanding as both Italians and Americans, catalyzed by their relationship with the neighborhood, which results in an inversion

of the push-pull migration model: the early settlers began to organize the feast to “go back home,” while their descendants work to escape from their American homes and go back to the neighborhood.

Among the shows hosted on the main stage are The Vinyl Groove, The Overdrive, and The Reminiscent—all bands that play music from the 70’s American traditions of disco music²³ and classic rock. Yet, The Defenders Concert Corps is a brass band performing American military songs and songs from American musicals. During the two days dedicated to entertainment, the feast transforms into a sort of summer music festival. The religious aspect is momentarily set aside. The bars and restaurants in the area are crowded until late at night, while the main community activity is the collection of money through ticket sales for the Grand Raffle, which happens on a desk arranged on Fleet St. and Hanover St.

The Street Magic is an a cappella group: five male voices perform a large variety of songs in the style of doo-wop. According to their website,²⁴ the group started in 1980. Three of them were born and raised in the North End and have last names of clear Italian origin. The welcome video on their homepage shows them singing “That’s Amore,” a hit sung by the Italian-American star Dean Martin, while walking through the streets of the North End. The Street Magic display *inbetweenness*, as they merge Italianness and Americanness through their doo-wop and Italian-American traditions, of which “That’s Amore” is one of the most prominent symbols, with its nostalgia for Naples and the *vita bella* (the beautiful life). Something similar happens with Ragdoll, who performs a tribute to the Italian-American leader of The Four Seasons, Frankie

²³ 1970s disco music was also deeply influenced by the work of some Italian-American artists, such as the author and producer Giorgio Moroder (e.g., “I Feel Love,” “Love to Love You Baby,” “Call Me”), and the actor John Travolta, who became a visual icon of the disco music phenomenon. This genre, though, is typically associated with American tradition.

²⁴ <http://www.streetmagicacappella.com/>

Valli.

Italian identity is displayed through the performance of Carla Maniscalco, a soprano performing opera arias from the Italian tradition, and through the reenactment of the Carnival of Sciacca, as well as the Renaissance performance by the group Lazzi Pazzi (see Chapter 1). These last two performances constitute the only direct line with Sicily and with Italian art music that is not opera. As discussed earlier, any Sicilian music may be used during the Fisherman's Feast, and perhaps it had never been used in the past, if only occasionally.²⁵ The re-enactment of the Carnival of Sciacca in Boston's North End recovers some of the sounds directly from the mythic village,²⁶ sounds related to a recent past, and brings them into the North End as part of the feast.

The carnival float parades in Sciacca are accompanied by pre-recorded songs, which are specifically composed for the parade year after year. Each float has its own distinctive music connected with the theme of the float itself, usually inspired by current events. The only song that is maintained perennially is the song associated with the float of Peppe Nappa (Cf. Ch.1), which is burned down in the main square at the end of the festival while the music plays. The re-enactment of Carnival of Sciacca in the North End is the only moment in the whole feast when it is possible to hear one of the soundmarks and see one of the most prominent icons of the Sicilian village. But the rest of the community shows a certain unfamiliarity with this new element of the

²⁵ Jennifer Caputo (2002) and Augusto Ferraiuolo (2006) mention "Vitti 'na crozza" (I saw a skull), a Sicilian folk song among those played by the marching bands during the Italian festivals in the North End. I have not observed any marching band playing this song during my field research. Perhaps the song is used by other societies of saints, and this would draw further interesting scenarios; or the song was removed from the repertoire.

²⁶ I use the word "mythic" instead of "idealized" for the following reasons: 1) the Sicilian village works as a myth of origin, allowing the Italian-American community to display their identity symbolically; 2) because of the different position that the two terms have regarding religious practices: "mythic" refers to a religious dimension which is absent in "idealized." The words "mythic" and "idealized" occupy "a different cultural space" (Buttitta 1996), and have a different phenomenology. I think the former is more appropriate for this analysis.

Feast, to which they don't pay too much attention. At the end of the parade, the announcers cannot remember the name of the mask, provoking the mirth of the audience near the stage area with his several attempts to pronounce correctly "Peppe Nappa."

This is another hint of how the descendants of the Sciacca fishermen now frame the village of Sciacca within a larger, national Italian background. The use of music in the past decades had an essential role in smoothing the borders between the village and the nation. Now, the community articulates at various times the Italian, Italian-American, and American identities, but I hesitate to suggest that they are displaying a local identity. Perhaps, this might develop in the coming years if attempts like those of Pascal gain more credibility within the community, and if the community feels the necessity to rejoin the village. Seeds may have been planted for this in February 2014, when an Italian-American delegation traveled to Sciacca to celebrate the Madonna del Soccorso together with the people of Sciacca, and brought along the statue of the Virgin.

How does it sound elsewhere?

The uniqueness of the Fisherman's Feast is given by the simultaneous presence of four elements which interact strongly among them: the statue of the Virgin, the place, the community, and the sounds that are used to celebrate the Madonna. The modifications or alterations of even one of these elements would lead to a complete different celebration. When the fishermen's descendants went to Sciacca to celebrate their Madonna, we cannot say they were celebrating the Fisherman's Feast, even if they finally were in the place they evoked for decades. The use of music within the Fisherman's Feast shaped for the community a different place, an *elsewhere* that can be assimilated to a mosaic inspired by sounds we discussed earlier. Music triggered a process that provided a "means to recognize identities and places" (Stokes 1994: 5). Through the

sounds selected during the last century, the fishermen were able to transform the space of the neighborhood into a place—in other words, to define their identity as Italian immigrants.

The early fishermen used the feast to escape their oppression by the capitalistic system transfiguring their tension toward the mythic village in Sicily into a tension to go outside the neighborhood. Their descendants are still using the Feast to escape from the same exploitation and from the everyday routine, but now their goal is a return to an altogether different *elsewhere*: the neighborhood. What was once in Sicily has now moved to the North End. The mythic Sicilian village of Sciacca is now much more accessible than it was at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the mythic North End began to take shape. It only takes about nine hours by plane to get Sicily, and the fares are now affordable to the community members who, for the most part, have been upwardly mobile and are not enduring the same hardships of their ancestors. A place that is easy to achieve can't be mythic. Sciacca lost its mythic characteristic because the ritual enacted by the fishermen worked well and the community emancipated itself. The North End, on the other hand, evokes the equally mythic time and condition of the first settlers, which can be only imagined. The myth, therefore, is used as a container to represent an imagined Sicily, Italy, as well as America through music.

Within the transformative aspects enacted by the fishermen's sounds, the North End became a trans-national and meta-historical space, creating what Patricia Clavin defined as "honeycombs, a structure that sustains and gives shapes to the identities of nation-states, international and local institutions, and particular social and geographic spaces" (2005: 438–439). Moreover, according to Clavin, "for a transnational community to survive, its boundaries must remain open, porous, revisable and interactive" (ibid.). The descendants of

the early fishermen are still involved into an open process of understanding and negotiating their condition of being Italian-American. Continuity is assured by elements like the neighborhood, the statue of the Madonna, the Grand Procession, the Annual Blessing of the Fishing Waters, etc., to identify the ritual as unique. The discontinuity that is due to the feast's fickle soundscape, is essential to assure the survival of the ritual and the community. The fishermen built a multi-layered soundscape, where each passage created interaction with one or more of the identities displayed by the community in relation to the neighborhood. For instance, the ten-hour procession and the multiple crossings of Hanover street are magnificent re-enactments of a strategy of appropriation of the neighborhood, which assumes a meta-historical depth. At the same time, it is an attempt to broaden the knowledge of both the country of origin, Italy, and the Italian-Americanness through repetition.

At the end of my field research, when I said goodbye to Therese, she asked me a question that others had asked during the past seven days: "Are we close?" She meant: "Are we close to what happens in Sicily?" I mumbled something, but I didn't have a good answer to this good question. Later that night, I kept recalling that last conversation, I realized that was not a question but an answer to all of the questions I had asked during my time in the field. I suddenly remembered that other members of the community had tried to flip their role from interviewee to interviewer by asking me about Sicily, and probing my thoughts about the authenticity of their feast, thereby switching my position from outsider to insider. They needed to know "how close they were" to have a measure of the trip they were pursuing, and to adjust their route.

The sounds used in the American version of the Fisherman's Feast indeed generate an asymptotic model, "a progressive and never concluded approach to the homeland" (Meschiari 2006). Something is always missed in this representation, and this something is

imagined, mythologized. It does not matter where this something is localized, if in Sicily or in the North End. The sound stratification of the feast witnesses the various phases of the identity process enacted by the fishermen and their descendants. The soundscape they had been selecting brings out how they built their vision of the world as it should be, in opposition to the world as it is. Because of the importance of music in the process of community building, the Sicilian community in the North End is to be considered as a musical community, specifically of the type defined by Kay Shelemay as descendant community, where music “music moves beyond a role as symbol literally to perform the identity in question and serves early on in the process of community formation to establish, maintain, and reinforce that collective identity.” (2011: 17)

In a cross-disciplinary perspective, it can not be ignored that the music and sounds used by the fishermen are constantly informed and inspired by geographical factors, and vice versa. Music helped and still helps the community in the North End to understand the several places with which it has been involved, whether they be real or imagined. Matteo Meschiari talks about the important role of geography on the cognitive processes in his article appeared in his blog *Pleistocity*, affirming that:

Now, the unknown land [...] has moved to different areas of the solar system, or even far beyond, in some interstellar short-circuit. But, if we go back to the here and now, if we lay a map on our kitchen table, something irreducible happens: there are deep gaps between a slope and a ridge, between a green that indicates woods and a blue that indicates a lake. (Meschiari 2016; translation mine)

Within a microcosm like the Fisherman’s Feast, it is possible to find an *elsewhere*, and the use of music highlights the tension toward this elsewhere. The long and cathartic route covered by the carriers through mortification of the body, while they are marching following the rhythm of a swing version of “O sole mio,” is one of the attempts to get to this elsewhere. That should not be

confused with Christian Heaven, the elsewhere of the Sicilian carriers. The space of the North End, in which descendants of the fishermen of old are still acting today, will remain always a new space, where there will always be some gaps to fill, new elsewheres that need to be discovered year after year, even though it is been more than a century from the first celebration.

When the Grand Procession arrives on Moon Street, on Sunday night, the *festa* is almost at its end. The statue of the Madonna, completely covered in money, looms above the crowd, which is noisy and excited for the long-awaited flight of the angel. Graffeo offered to host me on the balcony where he had connected the young Angelina Palazzolo to a thick steel cable to “fly” over the Madonna (Fig. 7).



Figure 7 - The flight of the angel (photograph by the author)

The flight of the angel is a pantomime where three very young girls talk to the Madonna in Italian, performing a suggestive melodic shape, which can be traced back to the pathogenic melodies described by Curt Sachs as “descending melodies [which] recall savage shouts of joy or rage and may have come from such unbridled outburst.” (Sachs 1944: 41) It is a type of sound articulation that conveys pathos, emotion, and solemnity. The two side angels begin this last

ceremony standing on second-floor balconies of two different buildings opposite each other, on either two side of Moon Street. They talk to the Madonna in an alternating pattern and give her thanks for her protection. Then, the third angel reaches the statue from an even higher balcony, suspended over the crowd, and begins to talk to and praise the Madonna. The flying angel concludes her speech with the exaltation of the descendants from Sciacca, the “Società Marittima” (Shipping Society), and the Madonna del Soccorso, thus renewing the bond between the Madonna and the community. The crowd attends in a surrealistic silence, until it joins the flying angel in pronouncing the final sentence “Viva Maria Madre del Soccorso” (Hail Mary, Mother of Help). The marching band starts playing once more the “Marcia reale,” while the touched crowd breaks into vigorous applause. The alliance between the community, the Madonna, and the neighborhood has been restored.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I investigate the soundscape of the Fisherman's Feast in Boston's North End. I argue that the music and sounds selected to celebrate the Madonna del Soccorso work as a cognitive model for the Sicilian community. Through their sounds, the Sicilian settlers not only negotiate their identity in the U.S., but they build a new sense of Italianness. At the same time, those sounds are the key to accessing both the various phases of the Sicilian settlement in the North End, and the process used by the community to domesticate the neighborhood to make it habitable. In order to analyze the role of sounds within the Fisherman's Feast and the complex symbolic system they underpin, I classify them into nine specific categories based on their function or nature. This results in a multi-layered soundscape that allows me to highlight the symbolic shift that has occurred within the Fisherman's Feast over the years, and how the necessities of the community have changed. The early fishermen selected their sounds in order to rejoin their village in Sicily, to build an imagined Italy, as well as to emancipate themselves from capitalist labor exploitation and ethnic marginalization. Moreover, my investigation into the use of fascist music allows me also to trace the shift of the Fisherman's Feast toward ideology and how the community has reframed its identity according a new concept of Italianness. The third and fourth generation Italian-Americans have re-functionalized the rituality and the sounds connected to the Madonna in order to achieve a different goal: to escape the heaviness of everyday life, the same life of which their ancestors dreamed, to reclaim the utopian space of the North End,

where everything began.

Although this investigation requires further research, the findings contained in this thesis demonstrate the great potential for this type of analysis to investigate Italian-American communities. They are a source of encouragement to extend this research to the other societies of saints in Boston's North End, in order to achieve a broader contextualization of the Italian settlement in that area. The study of the soundscapes related to the Italian festivals in the U.S. may provide a powerful tool to investigate Italian immigration in a cross-disciplinary perspective, to highlight and understand those processes connected with the Italian diaspora that haven't emerged yet.

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