

**MY HEART SINGS TO ME:  
Song as the Memory of Language in the Arbëresh Community of Chieuti**

**Sara Jane Bell**

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at  
Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in the Curriculum in Folklore.

Chapel Hill  
2011

Approved by:

Dr. Robert Cantwell (Chair)

Dr. William Ferris

Dr. Louise Meintjes

Dr. Patricia Sawin

## ABSTRACT

SARA JANE BELL: *My Heart Sings to Me: Song as the Memory of Language in the Arbëresh Community of Chieti*

(Under the Direction of Robert Cantwell, Chair; William Ferris; Louise Meintjes; and Patricia Sawin)

For the people of Chieti who grew up speaking the Albanian dialect that the inhabitants of their Arbëresh town in the Italian province of Puglia have spoken for more than five centuries, the rapid decline of their mother tongue is a loss that is sorely felt. Musicians and cultural activists labor to negotiate new strategies for maintaining connections to their unique heritage and impart their traditions to young people who are raised speaking Italian in an increasingly interconnected world. As they perform, they are able to act out collective narratives of longing and belonging, history, nostalgia, and sense of place. Using the traditional song “Rine Rine” as a point of departure, this thesis examines how songs transmit linguistic and cultural markers of Arbëresh identity and serve to illuminate Chieti’s position as a community poised in the moment of language shift.

*For my grandfather, Vincenzo Antonio Belpulso*

*and for the children of Chieuti, at home and abroad, who carry on.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is the realization of a long overdue dream, and I have so many people to thank.

First of all I thank my mother, for taking care of things.

Every one of my brilliant professors at the University of North Carolina and at Duke University fostered this work. Thank you especially to Bob Cantwell, Bill and Marcie Ferris, Patricia Sawin, Glenn Hinson, Louise Meintjes, and Roberto Dainotto for inspiration and encouragement.

I am most grateful to the D.K. Wilgus Fellowship in Comparative Ballad and Folksong Study and to the Foreign Language Area Studies (FLAS) Program of the U. S. Department of Education for fellowships that made this research possible.

The unfailingly cool and dedicated teachers at the Babilonia Scuola di Italiano in Taormina, Sicily made becoming a reasonably functional Italian speaker like a holiday. Were it not for them, and my pals and fellow students, I would not have had the confidence to take the long train ride to Puglia and begin asking questions.

I must also thank Janet House for her devotion to connecting the Chieuti diaspora. Through the magic of the internet she introduced me to Antonio De Lillis, who told me I should look for Angela Dell'Aquila, which led me to Professor Salvatore Villani, who runs the *Centro Studi di Tradizioni Popolare del Gargano e della Capitanata* and who presented me to his friends in Chieuti. He is a great musician, a stellar tour guide, and a truly generous host.

Finally, I wish to express my gratitude and love to all the Chieutini who opened their doors and hearts to me, invited me to sit at their tables and learn their songs, and shared their amazing stories. I sincerely hope I got them right. Especially to Angela Dell'Aquila and Donato Meola, his wife Virginia and their children Francesco and Lia Meola, Mario Massaro and his wife Nina Floria, and Giorgio and Maria Dell'Aquila, *il mio cuore è pieno di gratitudine, amicizia, ed amore.*

*Gja hora juòj në nëg isht mangu një! Të haristisinj.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	PRELUDE: “Rine Rine” .....	1
II.	INTRODUCTION: Il Gruppo Arbëresh di Chieti.....	5
III.	CHAPTER ONE:	
	<i>Cë hajdhi kan ata male?</i> – Symbolism in “Rine Rine” .....	7
	<i>Qift</i> – Chieti.....	10
	<i>Madre Chiesa</i> – Orthodoxy as a marker for language loss .....	13
	<i>La televisione</i> – Modernity comes to the South.....	22
	<i>Il vino in un bicchiere</i> – Inviting <i>latini</i> into a closed community .....	28
	<i>Lingua Madre</i> – The mother tongue .....	33
	<i>Fuori</i> – Venturing outside .....	37
	“Nessuno ci ha insegnato la lingua arbëreshe” –	
	“Unfortunately no one taught the Arbëresh language to us” .....	42
IV.	CHAPTER TWO:	
	“Per la diffusione e la salvaguardia della cultura Arbëreshe” –	
	Performing identity as part of the revival movement .....	51
	<i>Si të le u më ngë të pe!</i> – Since I left you no longer do I see you.....	63

	<i>“La capacità dei bambini”</i> – Teaching songs to children .....	68
	Ethnomimesis .....	71
V.	CHAPTER THREE:	
	The Poetics of song .....	79
	Creating a literary language.....	80
	<i>“Ostrenenie”</i> – Making strange In order to carry on .....	85
	<i>“La Voce Prodiga”</i> – The essence of language in voice.....	91
VI.	IN CONCLUSION	
	<i>“Lo Spirito Ricorda”</i> – “The spirit remembers” .....	97
	Chances for language revival.....	99
	<i>“Non si perde tutto, si evolve”</i> – “Everything isn’t lost, it is evolving” .....	101
VII.	CODA .....	108
VIII.	APPENDIX.....	110
IX.	BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	114

## PRELUDE

### “Rine Rine”<sup>1</sup>

*Rine Rine, te ku vajte? Luljo...?*

“Rina, Rina, where did you go? Flower...?” The mother calls out to her daughter. She was waiting, anxious, stirring in anticipation every time she sensed someone approaching the door.

*Luljo lulejza jime*

*zëmbëra moj, zëmbëra*

*me këndon*

The chorus joins her as she cannot hide her relief: “Flower, dear little flower/ My heart, oh, my heart sings to me.”

---

<sup>1</sup> For a full text of the song “Rine Rine” and other Arbëresh songs, including translations into Italian and English, please see the Appendix at the end of this paper.

*Mëma jime, vajta për ujë, Luljo...*

“Mother of mine, I went for water, Flower...” her daughter responds, innocently, returning her mother’s affectionate sobriquet, and the chorus again joins in the refrain, “Flower, dear little flower/ My heart, oh, my heart sings to me.”

*Bija jime ujët te ku ishtë? Luljo...?*

“Daughter of mine, but where is the water? Flower...?” Her mother inquires, for she sees that Rine is empty handed. Still, the chorus chimes in to complete the repeated refrain; not to judge, but to remind Rine of her mother’s love: “Flower, dear little flower/ My heart, oh, my heart sings to me.”

*Mëma jime m’u ça vuca. Luljo...*

“Mother of mine,” comes Rine’s tentative response, “the cask broke....” Poor Rine. But her mother continues to probe. “Where,” she wants to know, “is this water spill?” She is becoming suspicious. Rine fabricates an answer to each of these increasingly wary questions as she attempts to throw her mother off the trail. “The spill was dried up by the sun,” she lies.

*Bija jime, dielli te ku ishte? Luljo...*

Rine's mother looks up at the overcast sky, as her cautious mistrust turns to anger. "Daughter of mine, where is the sun?" "The sun was taken by the cloud," Rine offers, "The cloud was taken by the mountain..."

By now Rine's mother knows the truth: her daughter is trying to mask an illicit tryst with her paramour. Still, she continues to enact the charade, adopting Rine's coded language. She allows herself to be spellbound by her daughter's tale, accepting that the mountain cannot be obscured. She demands that Rine explain the mountain's allure:

*Cë hajdhi kan ata male?*

"What charms have these mountains?" Now the mother's voice is joined by a chorus. It seems that everyone wants to know what powerful force enticed Rine so far from her mother's love. Rine's response invites the chorus to join her as well:

*Kan mollazit të kuq  
si ka faqën vajza*

*kan ullinjazit tëzeza*  
*Si ka sut të zeza vajza*

Rine describes the magnetism of the “mountain,” drawing out each line with the help of the chorus. Her mother joins along, as they can all understand the magic in its charms: red apples like a girl’s red cheeks, black olives like a girl’s dark eyes; who could resist such erotic, sensual delights? Thus Rine’s tale closes, not quite resolved. Each is the other’s dear little flower, unable to tune out the singing of her hearts.



## INTRODUCTION

### **Il Gruppo Arbëresh di Chieuti**

“Rine Rine” is a song in the repertoire of the Gruppo Arbëresh di Chieuti, a collective of musicians dedicated to performing music in the Albanian language of their ancestors, which many of them spoke as the mode of daily discourse in their Arbëresh town until the 1950s when Italian established itself as the dominant language there. They have culled their songs from villages that comprise the archipelago of ethnically Albanian communities fanning across southern Italy from Molise to Sicily. They also perform songs that were collected in Albania and in Arbëresh settlements in the former Yugoslavia, but “Rine Rine” is the only one that is identified by the group as having roots in their town of Chieuti. As a conversation between a mother and a daughter who has been tempted away from home by the attentions of her suitor, the song contains a rich collection of linguistic, musical, and symbolic motifs which serve to illustrate Chieuti’s position as a community poised in the moment of language shift.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> The word *Arbëreshë* refers to the group of people who fled Albania in the fifteenth century and settled in Italy, as well as those who identify as their descendents. It is the masculine plural form of the noun used to describe the people of *Arbëria*, which was the medieval name for one of the first Albanian states. Adjectives in the Arbëresh language have masculine and feminine

On an allegorical level “Rine Rine” operates as a parable for the yearnings that divide generations, and highlights the vast rift that separates Chieuti’s young Italian speakers from their Arbëresh-speaking parents. Discursive elements at play in the song’s poetic language allow it to act out collective narratives of longing and belonging, history, nostalgia, and sense of place that may be revisited and reasserted each time the song is performed. Finally, there is structural significance in the way that the stylized language of song encodes and encapsulates its distinctive linguistic and cultural character, which, for a language that is threatened by obsolescence, is of enormous value to its speakers and those members of the community who relate to it only as a vestige of the past. Through a tripartite exploration of the tale of Rine and her mother, supported by the voices of those who sing it, this thesis will examine how songs transmit the linguistic and cultural markers of Arbëresh identity, allowing the inhabitants of this small Italian town to maintain a connection to their unique Albanian ancestry even as they struggle to accept the rapidly declining use of their mother tongue.

---

forms, as well as singular and plural forms. For the purpose of writing in English *Arbëreshë* will refer to Italo-Albanians as a group and *Arbëresh*, the masculine singular noun and adjective, will signify the name of the language and modify all singular and plural nouns.

## CHAPTER ONE

### *Cë hajdhi kan ata male?—What charms have these mountains?* Symbolism in “Rine Rine”

In a recording the Gruppo Arbëresh made in 1981, “Rine Rine” begins at a rollicking 6/8 clip, the downbeat steadied by the bass notes of a guitar while a homemade *tammër*—a reproduction of a traditional four-stringed Albanian instrument similar to a mandolin—and a *lautë*—another traditional Balkan stringed instrument related to the lute—vamp in anticipation for three-and-a-half measures. Halfway through the fourth Rine’s mother, unable to wait, calls out with admonishing relief to her wayward daughter. The piquant strains of a flute flutter about in a register above Rine’s voice when she responds, like a bird, or a bee, a familiar who has danced alongside and protected her on her adventure. Her mother’s voice is also accompanied by a flute, but it occupies a deeper space, wiser and more weighty as it watches carefully from its dim corner of the house. It anchors her cascading melody line before it is released into the crowd of chorus voices, eventually celebrating the charms of the mountain along with them as the song retards, the flute’s plaintive warble the last voice to trail away.

It is easy to imagine Rine's mother staying close to home, tending to the hearth and managing the family's affairs. In the poetics I have assigned to "Rine Rine" she stands for the five-hundred-year-old Arbëresh tradition in southern Italy, which was tended by a rugged community of pioneers who protected their enclaved societies from the intrusion of outsiders inasmuch as it was possible. In the Gruppo Arbëresh's recording of this song she is given voice by Angela Dell'Aquila, a retired schoolteacher and singer in Chieti who devoted much of her career to teaching Arbëresh songs, stories, and dances to her young students, ensuring that they would not be forgotten as the encroaching tempest of modern development swept through the town, threatening to wash it away. The part of Rine is sung by a young girl, Raffaella Tammaro, who represents the generations of Chieutini—denizens of Chieti—who speak Italian at home instead of Albanian. Behind them a chorus of singers and musicians support Rine and her mother as they play out their dialectic, siding now with Rine, now with her mother, finding value in the story each has to tell. They harmonize with the instruments and with each other. As a symbol of the community, they are there to make sure that the two women—as well as those of us in the audience—do not forget that this particular struggle between tradition and modernity is experienced by everyone in the village.

Among the musicians who make up the chorus are founding members Donato Meola and Giorgio Ruberto. Ruberto, a former mayor of Chieuti and the leader of the group, was a powerful force in the town's civic life and a diligent advocate for the conservation of its traditions. Sadly, he was killed in an automobile accident in 2008, two years before I traveled to this quiet seaside town in the summer of 2010 to investigate whether there was anyone who still played the songs that my great-grandfather played before he left his life of tending sheep a century ago to board a ship for America at the age of fifteen. Through a series of chances that can only be attributed to providence I found myself one scorching July afternoon at Chieuti's tiny train depot, Donato and his wife Virginia greeting me with arms outstretched, having no qualms about ushering a strange, dusty American into their home as family. With the Meolas, and later as a guest in Angela's home and at the table of professor and former mayor Mario Massaro and his wife Nina Florio, I was introduced to the songs, stories, personalities, places, and history of this community. I absorbed this information as much as I could in the time I had to spend among them.<sup>3</sup> Each is

---

<sup>3</sup> I spent three weeks in Chieuti and in the nearby town of Rignano Garganico as a guest of Professor Salvatore Villani, who runs the *Centro Studi di Tradizioni Popolare del Gargano e della Capitanata* (Center for the Study of the Folk Traditions of Gargano and Capitanata) in July 2010. I returned to Chieuti for two weeks in March 2011. I am most grateful to the D.K. Wilgus Fellowship in Comparative Ballad and Folksong Study and to the Foreign Language Area Studies (FLAS) Program of the U. S. Department of Education for fellowships that made this research possible.

a passionate and authoritative source of knowledge on the life of their town and on the experience of having dual identity as Italians and Arbëreshë. The more they spoke the clearer it became that they, as among a shrinking population of Arbëresh speakers in Chieuti, are the only ones who can tell the history of their community in its own language. They are living this very unique shift in the history of their town, and I use their words to tell their story here.

### *Qift—Chieuti*

Angela Dell’Aquila rises early to prepare a simple breakfast of espresso, cookies, jam, and fresh peaches. She watches a little bit of the morning news on television while she eats, washes the dishes, and sets out to do the day’s shopping. Her tidy apartment sits at the northernmost edge of Chieuti, in a 1970s-era structure whose modernity stands in contrast to the cluster of medieval buildings that line the cobblestone streets in the center of town. She heads up Via Sandro Pertini, past an ancient olive orchard whose trees are filled with new fruit, their silver leaves singing in the Adriatic breeze. The sea is just visible nine kilometers down the hill behind her, and it helps to cool an already stifling July morning.

Angela is nearing seventy, but her spritely movements and sparkling eyes disguise her age. Neighbors in this small town of nearly eighteen hundred souls

greet her as they pass. She stops to chat with everyone, giving particularly warm attention to the children. She knows them all, for she has had a hand in raising many of the children who entered school since the early 1970s. It is clear from the way they return her warm greetings that they adore her.

Angela was born in 1943 and, like Donato, Mario, Nina, and Giorgio Ruberto, was raised in a home where only Arbëresh was spoken. She learned standard Italian and the local dialect in school and in daily dealings with surrounding villages, but back then the people of Chieuti spoke to one another in the Albanian dialects of their ancestors. Chieuti is situated in the northeastern corner of Puglia, the region that comprises the heel of Italy's geographic boot. It was settled by Albanian exiles in the fifteenth century, and has been continuously inhabited by their descendants. Along with the towns of Casalvecchio, Campomarino, Montecilfone, Portocannone, and Ururi, it is part of a constellation of Arbëreshë villages that cluster within a twenty-five mile range of one another in southern Molise and Northern Puglia, a region that was historically known as Capitanata.

Though it is difficult to date the precise origins of the town, Chieuti was settled near the ruins of the ancient town of Pleuti sometime between 1460 and 1470 by recently arrived Albanians who were fleeing the Ottoman invasion of their native country. They named it *Qifti*, the Arbëresh word for 'hawk.' They

were offered refuge in Italy as a result of the valor Albanian soldiers had exhibited assisting their leader Giorgio Castriota Skanderbeg put down rebellions in Puglia. Skanderbeg was the heroic Albanian prince who had fought courageously against the Turks and cultivated a comfortable alliance with the Kings of Naples. The people of Chieuti adopted San Giorgio as their patron in his honor, and named their church for him. Though they did not always enjoy a peaceful coexistence with local populations, their valiant history as soldiers fighting on behalf of their adopted homeland was a strong source of pride and made them feel they were entitled to share this land.<sup>4</sup> For centuries they farmed the countryside, growing olives and wheat, tending sheep and goats, producing olive oil and wine, and raising their families on the fruits of their labor. For five centuries their connection to these ancestors was powerfully expressed in their shared Albanian language, the mother tongue that they tenaciously maintained

---

<sup>4</sup> Histories of the founding of Chieuti are found in Maria Teresa Massaro, , "L'Identità Etnica nella Comunità Arbëreshe di Chieuti," (Tesi di Laurea, Università degli Studi di Palermo, 2006), 10-17, and in the article "Chieuti cenni storici," published in a pamphlet for the Festa Patronale di "San Giorgio Martire" in 2010 by the Parrocchia di San Giorgio Martire, Chieuti's church. Massaro relies heavily on the research her father Mario Massaro conducted for his doctoral dissertation, "Chieuti colonia italo-albanese" (Università degli Studi "Carlo Bo," Urbino, 1968). According to Maria Teresa Massaro, "Grande ruolo ha svolto nella salvaguardia dell'identità la costruzione ed il rafforzamento del mito arbëresh. Per sostenere i continui attacchi, denigrazioni, pregiudizi della gente del posto, gli albanesi profughi arrivati in Italia senza nient'altro che la loro vita, per sostenere l'identità collettiva ma anche individuale hanno dovuto rendere mitica la propria storia, eroi i propri condottieri, nobili le loro radici, alte le cause della loro migrazione. Questa storia-mito ancora conosciuta e condivisa da gran parte della popolazione di Chieuti è alla base delle dichiarazioni di fierezza ed orgoglio che gli intervistati hanno fatto sulla propria *arbëreshità*." (41)

despite the natural flow and flux of outside influences from the larger Italian culture that had always surrounded them.

### *Madre Chiesa—Orthodoxy as a marker for language loss*

Whatever its origins, “Rine Rine” is remembered as a ritual song that was performed by members of the community to signal the end of the spring festival called *Vallje*. According to Donato,

“Rine Rine” was done for the *Vallje*. The last day of the festival culminated in singing this song in Chieuti. There were two groups of people, you had to have two groups, the two groups would make their way to the front of our “mother” church, there in the little square. One group would come from the south gate, from the old part of town, and the other from north gate, and they would sing. One group represented the mother and the other represented the daughter. So singing, singing the mother would ask the questions and the daughter would respond, like that. Little by little they would get closer together. And when the song was finished everyone would be given gifts of wine and sweets, wine and sweets for the whole festival, you would celebrate there in front of the church. The whole community would come out in front of the mother church to celebrate in those days.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> “È in un’occasione fatto per la *Vallje*, comme in questi giorni qua. È proprio come domani [l’ultima girorno della festa di *Carnevale*], perché è l’ultimo giorno della festa, il culminato della *Vallje* si cantava a Chieuti, questa canzone, ci sono stati, c’erano due gruppi delle persone, si devi avere due gruppi delle persone, una davanti alla chiesa, alla chiesa madre nostra, la piazzeta là...non, davanti la chiesa si arrivano le due gruppi. Una gruppa viene dall’una porta sud, dal paese vecchio, e una dalla porta nord. E cantavano, uno gruppo che rappresentavano la mamma, e l’altro che rappresentavano la figlia. Quindi cantando cantando la mamma faceva una domanda e la figlia rispondeva, e così. Piano piano più vicino insieme... E quando è finito la canzone c’è il regalo del vino, i dolci e il vino per tutti alla festa, si fa festeggiato, e faceva e la festa davanti la chiesa, in tutta la comunità si veniva davanti la chiesa madre a l’epoca.” (Conversation with Donato Meola, March 5, 2011).

This ritual was always performed in front of the *madre chiesa* or “mother church,” the site of the church where the *rito ortodosso* was last performed.

Donato continues:

The ritual vanished at least a century ago. The ritual was performed for the so-called *Vallje* (the dance of spring), and only for this occasion. Probably it was one of the songs with a related ritual dance that was celebrated during the festivals that coincided with the coming of a new season, so spring was celebrated not only in the Albanian-speaking communities, but also in many of the other Old World cultures. You see how [Stravinsky's] *The Rite of Spring* is a dance with two big parts, “*The Adoration of the Earth*” and “*The Exalted Sacrifice*.” So traditionally I think that “Rine Rine” came to be sung only for this occasion, alternating with other kinds of carols, lyric tunes and allegorical songs with a similar feel to “Rine Rine,” and other songs and dances that could create a cheerful atmosphere.<sup>6</sup>

Reference to the *madre chiesa* and the Orthodox rite signifies another important facet of Arbëreshë identity, one that is linked closely in the hearts and minds of the Chieutini to their recent experience of language loss. Unwillingness

---

<sup>6</sup> “Per quanto riguarda il canto Rine Rine, io credo che questo rituale sia scomparso da almeno un secolo e non da venti anni. Il rituale era rappresentato in occasione delle così dette VALLJE (le danze di primavera), e solo in questa occasione. Probabilmente era uno dei canti con il relativo rituale di danze che si celebravano proprio in occasione di queste feste che coincidevano con l'avvento della nuova stagione, cioè la primavera ed era comune non solo nelle comunità albanofone ma credo in molte altre civiltà del vecchio continente; Vedi: *La Sagra della primavera* è un balletto in due grandi parti: “L'adorazione della terra” e “Il sacrificio”. “Quindi tradizionalmente io credo che “Rine Rine” venisse cantata solo in questa occasione alternandola con altri canti tipo filastrocche, stornelli e canti allegorici dal significato analogo a Rine Rine, ed altri canti e danze che potessero creare un certo clima di allegria.” Meola goes on to suggest that this ritual warrants further investigation: “In ogni modo credo che non sarebbe superfluo approfondire l'argomento con un adeguato studio antropologico.” (Email communication with Donato Meola, April 19, 2011).

to endure enforced conversion to Islam by the Ottoman invaders in the fifteenth century led many of the first Albanian exiles to flee, and for today's Arbëreshë such devotion to their Orthodox religion is another source of pride, recognized as a powerful indicator of the fortitude of their ancestors. For many years the Catholic Church tolerated their presence and instructed local bishops to administer rites to those under their jurisdiction. Orthodoxy—referred to by Arbëreshë alternately as *rito greco*, *rito ortodosso*, *rito bizantino*, and *rito di Costantinopoli*—linked them spiritually and physically with their ancestral homeland, as their churches continued to be recognized and served by the Orthodox Patriarchy in Constantinople.<sup>7</sup>

Donato refers to the oft-cited Arbëresh propensity for hard headedness as a reason for their tenacity in holding on to their Orthodox faith for so long, and notes that Chieuti remained Orthodox for longer than the other regional Arbëresh towns as a result of their famous obstinance.<sup>8</sup> When asked how people in Chieuti reacted to the rapid shift away from the use of their language in the

---

<sup>7</sup> For more detailed descriptions of the history of Orthodoxy in Chieuti and Molise, see Carmela Perta, *Language Decline and Death in Three Arbëresh Communities in Italy: A Sociolinguistic Study* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2004) and Maria Teresa Massaro, (14-17).

<sup>8</sup> "Chieuti rimanava ortodosso per tanti anni, a causa della "testa dura." (Conversation with Donato Meola, March 5, 2011). This assertion is supported by historians and was researched extensively by Mario Massaro for his doctoral thesis (Maria Teresa Massaro, 16). It is also referenced in Parrocchia di San Giorgio Martire-Chieuti, "Chieuti: cenni storici." Other words Chieutini use to describe the enduring qualities of the Albanian exiles include *testardo* (headstrong), *cocciuto* (stubborn), and *ostinato* (obstinate).

1950s, Angela relates the story of Chieuti's enforced conversion to Catholicism.

Her evocative narrative reveals how manifestations of authority eroded the strong sense of Arbëresh pride and identity:

The history that is written in books, it is written by the victors, not by the defeated, but by the winners. And you don't have a voice, because you didn't win. It is like the church, it was already put down. The church that we had—the church with two naves and an aisle—was the Orthodox church, of the Orthodox rite. It was supported by the *latini*, by the outsiders. But then it became different.

So the (Catholic) church already said, however, we didn't have a place to pray, so it gave us a place in their church—of course! The Orthodox rite, the Greek Orthodox rite, it was under the authority of the Byzantine church. [But they said,] "You are in the Roman church, so you are Catholic." So little by little they came, at first they were hospitable and considerate, but later [our ancestors] went from being the master to being the stable boy, the servant. "You have to go outside because today I am in command." That's how it happened with our church.

The church's representatives, the district bishop, and those that were under him, the people he commanded... there is another proverb [she recites the proverb in Arbëreshë and then translates into Italian]: "You went like a crumb, like chaff, everything is closed, and then you will go and repent." As if it were your own house. So the landowners became nothing. That's how it was.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> "Sara, Sara, la storia è scritto sui libri, viene scritto dai vincitori. Non da chi è sconfitti, ma dai vinto. E quindi, quello che dici tu, non hai voce, perché tu non hai vinto. È come la chiesa, che già ha messe sotto. La chiesa avevamo noi, la chiesa con tre navate, ortodosso, del rito ortodosso, è sostenuti i latini, i forestieri, il forestiero chi è quello che.... gira un diverso. Quindi la chiesa già avevo detto, siccome noi non abbiamo un posto per priegare, ci ha dato un posto in chiesa—certo! Il rito ortodosso, il rito Greco ortodosso. Ci vuole dovete più dipendere da bizantino. Voi siete dalla chiesa romana, quindi siete cattolici, allora piano piano sono entrati, come si dicce, prima con ospitalità e con delicatezza, e dopo tu da i padroni sei diventato garzoni, ciò è, servitore. Devi uscire fuori perché oggi comando io, così ha fatto la chiesa come noi. I suoi rappresentativi, il vescovo, quindi comprensorio, e quello che aveva le suoi, le sue persone che comandavano. E un altro proverbio dicce: [parla in Arbëresh],

Angela uses of the loss of the Orthodox religion as a parable for the loss of language. She refers to the decision by Giovanni Andrea Tria, the Bishop of Larino, to suppress the Byzantine church in Chieuti in 1726, asserting that the town's population growth and the settlement of Italian Catholics in the area made it necessary to enforce Catholicism, performing baptisms and marriages in the Latin rite. Still, Chieutini continued to practice their Greek-Orthodox faith "despite difficulties and persecution," performing the last baptism in the Byzantine rite in 1774.<sup>10</sup> Linguist Carmela Pertà describes similar prejudice from the larger Italian community in neighboring Arbëresh towns, particularly in Ururi where homes were burned and people were driven from their original settlement in 1550.<sup>11</sup> An important factor in Chieuti's tenacious hold on their religion was the presence of Papas Nicola Figlia, an Orthodox priest from the Arbëresh town of Mezzojuso in Sicily, who came to serve the population of Chieuti in 1708. In addition to his duties as a cleric, he recorded many local stories and traditions, as well as traditional and liturgical songs. According to Maria Teresa Massaro, who

---

quindi [traduise] 'sei andato come una briciola—come un pula, tutto è chiuso—e poi che se andrai come si pente,' come se forse a casa tua. E quindi dal padrone sono diventati niente, insomma, è così." (Conversation with Angela Dell'Aquila, March 6, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> "...nonostante difficoltà e persecuzioni." Parrocchia di San Giorgio Martire-Chieuti, "Chieuti: cenni storici." See also Maria Teresa Massaro, 15.

<sup>11</sup> Pertà, *Language Decline*, 17-18.

is a professor of psychology in Palermo and conducted an empirical survey of Arbëresh speakers in her hometown of Chieuti for her doctoral dissertation on ethnic identity, “the importance of this manuscript is a testament to the vitality of the cultural exchange that existed within the larger Arbëresh community, and confirms an *awareness of belonging* that is the basis of the durability of [Arbëresh] identity even today.”<sup>12</sup>

It is clear then that by equating the current loss of language with this profound earlier loss of religion the people of Chieuti are expressing how deeply and spiritually they feel its effects. The force of this collective narrative was and is a source of tremendous pride that provides sanctuary in the face of prejudice. Massaro further attributes the persistent hold on the Arbëresh language to the honorable history of Albanian heroism in Italy, which made it possible to maintain a connection to the fallen homeland and a sense of having a right to make their new home in Italy:

It is really the *awareness of belonging* that perpetuates the quest for one’s own identity that relevant historical facts represent. This quest-creation of identity allows the Italo-Albanians to preserve on the one hand strong connections with their roots and on the other hand to face integration without denial, finding in the memory of diaspora justification for their

---

<sup>12</sup> Maria Teresa Massaro, 15. “L’importanza di tale manoscritto nella nostra ricerca è data dalla testimonianza della vivacità degli scambi culturali tra le comunità arbëreshe che confermano quella *consapevolezza dell’appartenenza* che è alla base della solidità della identità tramandata fino ad oggi.” [Italics original]

existence in a land that welcomed them not as illegal aliens or usurers, but as the displaced victors over a common enemy.<sup>13</sup>

The assertion most frequently referred to is the feeling of pride in their own origins, pride of being descended from a people who knew how to defend their own uniqueness and their own ideals with courage and a warrior spirit, honor in being the custodians, recipients and witnesses to high moral and cultural valor.<sup>14</sup>

So the loss of the Orthodox faith among the Arbëreshë dealt a blow to their collective identity, but it did not destroy it. Carmela Perta asserts that it may also have made life somewhat easier, as conversion to Catholicism “opened a new chapter with the ‘latin’ people, who started seeing Arbëresh speakers as less different from themselves.”<sup>15</sup> Augmented relations with Italians—or *latini* (*lëtinj*) as they are known in the local parlance—did not (and does not) have to signify a wholesale abandonment of Arbëreshë identity. Concepts of hybridity as it is used to enhance minority group identity and language shift are supported by David Samuel’s work with Apache musicians in Arizona, in which he

---

<sup>13</sup>Maria Teresa Massaro, 13-14. “Ed è proprio, la *consapevolezza dell’appartenenza*, la continua ricerca della propria identità che rappresenta un fatto storico rilevante. . . Questa ricerca-creazione dell’identità ha consentito agli italo albanesi da un lato di conservare un forte legame con le proprie radici e dall’altro di affrontare una integrazione senza negazione, trovando nel ricordo della diaspora le ragioni del loro esistere in una terra che doveva ospitarli non come clandestini o usurpatori ma come profughi sconfitti dallo stesso nemico.” [Italics original]

<sup>14</sup> Maria Teresa Massaro, , 40. “Le affermazioni più frequenti fanno riferimento al sentimento di fierezza nei confronti delle proprie nobili origini, orgoglio per essere eredi di un popolo che ha saputo difendere le proprie peculiarità e i propri ideali con coraggio e spirito guerriero, onorati di essere custodi, depositari e testimoni di alti valori morali e culturali.”

<sup>15</sup> Perta, *Language Decline*, 18.

emphasizes the uniquely local experience of song in San Carlos.<sup>16</sup> “In an increasingly global world,” he writes, “what distinguishes hybridity as an analytical concept ought to be how it can help us to understand the richness and density of radically local experience.”<sup>17</sup> Likewise, folklorist Amy Shuman argues for localized culture from the platform of performance studies and post-structural models that conceptualize the local as the “site of resistance to dominant culture.” She refers to “larger-than-local” tendencies, which recognize that groups are more heterogeneous than folklore studies had historically allowed. Rather than existing within static, bounded communities, they construct “local boundaries...in order to protect particular positions. Local cultures are not threatened by diversity in general but by particular incursions and competitions for rights.”<sup>18</sup> She advocates for analysis that investigates “the ways in which local boundaries are drawn in order to protect particular positions.”<sup>19</sup>

Reaching beyond the scope of perceived boundaries toward the “larger than local” implies this process of hybridity. One of the striking features of

---

<sup>16</sup> David Samuels, “The Whole and the Sum of the Parts, or, How Cookie and the Cupcakes Told the Story of Apache History in San Carlos,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 112 (1999): 466-469.

<sup>17</sup> Samuels, “The Whole and the Sum of the Parts,” 466.

<sup>18</sup> Amy Shuman, “Dismantling Local Culture,” *Western Folklore* 52 (1993), 345-364.

<sup>19</sup> Shuman, 351.

musical traditions in Chieuti and Arbëresh communities in nearby Molise is that polyphonic choir singing, which is the most studied form of musical expression identified with an Albanian tradition in Italy, is virtually absent. Instead songs are arranged for string bands, a practice which emerges from their proximity to the unique guitar playing and tarantella styles that distinguish the music of the larger region of Capitanata and the Gargano Peninsula. Drawing again on parallels between music and language, Donato describes the hybridity of their regional culture:

It is diverse. We were influenced by many of the traditions of Gargano, that's typical. A little from Molise, the traditions from Molise are very strong. For example, Serracapriola isn't Pugliese, it isn't Molisano, it is a hybrid. This is a border town, it doesn't always stay...the language is a hybrid between Gargano and Molise, so justifiably the music is very influenced by the music of Gargano. The tarantella of Gargano is heard a lot in this area, in the specificity of the way they sing. The rhythm is truly similar. [Donato demonstrates the version of the Arbëresh tune "Cë Bukura Kopile" sung in the old style with a tarantella accompaniment and vocal technique.] In fact, it is really symptomatic of these ties.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> "Si è diverse. Siamo stati sotto l'influenza di molti delle tradizione di Gargano. È normale. Un po' dal Molise, e le tradizione molisane sono molto forte. Per esempio, a Serracapriola non è pugliese, non è molisana, è un ibrido, è un paese di confini, non è sempre sta... è un linguaggio ibrido fra sempre Molise e Gargano ... Quindi giustamente la musica è molto influenzato dalla musica di Gargano. Anche la tarantella del Gargano è sentito molto in questa zona, nella specificità della moda in cui cantono. Veramente, la ritmica è molto similata. Per esempio [suona e canta 'Cë bukura kopilja' di mostrando il ritmo della tarantella su questa canzone arbëreshe] Anzi, è un sintomo, proprio della collegamento." (Conversation with Donato Meola, March 5, 2011)

*“La televisione ha distratto tutti quanti” – “Television distracted everyone”*  
**Modernity comes to the South**

Still, despite coexistence and hybridity, Arbëresh culture has been remarkably resistant to assimilation. Many people attribute the resolute endurance of their ancestral heritage to the fact their society has customarily been very *“chiuso,”* or closed. Indeed, the thick walls and commanding towers that ensconce the tiny enclave of Chieti provide a strong visual indication of its resilience against invasion. Containment would not have been quite as challenging in the first five centuries of its existence, as the pastoral lifestyle of Capitanata changed very little during that time. However, the gale of historical and economic circumstances that tore through Italy in the twentieth century was a force that no measure of fortification could withstand. *Il boom* is the name given to Italy’s “economic miracle,” the period of economic development that followed the ravages of World War II and saw the rapid rise of industry in the northern cities along the Po Valley. For Chieti, as for each of Italy’s southern towns, its effects were dramatic. The region as a whole had suffered centuries of scarcity, overpopulation, hunger, racial discrimination, and a feudal system of landownership that trapped many of its citizens in indentured servitude or subsistence farming. Navigable roads, electricity, and running water were mostly nonexistent in the middle of the twentieth century, and many families shared

their small apartments with their farm animals. All of a sudden houses were being outfitted with refrigerators and radios, and paved roads made it possible to travel to the commercial centers of Foggia and Campobasso in less than a day. Angela recalls how rare it was to travel great distances because of the bother:

The same [trip] would take two and a half hours, it was difficult for us to get to the border of different towns. So to take the train, to take...it used to be such a distance, it was a difficulty, a nuisance.<sup>21</sup>

Hundreds of thousands of young men and families in the south fled their ancestral villages to seek work in the steel mills and automobile manufacturing plants of Milano and Torino, or left to find jobs in Northern Europe. Mario describes how the waves of emigration that swept southern Italy in the first half of the twentieth century impacted their small Arbëresh town:

Until many years ago, before the second (world) war, marriage was possible among the inhabitants of your town or of the other Arbëresh communities—Portocannone, Ururi, Montecilfone, etcetera. Then, on the contrary, no. Then the doors were opened and you could associate with the other communities, and so the young people became more free. And then immigration, immigration and emigration. Many of our Arbëreshë went away to work in America, they went to Europe, to Australia, also to all the other parts, and so there came to be fewer people who spoke

---

<sup>21</sup> “Già lo stesso è proprio due e mezze chi aveva ci spostava la difficoltà nostra stava proprio nelle frontiere dagli altri paese diverse. Quindi prendere il treno, prendere...già la distanza, già era una difficoltà, insomma. Un disagio.” (Conversation with Angela Dell’Aquila, March 11, 2011).

Arbëresh. And also, those who came here busied themselves with finding a wife, and then they went away.<sup>22</sup>

The benefits of such newfound prosperity were estimable, but the shock of change was abrupt. Angela and other members of her generation who were born into households where only Arbëresh was spoken would become trilingual—versed in the regional Pugliese dialect as well as in standard Italian—eventually all but abandoning the daily use of their mother tongue. The Italian language invaded their homes most profoundly in the form of media as young and old listened to Italian pop songs on the radio and watched Italian television programs. By the 1960s, though they might have continued to speak Arbëresh with their families, Italian dialect was the language of daily discourse.

Despite the rapid changes, however, Angela asserts that modernity came “a bit more slowly to us” than it did to the rest of the south of Italy.<sup>23</sup> Though the

---

<sup>22</sup> “È non solo questo che è la prima causa, ma possiamo dire che c’è state anche come dicevi i matrimoni cogli altri che abbiamo avuto. Perche fina a molti anni fa, prima della seconda guerra, i matrimoni si facevano possibilmente degli abiti dal paese o dalle comunità arbëreshe, Portocannone, Ururi, Montecilfone, eccetera. Poi invece non. Poi ci sono stati apperti le porte più si frequenti colle altre comunità, e quindi i giovani sono stati diventati piu liberi. E poi l’immigrazione. L’immigrazione, l’emmigrazione. Molti dei nostri Arbëreshë sono andati via per lavorare in America, sono andati in Europa, in Australia, anche a tutte delle parte. E quindi è venuta meno quella gente che parlavano Arbëresh. E anche, quelli che sono venuti poi a occuparsi qua se a prendere una sposa si è andato via.” (Conversation with Mario Massaro, March 8, 2011).

Arbëreshë were in a “situation of diglossia” with Italian regional dialects before the twentieth century, with Arbëresh being the dominant language in their communities, Carmela Perta supports Angela’s assessment of Chieuti’s resistance to change:

“According to [Philosophy of Language professor D.] Gambarara, Albanian enclaves were only partially involved in the deep changes Italian society underwent. . . However, with the diffusion of mass media, all boundaries which prevented the spread of the Italian language were lowered, particularly those previously imposed by illiteracy. Indeed, since the 1930s with the spread of talking movies the Arbëresh population too was exposed to standard Italian. . . Arbëresh, like any other minority and non-standard language, was perceived by its speakers to be an objective obstacle for realizing their social aspirations, whereas the national language was felt to be an instrument for cultural awareness and social affirmation.”<sup>24</sup>

Everyone I spoke with in Chieuti relates anecdotes of how television and media affected them as they were growing up in the 1950s and 1960s. Angela describes how much she loved to sing and dance as a girl, a predisposition that was fed by variety shows she watched on TV:

Before I was doing theater, I was dancing. Because I wanted to be a dancer! So I had a big room, because our house was quite large. I set up the chairs for the kids in the street, the audience, the spectators, and then

---

<sup>23</sup> La modernita è venuta “un po’ più lento da per forza.” (Conversation with Angela Dell’Aquila, March 11, 2011).

<sup>24</sup> Perta, *Language Decline*, 10.

we had Giorgio, my brother, in the fashion of a TV announcer, he would come to the window or to the wall, and I would pass by it on the right, “And now we will have a dance by...” Then they would clap their hands and I would conduct, I would make stuff up, I would sing and make the children sing all these things for the old people. That’s the truth! I had forgotten about that!<sup>25</sup>

I later asked Donato to talk more about where he learned to play traditional Arbëresh songs, and whether they had been passed down as a result of a continuous performance tradition in Chieuti. In fact, he relates, the introduction of mass media culture created a rift between the performance practices of the young and old:

This is what remained of our heritage, of the older generations. [Music] wasn’t handed down automatically to the young people. Why? Because before there was never television, so in modern times they imposed a model of a different culture with the advent of pop music, and the rock music that came later. And singing the music on television you realized that you lacked a culture that was different from ours. We were having...it was a more realistic era. Until the 1950s when you lived in your neighborhood, in your town, with our family, you handed down and

---

<sup>25</sup> “Prima facevo fare teatro, facevo fare danza. Una volta ho fatto un ruolo pure un di mia sorella prima...perché devo fare, pensato che forse fare la ballerina [sorride e tsks colla gestura]. Quindi avevo una stanza grandissima perché avevamo una casa abbanstanza grande. Mettevo le sedie come se ci fossero i bambini alla strada, da pubblico, da spettatore, e poi avevamo Giorgio—che hai visto qua, mio fratello—in moda televisore, delle come la finestre o il muro, lo facevo passare alla destra, “In questo momento si fara la danza di...” e poi tutti battavano I mani, e in questi momenti guidavo, inventavo, cantavo e facevo a cantare a tutte cose per gli anziani. Si. Questa e’ la verita! (Sorride). Tu mi fai ricordare! Ho dimenticato di queste cose!” (Conversation with Angela Dell’Aquila, July 23, 2010).

preserved your culture. But then it took so much effort. Television distracted everyone.<sup>26</sup>

Mario Massaro is equally blunt about the way media expanded the scope of their formerly “closed” society:

There are many reasons why the Arbëresh language has become so diffuse, and even on the part of an educated person, a person who tries to preserve the language with a passion. In fact, you had an enlargement of the culture. Everyone went to school, but at first you only went up to the second grade of elementary school, and there wasn't any farther you could go. You stayed at home and spoke with your parents. But that kind of contact doesn't exist anymore. There weren't any newspapers, there wasn't television, there wasn't a radio. And so the language was preserved better in the family, because of contact with others.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> “Questa era rimasto dal patrimonio, dalla vecchia generazione. Non era stata trasferita automaticamente ai giovani. Perché? Però era mai il televisione, quindi, i tempi moderni, hanno imposto della modele di una cultura diversa con l'avvento del pop, del rock, ma era dopo. E contando con la musica sulla televisione si è realizzato che si è mancato una cultura diversa della nostra, noi avevamo, era un era realistica. Fino alle anni cinquanta quando si viveva nel vicinato, nel paese, nella famiglia, si tramandava conservare la cultura. Poi si è fatto fatica, quindi, la telvisione ha distratto tutti quanti.” (Conversation with Donato Meola, March 11, 2011).

<sup>27</sup> “Sono molte ragioni per cui sia passato da un linguaggio molto diffuso del arbëreshë, ad una parte pure dotta a una persone insomma che cercano di conservare proprio con passione la lingua. . . . Anzi tu perché abbiamo avuto l'ampliamento della cultura. Sono andati alla scuola tutti, prima invece le persone andavano le ultime classe era la seconda classe elementare, e non ci andava più. Si rimanevi in casa si parlava con i genitori, ma i rapporti erano quello non c'è. I giornali più leggere non c'era, il television non c'era, il radio non c'era. E quindi si è conservato meglio la lingua in famigli, e anche nei rapporti cogli altri.” (Conversation with Mario Massaro, March 15, 2011).

*“Il vino in un bicchiere” – “Like wine in a glass”*  
**Inviting *latini* into a closed community**

So perhaps Rine’s mother has another reason for being angry with her daughter. Through her transgression, the secret flirtation with a lover whom she must conceal from her family, Rine has invited the outside world uncomfortably close to the tightly-knit and self-protecting society of Chieuti. Rine’s mother is justly suspicious of the perils that might befall her daughter should she become entangled with a strange boy. Her interrogation illustrates the customary small-town incentive to remain localized when searching for a mate. Angela identifies the courtship story of “Rine Rine” as a paragon for Chieuti’s shift toward openness. She compares the traditionally intimate society of Chieuti to wine in a glass:

In the neighborhood, in such a small community, to search for a boyfriend—a boyfriend or a girlfriend—there was this method to gauge. Say if Donato lived near me, on the same street, it’s just like drinking wine in a glass, the transparency. I observe him, really learning things about him. On the other hand, if he lived in another world, it isn’t clear to me, maybe there is something wrong with him. Because the wine that you drink is liquid, the wine is transparent.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> “E poi ho detto un’altra cosa a lei, che è fatto del vicino, della comunità così piccola, insomma, non? Cercare un giovane, come una ragazza, un ragazzo...quindi c’era questa metro per dire...se Donato abita vicino a me nella stessa attraversa, e come se tu bevi il vino in un bicchiere. Quindi la chiarezza e sto...abito...miro con lui, va proprio apprendelo lui. Se invece lui abita a altro mondo, non è più chiaro a me, forse ha i difetti. ... Perché il vino che bevi e il liquore. La chiarezza del vino.” (Conversation with Angela Dell’Aquila, March 5, 2011)

Donato agrees, describing the unwillingness of Chieutini to turn their gaze outward as the product of “a very closed mentality. So there was certainty, you knew the person directly because you knew their family.”<sup>29</sup> Yet Angela concedes that the temptation to explore exquisite mysteries flowering on the hillsides of distant mountains was difficult to resist:

Everybody knew who your girlfriend was, they had to know everything about her. So these comparisons to the flowers and to beauty, it is a comparison to the daughter. The mother has become unnerved by the end, because here she has accomodated her daughter, but in order to relate to her mother she carries this beauty of youth, and by the force of this the lie disappears, because she can see the beauty of her daughter, “eyes as beautiful as berries,” even “cheeks like apples...”<sup>30</sup>

So while it is perhaps beyond argument that the forces of modernity dealt the harshest blow to their ancestral language, almost everyone in Chieuti attributes the rapid decline in Arbëresh use to the particular trend toward intermarriage with Italians. According to Maria Teresa Massaro, for the last forty

---

<sup>29</sup> “C’era una mentalità molto chiusa. Allora ci andava al certo, si conosceva direttamente la persona, perché la famiglia è conosciuta.” (Conversation with Donato Meola, March 5, 2011)

<sup>30</sup> Tutti sapevano che si era stata la fidanzata, ne devono sapere tutti quanti. ... Perché le paragone delle fiori e la bellezza, è una paragona della figlia. Mettere inquieta della mamma, alla fine è lei, la mamma, che alloggia la figlia, non proprio la madre, ma in quel caso si la madre per dire la bellezza, la gioventù porta questa, per forza dove va via la buggia, perché si può vedere la bellezza della figlia, gli occhi, così bella come una bacca là, o pure la guancia, come le mele...” (Conversation with Angela Dell’Aquila, March 5, 2011).

years or so “marriage to non-Arbëreshë has become the norm, while in the past, as one of my 70-year old informants told me, until the 1950s or 1960s they organized parties and dances to encourage contact among young Arbëreshë from the neighboring communities of Ururi, Campomarino, and Portocannone, preferring marriages be made with those from within the same ethnic group.”<sup>31</sup>

Not surprisingly, she found a marked decline in language transmission in families in which the mother came from an Italian-speaking community. Donato Meola places the shift as having taken hold in the 1950s. “Before that you would marry really only other Arbëreshë, not only from Chieuti but from other neighboring Arbëresh towns like Ururi or Portocannone.”<sup>32</sup>

“Cë Bukura Kapile,” a traditional song that was popular among the Arbëresh-speaking communities of Molise and Capitanata, celebrates the attributes of local Arbëresh girls from Chieuti, Portocannone, Campomarino, Ururi, and Montecilfone, deliberately skipping over whole communities of eligible Italian girls in the process. The song gallops along in jaunty 2/4 time,

---

<sup>31</sup> Maria Teresa Massaro, 34-35. “Negli ultimi trent’anni i matrimoni con i non arbëresh sono diventati la normalità, mentre in passato, come mi riferisce un’informatrice di 70 anni, fino agli anni ’50 e ’60 si organizzavano feste familiari e balli per favorire gli incontri tra giovani arbëreshë delle comunità limitrofe, Ururi, Campomarino, Portocannone<sup>31</sup>, preferendo il matrimonio all’interno della stesso gruppo etnico.”

<sup>32</sup> “Quindi voglio dire che i matrimoni misti interotto verso a ci ma apparrarsi solamente fina agli anni cinquanta. Prima si sposava veramente fra arbëreshë, se non solo a Chieuti, magari cogli arbëreshë dai paesi vicini. Di Ururi, Portacannone, eccetera.” (Conversation with Donato Meola, March 5, 2011).

exhibiting the tarantella rhythms and singing style of the Gargano region as it

lists the particular traits ascribed to the girls of each town:

### **CË BUKURA KAPILE**

Cë bukura kapile  
Qeft janë  
Sa më të bukura janë  
Këmarin  
E vërnutile  
Portakanun janë  
Oj mem – o, çë m’ë  
Dredhënjën  
Atë skarpinë  
E Munxhëlfun  
Gjuh-shkurta janë  
E vinjën era mbë  
Rozamarinë  
E xura nuse,  
Ke do veç Rrur  
E priru nuse, e shih  
Horëzën jote  
Sa dish dija çë  
Kishe e më ke  
E si të mundi kjo  
Malankunijë?

### **WHAT BEAUTIFUL GIRLS**

What beautiful girls  
There are in Chieuti  
But the ones in Campomarino  
Are more beautiful still  
Brown-haired beauties they have in  
Portocannone, and there are some  
magnificent  
Dancers there too.  
The girls of Montecilfone  
Speak very little  
And carry the scent of rosemary,  
I knew o bride,  
That you wanted to be married  
In Ururi  
Turn yourself around and look  
At your little town  
But now, tell me,  
What is the matter with you?  
Why do you let yourself  
Be defeated  
By sadness?

The lyrics revel in solidarity with fellow Arbëresh communities, and illustrate the apparent pledge to maintain the culture’s integrity by marrying within it. The song, however, ends on a note of melancholy, with the suggestion that the bride might have

regretted her choice. Does she look sadly at her town because she feels too far away from it, even just a few kilometers away in another Arbëresh village, or is she longing, like Rine, for an even bolder move beyond the circumscribed world of her childhood?

Marrying outside of the community was not unheard of before the 1950s. In five hundred years Arbëresh communities were certainly not impervious to the influence of Italian culture, but previously, once an outsider married into a family in Chieuti and settled within its walls they were much more likely to adapt to its ways. Mario Massaro describes this process of adoption:

Naturally there were *latini*, as we say, from the other towns nearby or from other regions, from other provinces, who brought their culture and their language. Even though until some time ago there were marriages that were made with girls from outside, they were still obligated to learn the language, because in the family you spoke only one language.<sup>33</sup>

This was true in Angela's home, even though her father came from the nearby Italian town of Torremaggiore. Maria Dell'Aquila, who is married to Angela's brother Giorgio, supports Mario's assessment of the language dynamic in Arbëresh homes during the middle part of the twentieth century. Her father, who was a *latino* from the Italian town of Guardiafiera in Molise, came to settle in her mother's town of Portocannone and learned Arbëresh:

---

<sup>33</sup> "Naturalmente c'erano i 'latini' diciamo dagli altri paesi vicini o dalle altre regione, dalle altre provincie, per cui hanno portato la loro cultura e la loro lingua. Anche se fino a tanto tempo fa anche qualche matrimoni si faceva con le ragazze esterne. Quindi però era un'obligate a imparare la lingua, perche in famiglia si parlava solo una lingua." (Conversation with Mario Massaro, March 8, 2011).

At my house we always spoke Albanian with our mom, but also with our dad, though he was from Guardiafiera in Molise, he was a Molisano. He spoke in dialect, but at my house we always spoke Albanian. He learned a little Albanian, so I would speak to him in Albanian and he would answer me in Italian. At my house we didn't speak Italian, no, no, no. Always Albanian.<sup>34</sup>

### *Lingua Madre*—The mother tongue

The concept of the *lingua madre*, or mother tongue, holds special resonance for Arbëresh speakers, and taken literally is often cited as the most significant measure for maintenance, loss and connection to their ancestral language. The power of the mother to transmit language, as well as deeply conveyed emotions, is linked to Arbëresh language survival among the Chieutini. Maria Teresa Massaro cites psychological foundations for the emotional worldview of children as stemming from the emotional connection to the mother:

This function, so important for the comprehension of reality and of the interpretation of the world, develops in children from interaction with the mother through learning models that continue to function as organizers of emotions for the rest of the child's life.

---

<sup>34</sup> "Noi abbiamo a casa mia sempre parlate albanese con mamma, ma anche con papà, ma lui è di Guardiafiera, a Molise, molisano. No, non a lui si parla in dialetto. Però a casa mia si sempre abbiamo parlato in Albanese. Lui ha imperato un po' Albanese. Quindi, io parlava con lui in Albanese e lui mi rispondeva in italiano. Non a casa mia si parlavano italiano, no, no, no, no (tsk). Sempre Albanese. Invece mio padre, lui ha imperato albanese. Eh si. Io parlavo in Albanese con mio padre e lui mi rispondeva in dialetto, in italiano." (Conversation with Maria Dell'Aquila, March 6, 2011).

She identifies specific emotions which continue to manifest in language as having roots in early childhood:

The data regarding emotional stories among the Arbëreshë show that in expressions of anger and most of the expressions of pain one uses mainly the earliest coded language. The models learned in earliest childhood for interpreting expressions of pain continue to function throughout one's life. The same was true for subjects who described speaking primarily Italian or the dialect of Chieuti in their childhood home: when they were confronted with either physical or moral pain they describe using *the mother tongue*.<sup>35</sup>

Having an Arbëresh mother at home was a vital requirement for maintaining active language use in the community. Massaro shows that the overwhelming decline in language transmission among Chieutini stems from a rapid rise in intermarriage within a single generation, and in households with an Italian mother and an Arbëresh

---

<sup>35</sup> Maria Teresa Massaro, , 37. "Questa funzione, così importante per la comprensione della realtà e della interpretazione del mondo, si sviluppa nel bambino dall'interazione con la madre attraverso l'apprendimento di modelli che continueranno a funzionare come organizzatori delle emozioni per tutto il resto della vita.

I dati riguardanti le emozioni raccolti tra gli arbëreshë mettono in evidenza come nell'espressione della rabbia e maggiormente nell'espressione del dolore, si utilizza prevalentemente il codice primario. I modelli appresi nella prima infanzia di interpretazione ed espressione del dolore continuano a funzionare per tutta la vita. Anche i soggetti che dichiarano di parlare prevalentemente in italiano o in dialetto chieutino nella attuale famiglia, quando si trovano di fronte ad un dolore sia fisico sia morale dichiarano di utilizzare *la lingua del cuore*."

I observed this dynamic in Chieuti among Arbëresh speakers as they switched easily from Albanian to dialect to standard Italian and back again. When I asked about how this process works, they usually replied that they switch when there is a word that doesn't come easily in one language but is readily available in another, and their listeners follow along. However, Giorgio Dell'Aquila explained further that in certain social contexts, for example when he has something particularly grave or emotional to convey, he and others are more likely to use Albanian.

father Arbëresh was unlikely to have been spoken.<sup>36</sup> As her father Mario, who had an Arbëresh father and a *latina* mother, noted,

It is true [that] the mother teaches the children. It isn't justified, but the role of the father is not to teach the language to the children. The mother is more often with the children, with the most frequency, it is really a different relationship. So the father doesn't want to teach them.<sup>37</sup>

Perspectives such as Mario's reverberate in the insistent singing of Rine's mother's heart as she interrogates her daughter and laments her roving ways. Maria Teresa Massaro points to the emotive metaphor used by Slovenian-speakers in the area of Trieste in Northern Italy to describe the experience of bilingualism in their country of exile: "There is the language of bread, that is Italian, and the language of the heart, that is Slovenian." Massaro finds this distinction to be an effective way to articulate how the people of Chieuti negotiated the difficult choices thrust upon them by the seismic

---

<sup>36</sup> Maria Teresa Massaro, 35.

<sup>37</sup> "Questa è vero quello che diciamo noi che la mamma insegna i figli. Non è giustificato. Il ruolo del padre non insegna la lingua ai figli. La mamma è più spesso coi figli, e frequenta...la frequenza e più....diciamo maggiore. È già un rapporto diverso. Però il padre non vuole a insegnare. (Conversation with Mario Massaro, March 8, 2011). Mario says that he learned Arbëresh from his father but spoke "very improperly" ("molto improprietà") because his mother could not teach him the language, although he says that over the years she acquired more facility with the language ("ha raggiunto con gli anni un buon grado di conoscenza della lingua"). He became a more capable speaker after his marriage to Nina Florio and they spoke Arbëresh at home and with her family. He also took courses in Albanian at the University of Prishtina in Kosovo at different times between 1982 through 2009. (Mario Massaro, *Dizionario Comparato delle parlate arbëreshe di Casalvecchio e Chieuti* [Apricena: Malatesta Editrice, 2009], 9).

societal shift they experienced in the middle part of the twentieth century.<sup>38</sup> While some members of the community find it difficult to understand how people could abandon their traditions so easily, attributing it to indolence that they later come to regret, other community members are making choices based on criteria that appear to be sound at the time. Though their hearts might continue to sing to them in Arbëresh, the necessity of procuring bread for their children compels them to speak in the language of the bread givers.

As we shall see, it was not only Italian mothers who did not transmit the Arbëresh language to their children. Many Arbëresh-speaking mothers also eventually chose not to teach the language in their homes. How is it that the process of *lingua madre*, of mother's passing their own mother tongue on to their children, could reverse so dramatically within just one generation? While Maria Dell'Aquila, who was born in the early 1950s, spoke Albanian with her father, who answered her in Italian, Maria's daughter Manuela spoke Italian to her mother and grandmother, even when they spoke to her in Albanian. According to Maria, "Manuela understands Albanian, she understands everything, but she doesn't speak it. At my house my mother always spoke [Albanian] with me, but my children only spoke Italian. But we had to do it this

---

<sup>38</sup> Maria Teresa Massaro, , 32. "Sempre in [Roberto] Gusmani viene riportata la dichiarazione di uno sloveno del Carso Triestino al quale fu chiesto di indicare quale fosse la sua lingua, la sua risposta è stata "C'è la lingua del pane, l'italiano e la lingua del cuore, lo sloveno". Ho voluto riferire questa citazione perché rende in maniera efficace il diverso uso e funzione delle due lingue e per approfondire la ragione per la quale si tende ad abbandonare la *lingua del cuore* per la *lingua del pane*." [Italics original.]

way.”<sup>39</sup> So the process of transmitting the *lingua madre* can be superceded by powerful societal forces: the pervasive incursion of media into homes and communities, and the enforced education of its children.

### *Fuori—Venturing outside*

When asked about the specifics of language shift in their communities, Angela, her brother Giorgio, and his wife Maria have only a vague recollection of exactly when and how the wholesale conversion to speaking Italian began. Because they observed this change from their perspectives as children who only spoke Arbëresh in their homes, they were not able to note the details of how it manifested in the larger community, or grasp its significance, until later. They place it at some point around forty or fifty years ago, though in attempting to pinpoint the moment of shift Angela’s halting language exhibits how imperceptible it was for them:

It came later, after about ’56, ’57, so maybe forty-seven years ago, forty-three years ago, in 1950... in the 1950s... Everyone was speaking in Arbëresh at home,

---

<sup>39</sup> “Manuela capisce Albanese, capisce tutto quanto, lo capisce, però non la parla... Si, a casa mia anche mia mamma parlava con me, ma i bambini miei in italiano. Ma abbiamo dovuto così.” Maria and Giorgio’s son Matteo does speak Albanian, however in a form they describe as “not perfect.” Though they lightheartedly relate how his style of speaking Albanian makes them laugh, Matteo suffers from acute mental disabilities which prevent him from being able to participate in Portocannone’s language-revitalizing activities. The fact that neither of her children will carry on their Arbëresh language traditions carves an undercurrent of sadness through Maria’s discourse.

it was still called the *lingua madre*, because it was the mother who taught it. Then the time came when you were two or three years old, you started to go outside, outside of our little communities of Chieuti, Portocannone, Ururi...<sup>40</sup>

“Going outside” meant entering school, where they all were exposed to formal Italian lessons for the first time. Maria says that she did not learn Italian from her Italian-speaking father, but that she learned at school, beginning with *asilo*, or nursery school, at about three years of age.<sup>41</sup> Formal schooling, which for these generations of southern Italians was still a relatively new experience,<sup>42</sup> brought them in contact with outsiders and a concept of enforced language education. Maria explains:

You didn’t speak in Albanian any more because when you went to nursery school, when you went to elementary school you found the nuns there, the nuns had come from the outside, and they didn’t speak Albanian. . . They taught us to speak Italian. Because there wasn’t an Albanian language like there is in Albania. In Albania, from the time you were born until you finished high school

---

<sup>40</sup> “Perché poi c’era non una moda—è venuto dopo—dopo che adesso in ‘56, ‘57 anni, quindi, 47 anni, 43 anni fa, nella 1950, negli anni cinquanti, tutti parlevamo nelle case, in arbëresh. Si cominciava—perché questa era chiamate di tuttora dalla lingua madre, perché della mamma che statuisce. Poi, una volta è arrivato due o tre anni, si cominciava uscire fuori, fuori, e’ fuori di una comunità piccolo come la nostra Chieuti, Portocannone, Ururi...” (Conversation with Angelal Dell’Aquila, March 5, 2011).

<sup>41</sup> “Io sempre in Albanese io parlavo, però, in italiano vero, alla scuola ho imparato all’asilo, a tre anni...54 anni fa andavo all’asilo! [Quindi circa 1957]” (Convesation with Maria Dell’Aquila, March 5, 2011).

<sup>42</sup> Though a national, public school program was initiated in Italy with the passage of *La Legge Casati* in 1859, around the time of the unification of Italy (*Il Risorgimento*), it was not strictly enforced in the south, and many southern Italians remained unschooled and illiterate until *La Riforma Gentile*, the Gentile Reform, was initiated in 1923 by Giovanni Gentile, Mussolini’s Minister of Public Instruction. Under this new mandate public school was obligatory for all Italian children until at least age fourteen, and instruction in any language other than Italian was forbidden. School buildings were rapidly constructed in many towns, including one in Chieuti. (see Anna Ascenzi, *Education and the metamorphosis of citizenship in contemporary Italy*, [Macerata: Edizione Università di Macerata, 2009].)

you spoke only in Albanian, even at school. You wrote in Albanian, everything was in Albanian.<sup>43</sup>

Maria's recognition that a viable Albanian language exists shows an enduring sense of connection with the country of her forebears. The absence of a unified literary language like the one that had evolved in Albania over the centuries since the Arbëreshë had settled in Italy made it difficult for them to develop a language curriculum to teach in the schools. Lacking a literary language disempowered them in formal educational situations, even though ironically, as Perta suggested above, illiteracy actually played a part in keeping the Italian language from invading their communities.<sup>44</sup> Instead, young Albanian-speaking children were met with prejudice as their communities became increasingly more open and populated by outsiders.<sup>45</sup> Angela remembers how teachers

---

<sup>43</sup> "Non si parlava più in Albanese perché tu andavi in asilo, andavi in una scuola materna, trovavi le suore, e le suore venivano dal fuori, non sapevano parlare in Albanese...Si li insegnava a parlare in italiano. Poi si andava alla scuola, e alla scuola si parlava in italiano, non si parlava, non c'è una lingua Albanese come in Albania. In Albania, da quando nasci fin quando si finisce la scuola superiore, si parla sempre in Albanese, anche alla scuola. Si scrive in Albanese, tutto è in Albanese." (Conversation with Maria Dell'Aquila, March 5, 2011).

<sup>44</sup> Perta, *Language Decline*, 10.

<sup>45</sup> Mario Massaro describes how immigration of Italians into Chieuti also came as a result of agricultural reforms of the post-World War II era, during which agents were sent to inhabit the communities and oversee government programs. He describes how they first populated the surrounding rural areas but slowly moved into town, which caused the Italian language to infiltrate civic life: "Piano piano, lentamente, l'immigrazione abbiamo avuto, poi rendere di riforme, l'assegna anzi...le legge nella forma agraria ha permesso qui a Chieuti, che a intervieni a fossero assignate, agente, che veniva dal fuori. Sai che si e quanti famiglie noi abbiamo oggi che non sono Chieutini. Tutti quelli che abitano....abitavano primo solo al mare, ma o abitano in paese. Prima i margheritani abitavano solo nella zona dal mare dove c'è il villaggio, la marina di Chieuti, vicino della fontina prima. Ma oggi non. i figli, poi i nipoti, e poi questi stanno a Chieuti, sono sposati cogli altri, e i matrimoni non si fa conserve con gli altri paese, e la lingua viene meno." (Conversation with Mario Massaro, March 8, 2011).

would rap students on their knees when they spoke in Arbëresh. She and Maria recall how Italian-speaking teachers in their school and others in their community reacted to their use of their mother tongue:

Angela: [The teachers] came from farther away than you see today. “We are in Italy! Decentralize! You must make yourselves useful!” So we tried to abandon what we knew. “Don’t make a big show of yourself for knowing Albanian, use our language.” In fact, if you went to the market and you said something under your breath [Angela whispers a few sentences in Albanian]—“Miss, speak in Italian, we aren’t in another country!” So they took it bad when you spoke this language.

Maria: “Make yourself understood, Miss,” they would say.

Angela: “Make yourself understood and I’ll give you an answer!” So it was a nuisance to them, it was a nuisance.<sup>46</sup>

Angela elaborates on this dynamic:

Whereas before when we went to school, anyone who knew Italian had to make a big show of it. Because they were watching you a little, they were from the outside, the teachers, the programs were always from the Minister of the Republic, they were national programs. You had to speak Italian, you were forced to speak Italian. If I didn’t know where certain words came from of course I had to learn them in Italian. This is how it was. It was more to your advantage. There were a few words, a few phrases that I would always get

---

<sup>46</sup> Angela: Venivano un po’ disto che oggi si vedono...quindi, “Siamo in Italia, voi decentrate, voi dovete inservirvi!” Quindi e cercate di abbandonare quello che voi sapevate. “Non fati sfoggio, per conoscete Albanese, fati vostri.” Anzi se si andava in mercato e si diceva sotto voce [qualcosa in albanese], “Signora, parlate in Italiano, non siamo in un altro nazione.” Quindi prendevono male che parlate questa lingua.

Maria: “Fati me capire, signora!” diceva.

Angela: “Fati me capire e do la risposta!” Quindi da la fastidio. Da la fastidio. (Conversation with Maria and Angela Dell’Aquila, March 6, 2011).

wrong in Italian, but for us, no! Because for example it had an accent that wasn't easy for us: "egli è buono," "lui è bravo..." Also with "c'è," "è" is a verb, there is no accent on the conjunction. The Italians who knew this—because we only knew Italian in [our regional] dialect—it didn't have an accent.<sup>47</sup>

Carmela Perta supports these recollections with her own data on language shift in Arbëresh communities in Molise. In the 1960s, at around the time that Maria, Giorgio and Donato were all attending school, the government of Italy instituted "a national policy based on the suppression of non-standard varieties and minority languages, considering them to be an obstacle for the acquisition of Italian and, therefore, for social emancipation. Indeed, Arbëresh-speaking students were punished, and some of them were failed for speaking Arbëresh at school."<sup>48</sup> Mario Massaro describes how such treatment affected the strong, deep sense of Arbëresh pride noted above. Recalling again how the Catholic religion was forcefully imposed upon the Orthodox Arbëreshë in the eighteenth century, he attributes the failure to transmit the language beginning

---

<sup>47</sup> È un'altra cosa. Invece prima, noi, [io per primo, lui, più o meno, sono della stessa età, ci sono cinque o sei anni, sette anni la differenza,] quando andavamo alla scuola, si doveva fare sfoggio che conoscevi l'italiano. Perché ti guardavano un poco così bene vanno dal fuori, ma anche se fosse lo stato l'insegnante dal posto, siccome la più programma, i progetti sempre del Ministero della Repubblica, quindi della nazione... Si doveva parlare in italiano. Quindi chi dovevi sforzare a parlare in italiano. Se non lo so come certi parole derivante, certo che si è imparato in italiano. Questo è. Il vantaggio ancora di più. Di alcuni frasi, di alcuni verbi che gli italiani sbagliavano sempre, e noi non! Perché per esempio l'ha ecco un'accento non è facile: "egli è buono" "Lui è bravo" . . . invece si mettevano... anche l'ha senza "c'è": "è" è un verbo, senza l'accento sulla congiunzione. Gli italiani chi sapevano—o solo in dialetto italiano—non faceva senza un accento. (Conversation with Angela Dell'Aquila, March 6, 2011).

<sup>48</sup> Perta, *Language Decline*, 21.

around the 1950s as having “less to do with the expansion of doors onto other communities, but with the pride of being Arbëreshë.”

And to continue to profess your religion [for centuries in a country of exile], and then not to profess it any more, and you speak this language...so here you felt a bit mocked, a bit mocked and considered [of] a different culture. Not only different, but a culture of illiterates. For this reason it happened that we started speaking Italian. So many people were trying to express themselves in the dialect of Daunia, in the southern dialect, Pugliese, Molisane, and so they neglected the Arbëresh language. And they didn't teach their children Arbëresh.<sup>49</sup>

*“Purtroppo a noi nessuno ci ha insegnato la lingua arbëreshe” —  
“Unfortunately no one taught the Arbëresh language to us”*

The confusion and shame that accompanied young school children attempting to navigate the outside world in a new language was absorbed by this generation and manifested in a resolve—whether conscious or not—to spare their children similar experiences. Perta found that the choice not to teach Albanian to children in the home to be the result of a “negative” attitude toward the language, which of course impacted

---

<sup>49</sup> “Ma anche perché poi c'è stato quest'altro cosa tanti anni fa, è venuto meno con l'ampliamento delle porte colle altre comunità, quell'orgoglio di sentirsi Arbëreshë...E di continuare a professare diciamo la religione non si professare più, ma di parlare nella lingua insomma. Allora qua se si sentiva un po' beffato, beffato si sentiva un po'... considerato di una cultura diversa, non solo diversa, ma la cultura degli analfabeti, e per questo è venuti che si comincia a parlare in italiano. Allora molte persone hanno cercato di esprimersi in dialetto Daunia, nel dialetto meridionale, Pugliese, Molisane, e c'è inoltre hanno trascurato la lingua arbëreshë. E i figli anche non hanno insegnato in arbëresh.” (Conversation with Mario Massaro, March 8, 2011).

the children's ability to comprehend it: "Old speakers expressed the intent to transmit Arbëreshë to their offspring . . . and the parents' willingness did influence their children's degree of competence. The almost negative attitude found in the intervening generations can be seen particularly in their widely shared intention of not transmitting the language to their children, a decision which did influence their children's proficiency in Arbëreshë."<sup>50</sup>

As psychologist and linguist John Edwards points out, "the price of original-language retention is geographical and cultural isolation; if a mobility that is generally welcomed is destructive of traditional ways of life, then is the price too unaffordable for most people, are the necessary social limitations too severe?"<sup>51</sup> This was profoundly evident for the people of Chieuti who, just as Arbëreshë throughout Italy, were faced with the grim paradox of choosing between educational and economic advancement and the upkeep of their cultural traditions. Facility with Italian became increasingly associated with improved opportunities, often with serious consequences. According to Maria Teresa Massaro,

A few [of the older people] expressed regret that they didn't teach the language to their children, thinking that it wasn't important in current society, that it would be more useful to know English than this absolutely incomprehensible language that was spoken only by a handful of people. Most of them related episodes to me of encounters outside of their hometown, and often abroad, in

---

<sup>50</sup> Perta, *Language Decline*, 131.

<sup>51</sup> John Edwards, *Minority Languages and Group Identity: Cases and Categories*. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2010), 11.

which the common language allowed them to resolve a difficult situation, or to find work, or to be understood, or, in a few cases, during wartime when it saved their life.<sup>52</sup>

Antonio De Lillis, a professional musician who was born in 1977 and raised by two Arbëresh-speaking parents in Chieuti, describes how his parents spoke Arbëresh at home with each other when he was growing up, and still speak it together today. Though Antonio learned enough of the language to understand it and speak a little, his parents did not actively teach it to him or his brother. They have never discussed why they chose to speak Italian with their children instead, but Antonio speculates that their motivations had to do with wanting them to have more opportunities for future success:

Maybe they were afraid that we children wouldn't learn Italian. You know, sometimes in a few families where the children spoke Albanian, the kids would show up at elementary school and they didn't know how to speak Italian, and this slowed down their scholastic career so, so much. Probably my parents thought that it was better if they spoke Italian with us.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> Maria Teresa Massaro, 28. "Alcuni hanno espresso il rammarico di non aver insegnato la lingua ai figli pensando che non fosse importante nella società attuale, nella quale era più utile conoscere l'inglese piuttosto che questa lingua assolutamente incomprensibile e parlata solo da un pugno di persone. La maggior parte di loro mi ha raccontato episodi di incontri fuori dal proprio paese e spesso all'estero in cui la lingua comune ha consentito loro di risolvere situazioni difficili, di trovare un lavoro, di essere compresi o in alcuni casi, in periodo di guerra, di avere salva la vita."

<sup>53</sup> "No, non ci hanno mai detto il perché. Io mi sono fatto un'idea negli anni... forse avevano paura che noi figli non imparassimo l'italiano. Sai, a volte, nelle poche famiglie in cui i figli parlavano l'albanese i figli quando arrivavano alle scuole elementari ( primary schools ) non sapevano parlare italiano e questo li rallentava tantissimo nella loro carriera scolastica. Probably my parents thought that it was better if they spoke Italian with us." (Email communication with Antonio De Lillis, April 14, 2011).

So, regret for having failed to transmit the language to the next generation is not only expressed by the older generations, but also by those who did not acquire the language. Carmela Perta elaborates on the deeper socioeconomic motivations for allowing one's *lingua madre* to decline:

Most comparative works on threatened languages seek out general points of commonality between situations, rather than distinctiveness. By identifying recurrent patterns in the causes of language decline, such works have outlined both certain characteristics of speech communities—which leave them most susceptible to language loss—and structural changes undergone by a language bound for death. According to the general pattern, underprivileged minorities are subject to political, economical, and social disadvantages, and these conditions are shown in the usage and imminent changes of their language. Such a shift, which frequently leaves a dying language in its wake, is an aspect of sociocultural change, intimately linked to phenomena such as urbanization, industrialization, and secularization, though not predictable from any of them. As a consequence of this minorities internalize the bad connotations imposed on the group and their members may experience identity conflicts and disturbances. These may then induce the community to suppress a part of itself, in the process of onward transmission. To put it another way, multilingual parents no longer consider it necessary or worthwhile for the future of their children to communicate with them in a low prestige language.<sup>54</sup>

Since there was no official curriculum for teaching the language in local schools, there was no way for them to become formally literate. Antonio laments:

Unfortunately no one taught the Arbëresh language to us, and this makes me really sad. I don't know how to read or write in Arbëresh, and I speak it only a bit. I think that no one in Chieuti is interested in maintaining the traditions, only

---

<sup>54</sup> Perta, *Language Decline*, 27.

Mario Massara and Angela Dell'Aquila. But that is too few. They should have taught us Arbëresh in school!!!<sup>55</sup>

Carmela Perta found that in the town of Portocannone proficiency in Arbëresh does indeed decrease as education level increases.<sup>56</sup> However, Mario Massaro disputes such findings, and counters the idea that being an educated person precludes the necessity to continue upkeep of the language. He and his family serve as positive models for the way Arbëresh language and traditions can continue to be transmitted through the generations, despite insistent outside challenges. Mario, along with his wife Nina, were determined to maintain an Arbëresh-speaking household, and each of their three children, Maria Teresa, Gianfranco, and Antonella—who were born in the late 1960s and early 1970s—grew up proficient in both Italian and Arbëresh. Clearly though, a passionate and untiring devotion to preserving this language in a community where it is barely hanging on is required, and is not easy for everyone in practice. Class certainly plays a role in this process, as the Massaros come from a background of educated Chieutini, and Mario bemoans that this group did not work harder to lead the community through the process of shift:

---

<sup>55</sup> “Purtroppo a noi nessuno ci ha insegnato la lingua arbëreshe. E questo mi fa dispiacere tantissimo. Io non so leggere e scrivere arbëresh e lo parlo pochissimo. Penso che nessuno a Chieuti si sia interessato a mantenere le tradizioni. Solo Mario Massaro e Angela Dell'Aquila. Ma è troppo poco. Si doveva insegnare nelle scuole!!!” (Email communication with Antonio De Lillis, April 11, 2011).

<sup>56</sup> Perta, *Language Decline*, 95.

And this is another reason for why the language is lost. Because so many cultured people—teachers, professionals, those at a certain level of culture—didn't teach the Arbëresh language to their children. Not even the knowledge or a sense of being Arbëreshë, and this is another motivation. And then they say later, "What did you do? You didn't know how to sustain for your children your heritage, your riches..."<sup>57</sup>

Angela is quick to describe this as an error that no one could recognize until it was too late. But Mario feels the loss deeply, finding it difficult to blame the problem on larger societal stimuli:

And today you can't just decide to want to recover it. Who can recover what is lost? You had to want it, you lost it intentionally, you wanted to lose it, you don't want to get it back. Who gets back what is lost? But despite this, you say, these older people, despite there being more economic problems, welfare, even they could have transmitted their culture, their language to their children, isn't it true? But no. It was only fifty years ago that things started turning around. I conducted a survey in the 1960s, and here there were fifty percent who were speaking Arbëresh, even in the schools, the children. Now if you go in a classroom, no one is speaking. I have to find Carolina, Giorgio (his grandchildren), someone else, do you understand? Fifty years and it's finished.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> E pure quest'è un'altra motive perché la lingua si perde. Perché tante persone che sono colte—i maestri, professionisti—a un certo livello culturale, non hanno insegnato ai figli la lingua arbëreshe. Pure conoscenza, pure il senso arbereshe e questo e l'altra motivazione. Allora, queste persone vi hanno detto prima, che cos'hai fatto? Non hai saputo sostenere ai figli il tuo patrimonio, la tua ricchezza." (Conversation with Mario Massaro, March 8, 2011).

<sup>58</sup> "E oggi tu non puoi venire a volere recuperare. Chi recupera ciò che è perso? Tu le hai voluto, tu volutamente hai perduto, hai voluto perdere, e noi vogliamo recuperare, chi recupera ciò che è perso? Ma nonostante questo, tu dici quelli anziani, nonostante quell'essere più problemi economici, assistenziali di noi, pure hanno si può trasmettere la loro cultura, la loro lingua ai figli, è vero? Pure no. Già cinquant'anni fa che la cosa va per girando. Io fatto insomma un sondaggio negli anni sessanta e qua c'erano cinquante per cento parlava arbëresh anche alla scuola, i bambini. Mo' se vai in una classe, non parla ne nessuno. Devo trovare a Carolina, Giorgio, qualcun'altro, hai capito? Cinquant'anni, è finito." (Conversation with Mario Massaro, March 8, 2011).

The mothers speak very little to their children, and then they say, “what have we done?” They don’t understand the importance of this culture. It isn’t even just a culture. It a link to the past, a link to your parents, to your ancestors, you see?<sup>59</sup>

The gravity of Mario’s distress is palpable. However, his wife Nina is quick to add:

But this is happening: that many mothers are asking that their children have to learn. Now, yes. Now it is happening—they have woken up. There has been a consciousness-raising.<sup>60</sup>

Indeed, according to Maria Dell’Aquila her neighboring town of Portocannone, which is a slightly larger municipality than Chieuti, has managed to institute a process for Arbëresh education in the schools and in the community that seems to be working:

Everyone takes courses in Albanian, in order to make up for this (a generation of lost language transmission). The young people are losing this tradition, this language, because they don’t really understand Albanian. And so at elementary school they give a course in Albanian, and a few of the teachers who want to teach a bit of the language.<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> “Le mamme parlanno poco, e poi proprio dice “e che ci noi abbiamo fare?” Non si capisce l’importanza di questa cultura. Che pure non essere una cultura. E una legame al passato, un legame ai parenti, i legami agli antenati, i legami ...mi capisci?” (Conversation with Mario Massaro, March 8, 2011).

<sup>60</sup> “Però succede questo, Sara, che molte mamme chiedono che i figli devono imparare. Adesso sì. Adesso si stanno...si ha svegliato. C’è una presa di coscienza.” (Conversation with Nina Florio, March 8, 2011)

<sup>61</sup> “Ogni tanto farle i corsi in albanese, per far riparare per questo. I ragazzi non fanno perdere questa tradizione, questa lingua, perché i ragazzi non lo conoscono proprio l’albanese. E allora alla scuola elementare fanno il corso di albanese, ci sono qualche insegnante che si preferiscono a imperare un po’ della lingua. (Conversation with Maria Dell’Aquila, March 5, 2011).

Though Mario and others mourn the loss of the language among most young Arbëreshë deeply, Giorgio Dell'Aquila is philosophical about the the process of language shift, recognizing it as a realistic and practical corollary to development:

Why was there this transition, that we used to speak in Albanian and then there was a transition? It was a natural shift, because with time the people, the population moved on, right? They moved, and so there was this change. Also, the English language, in England you write in one way and you pronounce in such a different way, because in England there was an influence of other cultures. There is the influence of one way or another. Also, the Italian language itself evolves and changes with time because there are influences of other people who come to Italy. The same thing happens with the Italian language, because everything changes, doesn't it?<sup>62</sup>

As Angela put it, "when it was happening things were strained for us. . .but everything has to die."<sup>63</sup> Maria Teresa Massaro's research indicates that people were largely unaware that they were failing to impart vital elements of their cultural heritage to their children. "The majority of the interview subjects," she writes, "described feeling pride in their own cultural and linguistic belonging. In fact, 97% were convinced that this heritage was being handed down to their children. In reality, however much their

---

<sup>62</sup> "Perche c'è stato questo cambiamento, che prima parlavano in Albanese e poi c'è stato cambiamento...era un cambiamento naturale perche con tempo il popolo, la popolazione si spostano, non? Si spostano e quindi ci sono questi cambiamenti. Anche la lingua inglese, in Inghelterra perche si scrive in una maniera, e la pronuncia e tanto diversa perche c'era l'influenza dei popoli anche in inghelterra. C'è l'influenza di una maniera di un altra. Ma anche la stessa lingua italiana si evolve, si cambia nel tempo perche c'è l'influenza degli altri popolo che vengono in Italia, e la stessa lingua italiana cambia perché tutto cambia, non?" (Conversation with Giorgio Dell'Aquila, March 6, 2011).

<sup>63</sup> "Quando succede ci tendesse, c'è una causa principale, perche tutto devo morire insomma, perche le parole evolvere dallo spazio e dall'idea." (Conversation with Angela Dell'Aquila, March 5, 2011).

attitude declared this favorably, only 43% of the children of those interviewed participate in the culture of their parents.”<sup>64</sup>

Angela’s brother Giorgio reflects on the way older people expressed their feelings about these changes as they were happening:

They talked about this change, it was a little bit arresting. They weren’t ready to change. So they let things go, they remained very closed, with their ideas and with their ways. So the kids went along, when things were changing, they didn’t retain anything. Of course they accepted this change.<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> Maria Teresa Massaro, 50. “La maggior parte dei soggetti intervistati dichiara di essere orgogliosa della propria appartenenza linguistica e culturale, infatti il 93% degli intervistati è convinto che essa sia un patrimonio da consegnare ai propri figli. In realtà per quanto l’atteggiamento dichiarato sia favorevole, solo il 43% dei figli degli intervistati partecipa della cultura genitoriale.”

<sup>65</sup> “Parlavano di questo cambiamento, era un po’ arresti, non erano pronti a cambiare a loro stessi. Però lasciavano le cose andare. Loro rimanevano sempre lì fermi, coi loro idee, coi loro manieri. Però i figli quindi caminava, quando cambiavano, non li stocavano i figli. Però accettavano questo cambiamento. Naturalmente.” (Conversation with Giorgio Dell’Aquila, March 5, 2011).

## CHAPTER TWO

*“Per la diffusione e la salvaguardia della cultura Arbëreshe” –*  
**“For the preservation and dissemination of Arbëresh culture”**  
**Performing identity as part of the revival movement**

Mark Janse has noted that indifference, linguistic discrimination, and outright “linguicide” from a dominant language in the process of replacing a minority language are “powerful forces in the reawakening of ethnic identity feelings among speakers of endangered minority languages, which appears to have become a global trend from about 1970 onwards. Ethnic identity is often accompanied by an increased interest in language maintenance.”<sup>66</sup> This was certainly true for Arbëresh communities throughout Italy, and cultural revival movements starting as early as 1960 manifested in the establishment of Albanian language programs at universities in Sicily (Palermo), Puglia (Bari and Lecce), Calabria, and Rome. Cultural associations were established, including the *Unione delle Comunità Italo-Albanese* (UCIA) in 1969, which was led by intellectuals and community leaders and helped establish a political foundation for

---

<sup>66</sup> Mark Janse and Sijmen Tol, eds. *Language Death and Language Maintenance: Theoretical, practical and descriptive approaches*, (Amsterdam: John Benjamin BV, 2003), x.

negotiating the rights of these small communities and developing initiatives to teach Albanian in primary and secondary schools.<sup>67</sup>

The vanguard of native Arbëresh speakers like Angela, Donato, Mario Massaro, and Giorgio Ruberto and his brother Roberto, who were all subjected to prejudice and imposed Italianization as children in the 1940s and 1950s, were galvanized into active and self-aware participation in the process of tradition bearing during the 1970s. A powerful way to register reaction to the changes that were engulfing their culture was to perform it. Writing in *Performing the Past, Memory, History and Identity in Modern Europe*, Jay Winter notes that “the performative act of remembrance is an essential way in which collective identities are formed and reiterated.”<sup>68</sup> Angela’s use of songs in the classroom and the Gruppo Arbëresh’s concerts on festival stages became ways for them to recognize the process of cultural loss while simultaneously ensuring that the memory of their language and history are not rendered completely obsolete, particularly for future generations. They are performance practices that are politically motivated, a deliberate contest to the Italian language’s near-complete conquest over Arbëresh.

---

<sup>67</sup> Perta, *Language Decline*, 11.

<sup>68</sup> Jay Winter, “The performance of the past: memory, history, identity,” in *Performing the Past: Memory, History and Identity in Modern Europe*, Karin Tilmans, Frank Van Vree and Jay Winter, eds., (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 15.

According to Richard Bauman, “performance is a way to bring identities to the fore, often in subversive or resistant ways.”<sup>69</sup>

As part of their revivalist efforts, “Rine Rine” was recontextualized from its earlier incarnation as a ritual song and included among the various songs in the repertoire of the Gruppo Arbëresh, with particular emphasis on its provenience as being uniquely from Chieuti.<sup>70</sup> They recorded several versions of “Rine Rine,” starting in 1978, and self-released them on cassette tapes. This was their first venture toward circulating the songs that members of their community had been collecting for some time. In the liner notes that accompany their second cassette release, Donato Meola describes how the project came about as a result of the efforts of Roberto Ruberto, a poet and literature professor who taught at universities in Canada and the United States in the 1960s before he returned to Chieuti in the early 1970s to focus his attention on the culture of his hometown. While abroad he had become increasingly interested in folklore and ethnography,<sup>71</sup> and he made several trips to Albania to investigate linguistic and musical relationships between Chieuti and its ancestral home. The songs

---

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in “Language and Identity” by Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall, in *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*, (Maldon, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 381.

<sup>70</sup> That is, “proprio di Chieuti.”

<sup>71</sup> While at the University of California at Berkeley, Ruberto became acquainted with Alan Dundes, with whom he consulted for a journal article he wrote on Italian folk music. I note this only to express how serendipitous it was to discover a link to the vanguard of American folklore secreted away in this cozy little corner of Italy. Roberto Ruberto would surely have achieved a distinguished position of his own had he lived to continue his important work.

he collected joined the small canon of local and regional Arbëresh songs that he had been busy recording. Ruberto was just getting started with this ardent mission when it all came to a grinding halt. He died tragically and prematurely from a brain hemorrhage in 1972 at the age of thirty-nine.

His death was a heartbreaking loss for members of this community, especially for Angela Dell'Aquila, who was his fiancée. She had already embarked on her own mission to teach these songs to Chieuti's children when they met in the town library, and they shared a devotion to their work as passionate conservators of Arbëresh traditions. After a period of mourning, and as a tribute to his life and legacy, Roberto's brother Giorgio dusted off the recordings and assembled a cadre of local musicians to perform them. In his liner notes to their first release, Donato says that their project would never have seen the light of day without the "considerable moral thrust" of Roberto's influence.<sup>72</sup> He outlined their mission, illustrating how acutely aware they were that the linguistic transition their community was experiencing had implications for even deeper loss: "The scope of the publication of this collection of songs is to continue the discourse on the much-discussed problems of minority languages, and

---

<sup>72</sup> Donato Meola, liner notes to *Canti Popolari Degli Albanesi D'Italia, Jugoslavia e Albania*, 1978. "Un motive questo per il quale è sorto il gruppo arbëresh di Chieuti, anche se ciò non sarebbe mai avvenuto se non per una notevole spinta morale di Roberto Ruberto, del quale è bastato il grande modo di essere per far comprendere a tutti, il senso dell'enorme patrimonio culturale e folkloristico di cui si disponeva e del quale quasi ci si vergnava di possedere."

therefore the necessity to preserve and safeguard our cultural heritage, which in the end is also a part of the complex system of global cultures.”<sup>73</sup>

At the same time, the group expressed a desire to allow their sensibilities as modern musicians to influence their arrangements. Donato felt the need to explain why some songs in the collection “have not in a certain sense been reproduced strictly in the model of the original. The group had an arbitrary initiative to add a deliberate instrumentation to the musical repertoire, finally being able to adapt the typical musical arrangements to our own ideas, which were glaringly insufficient for these ancient, complex songs.” As Donato further elaborated,

We were trying to pursue a model, not exactly scientific...because we had very little. We had discovered Roberto’s songs, the recordings he made, and the records he had kept in the studio, and little by little we discovered these things. But Giorgio knew about them, the cassettes that Roberto had recorded. . . We were a little bit out of touch, we thought. We felt a little bit deprived by our western baggage. I was coming by way of rock, Giorgio was coming from a background of singing Neapolitan songs, each of us almost had been learning to sing different songs, we had been studying “light” music. So we were looking for a way to get into these songs, a way to project the past into our way of thinking.<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> Meola, *Canti Popolari Degli Albanesi D’Italia, Jugoslavia e Albania*. “La pubblicazione di questa prima raccolta di canti ha come scopo la continuazione del discorso sul tanto discusso problema delle minoranze linguistiche e quindi la necessità di tutelare e salvaguardare un patrimonio culturale che in fondo fa parte anch’esso del complesso sistema cultural universale.”

<sup>74</sup> “Abbiamo cercato di inseguire in un modello un po’...sai...non scientifico, perche ciò che avevamo era molto pocho. Noi abbiamo scoperto i canti di Roberto, le registrazioni di Roberto, i documenti che Roberto aveva nello studio, abbiamo scoperto piano piano piano piano...ci abbiamo, primo cantatti poi man mano ...perché anche Giorgio sapeva di tutti questi cassette che stavano registrato di Roberto. . . Invece poi... Abbiamo sbagliato un po’, secondo nostro...quello che sentivamo diciamo spogliandosi il di ogni bagaglio occidentale. Quindi, io caminavo dal rock, Giorgio veniva dai canzone napoletano, ognuno di noi quasi cantavamo il canto diverso, la musica leggera ci stavamo un po’ studiate, cercando

Donato is an excellent musician and singer, and he is able to skillfully recreate the way the older people performed these songs, demonstrating nuances in vocal technique and instrumentation. He shows how the old songs were played in a very staccato 6/8 time signature, rhythmically similar to the tarantella tradition and guitar style that was typical of the Gargano peninsula. He admits that he was slow to recognize just how much of an influence the regional musical styles of Puglia had on the music of his community:

So we were almost afraid to change the tempo—surely they didn't count it this way! But the reality was, I came around to the idea that the *chittara battente* had come to be played in Chieuti, the *chittara battente* was among the instruments that they played, you can see it in the photographs of old musicians with the *chittara battente*.<sup>75</sup>

Angela remembers her grandfather playing songs in these local and regional styles, and her mother singing them as well, which gave her a strong foundation and authoritative sense of how to perform them.<sup>76</sup> Donato designates other musicians from

---

un modo per entrare, col cervello un po' proiettati, un po' nel passato, vediamo un po'." (Conversation with Donato Meola, March 11, 2011).

<sup>75</sup> "Quindi, avere quasi paura di scambiare il tempo. Sicuramente non era così. Però per contando non anche così, anche come la realtà di questa fammi girata la chittara battente di Chieuti venisse suonata. Perché per esistere fra gli strumenti c'erano la chittara battente. E si può vedere le fotografia dei vecchi colle chittare battente. (Conversation with Donato Meola, March 11, 2011).

<sup>76</sup> "E mio nonno la suonava sempre, mio nonno. E mamma la cantava così." (Conversation with Angela Dell'Aquila, March 11, 2011)

the community who had an impact on the development of the group's style, and the way they helped them to craft new versions of their old songs:

Listening to the voice of Grazia Rubino, listening to the voice of Carolina Florio, listening to the older people... So with these models we tried to reconstruct the songs even rhythmically, because it was difficult to put a guitar to them, very difficult. . . Carolina Florio was the aunt of Nina Florio, and Nina's father Antonio Florio played the guitar alongside her. Then there was Grazia Rubino, who had given us, from an interview that was released to us at the end of the 1960s or the beginning of 1970s, the possibility of understanding where to place the emphasis in the song "Qifti" that we had recorded without instrumentation and only with the unaccompanied voice of Raffaella Tammaro first, and then Angela Dell'Aquila for the second recording. Another Chieuti personality, who was famous for his singing performances, was Aurelio Magnacavallo, a great and passionate executor of Arbëresh songs. And then of course there was the singer and accordion player Giorgio Reggio. All of them passed away during the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>77</sup>

Despite their serious commitment to learning the songs as they were performed by older musicians, recognition of their role as links between the past and the future manifested itself in the person of a young singer, twelve-year old Raffaella Tammaro,

---

<sup>77</sup> "Ascoltando alla voce di Grazia Rubino, ascoltando alla voce di Carolina Florio, ascoltando alle voci degli anziani... Quindi, su questi modelli noi abbiamo cercato di ricostruire le canzone anche ritmicamente, perche era difficile metterci la chitarra vicino, era molto difficile." (Conversation with Donato Meola, March 11, 2011).

"Carolina Florio era la zia di Nina Florio, inoltre cantavano anche il padre di Nina, Antonio Florio (suonatore di chitarra) poi c'era Grazia Rubino (che ci ha dato, da un'intervista che ci ha rilasciato tra la fine degli anni sessanta e gli inizi degli anni settanta, la possibilità di capire quale era l'enfasi della canzone "Qifti" che noi abbiamo poi registrato senza strumentazione e solo con la nuda voce di Raffaella Tammaro prima e Angela Dell'Aquila in un secondo momento. Un altro personaggio famoso a Chieuti, per le sue performance canore, era Aurelio Magnacavallo, grande e appassionato esecutore di canti arbëreshë. Altro cantante e suonatore di organetto era certo Giorgio Reggio. Tutti scomparsi tra gli anni sessanta e settanta." (Email correspondence with Donato Meola, April 19, 2011).

whose “lush” voice they felt would “imbue the songs with a new tone and liberate them from a certain traditionalism. In fact,” Meola adds, “up until recently the only ones you could hear singing these songs were the elderly.”<sup>78</sup> Donato describes their excitement at finding such a talented young singer in their own community:

So ... the songs...were only known and sung by the older people, we didn't do them. But scholars had done research, like [Alan] Lomax, [Diego] Carpitella in the 1950s, they created their archives in those years of the songs that today are maybe the most important archives in the world. For us, the work of Giorgio and Roberto was really this: to search for and at all costs to hand down the songs of the old people to the young. And this was done, truly, with the voice of Raffaella. When Giorgio told me, “Oh Donato, there is a young girl, she sings powerfully, she is great,” he said, “but she is young, she is a young girl who can sing, she is really professional, extraordinary, she is like a machine!” A machine for counting time! She was precise. But she didn't speak Arbëresh. Her father was from Chieuti but her mother is from Lesina [a nearby Italian-speaking town], she isn't from Chieuti. Giorgio knew her, I didn't know her. When she came to our studio we were speechless. This was extraordinary because she didn't have the voice of a young girl, she had the voice of an old woman. At that time she had a voice—I don't know—you know what it means? The voice of a child, of a young girl who was singing... It was interesting, she was younger, it was such a gripping example. Because the fact is that there was something really special about this girl, this child who sang so professionally. When we were on tour people would notice the phenomenon of a child who was singing.<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> Meola, *Canti Popolari Degli Albanesi D'Italia, Jugoslavia e Albania*. “Grazie al materiale raccolto da R. Ruberto durante gli anni che egli dedicò allo studio del fenomeno albanofono, il gruppo ha potuto realizzare questa prima raccolta di canti, anche se in un certo senso questi non sono stati riprodotti aderenti ai moduli originali. Quest è dovuto ad un arbitraria iniziativa del gruppo di inserire nell'organico musicale, una determinate strumentazione, al fine di poter adattare la propria peraparzione musicale, palesemente insufficiente, ad un canto antico e complesso... Prevale nel gruppo, l'estro e la prodiga voce di una ragazzina di dodici anni. Raffaella Tammara, inserita nel gruppo nel tentative di ridare ai canti un tono nuovo e, svincolarli da un certo tradizionalismo; infatti, negli ultimi anni quel poco che ormai rimaneva dei canti, si udiva solo dalla voce di vecchi ed anziani.”

<sup>79</sup> “Quindi per tornare alla questione dei canti che erano solamente conosciuti e cantata dagli anziani, noi abbiamo fatto. I studiosi hanno fatto i ricerche, come varie Lomax, Carpitella, dagli anni cinquanta, faceva al loro archivio di quest'epoca dei canti e oggi e molto importante forse all'archivio del mondo. Da noi, il lavoro di Giorgio e Roberto è stato proprio questo: quello di cercare a tutti i costi di trasferire i

With Angela's help, Raffaella learned how to speak Arbëresh and properly pronounce the lyrics in the songs. They, along with Donato and Giorgio, accompanied at various times by Giovanni Rimenti, Antonio Fiadino, Nicola DeVirgilio, Nicola Bucci, Antonella Calo, Virginia Carducci, Giorgio Selvaggi, Giorgio Cuccia, Domenico Gallucci, Giovanni Licursi, Donato's brother Leonardo Meola, and Angela's brother Raffaele Dell'Aquila, became Il Gruppo Arbëresh di Chieuti. In their endeavors to approximate exacting performances of the old songs and at the same time to "free them from a certain traditionalism," they performed their very particular experience as a generation of musicians who were challenged to negotiate the vast cultural and temporal fissure that had divided their community. In doing so they accepted the dual role of being both deeply nostalgic and vibrantly current, and when they hit the road to perform the traditional music of their community they wove relationships between audience and performer that manifested as reflexive and highly political.

---

canti dagli anziani ai giovani. E questo si fece, veramente, con la voce di Raffaella, quella ragazzina. Quando Giorgio mi diceva, "Eh, Donato, c'è una ragazzina, canta forte, forte, bravissima," dice, "ma è giovane, è una ragazzina che può cantare, invece è proprio professionale, è straordinaria, è una macchina!" Una macchina di contare il tempo. [Ride.] Era precisa. ... No, lei non parlava Arbëresh. Il papà era di Chieuti, ma la mamma è di Lessina, non è di Chieuti. E lei non parlava. . . . Giorgio ha saputo, io non sapevo. Quando poi veniva in studio nostro, era proprio la, abbiamo rimasto di stucco. Questa era straordinario perché la voce—non avevo la voce di una vecchia—all'epoca lei aveva una voce, non so... Sai che vuol dire: La voce di una bambina, di una ragazzina, che cantava, e interessavano, e più giovani, e interessava che quindi il modello è stato avvincente. Perché infatti la cosa [] è proprio perché c'era questa particolarità di questa bambina, questa ragazzina che cantava era proprio professionale. Quando stavo in giro la gente notava il fenomeno di una bambina che cantava..." (Conversation with Donato Meola, March 11, 2011)

As Richard Bauman writes,

the collaborative participation of an audience, it is important to emphasize, is an integral component of performance as an interactional accomplishment. From the point of view of the audience, the act of expression on the part of the performer is laid open to evaluation for the way it is done, for the relative skill, effectiveness, appropriateness, or correctness of the performer's display. The interpretive process of evaluation invokes an intertextual field in its own right, constituted by the past performances that provide a standard for the comparative assessment of the performance now on view. A performer is thus accountable to past performances, however the standards and measures of accountability may be construed in particular cultural and historical milieu. As with genre, the alignment of performance to past performances demands calibration of the intertextual relationship between them. Taking responsibility for correct doing may impel a performer to close replication of past performance in an enactment of traditional authority, while distancing of a performance from established precedent may foreground the distinctiveness of present exigencies.<sup>80</sup>

As they began to receive feedback for their performances, Donato explains, the group was subject to the same dynamic that Bauman describes, and they were very conscientious of their responsibility to correct any perceived "errors" that they felt they had committed.

The publication in 1978 of our first cassette, financed entirely by Giorgio Ruberto, titled "Canti Popolari degli Albanesi d'Italia, Jugoslavia e Albania" ("Traditional Songs of the Albanians of Italy, Yugoslavia and Albania"), had an extraordinary impact not only on the population of Chieuti, but also among the Arbëreshë of Sicily and Calabria, because it contained in itself the presupposition of revisiting the scientific character of the entire repertoire of the Arbëresh songs, even if there were many errors made from a musicological point of view. Said errors, noted immediately by the group thanks to the collaboration of experts and scholars, made it necessary for us to extend the research. We were preoccupied with doing better, and we made concrete improvements on the two successive

---

<sup>80</sup> Richard Bauman, *A World of Others' Words*, (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 9-10.

releases. The second had the same title as the first, this is the one with the red cover (“a revisitation of the first cassette”). The third was called “Il Canto Albanese In Italia” (“Albanian Songs in Italy”) and that, through a study of comparison and overlap of the songs of all or almost all of the Albanian-speaking regions of Italy, revealed and confirmed many analogies and points in common in rhythm and melody. This in our opinion made something clear that wasn’t at first, justifying for example the adoption of one arrangement rather than another, playing one beat or waiting for a rest, suggesting to us such a way of doing things with mathematic precision, thus making more comprehensible the contents of our original package.<sup>81</sup>

The tape was well received both in Chieuti and by the larger Arbëresh community. Besides the songs that Angela taught in the classroom, Antonio De Lillis attributes his knowledge of traditional Arbëresh music to these recordings, because his parents played them in their home when he was growing up:

---

<sup>81</sup> “Come già ti dissi a Chieuti, la pubblicazione nel 1978 della nostra prima compact cassetta finanziata interamente da Giorgio Ruberto, intitolata "CANTI POPOLARI DEGLI ALBANESE D'ITALIA, JUGOSLAVIA E ALBANIA" ha avuto un impatto straordinario non solo fra la popolazione di Chieuti, ma anche fra gli arbëreshë della Sicilia e della Calabria perchè conteneva in se i presupposti di una rivisitazione a carattere scientifico dell'intero repertorio del canto arbëreshë anche se, molti errori sono stati fatti dal punto di vista musicologico. Detti errori, rilevati immediatamente dal Gruppo, grazie alla collaborazione di esperti e studiosi, hanno creato i presupposti, per un'allargamento della ricerca e, la preoccupazione di fare meglio, ha trovato concretezza nelle successive due pubblicazioni la seconda intitolata uguale alla prima con copertina rossa"(una rivisitazione della prima cassetta)" e la terza intitolata "IL CANTO ALBANESE IN ITALIA" che, attraverso uno studio di comparazione e sovrapposizioni dei canti di tutte o quasi le aree albanofone d'Italia, hanno rivelato e confermato moltissime analogie e punti in commun nella ritmica e nella melodia. Questo a nostro avviso, ha reso comprensibile ciò che all'inizio non lo era, giustificando per esempio, l'adozione di un accordo anzichè un altro, l'esecuzione di una battuta o l'attesa per una pausa, suggerendoci così un "modo di fare", con una precision matematica, tale da rendere comprensibile il canto nei suoi contenuti originari.” (Email communication with Donato Meola, April 19, 2011).

Yes, I remember many songs. All those that Angela's group recorded in the 1980s. I learned them also because my dad and mom had bought these two discs and made us kids listen to them.<sup>82</sup>

Moreover, their popularity throughout the Albanian-speaking communities in Italy gave them an opportunity to perform their songs for audiences all over the south, and even took them as far as Milan. Participation in the revivalist movement reinforced connections between Chieuti's Arbëreshë and the larger Italo-Albanian community, enhancing their collective identity with those who share their *gjaku i shprishur*, or "displaced blood."<sup>83</sup> Donato further describes how the scope of their travels even took them beyond esoteric interest in Arbëresh culture:

Regarding our concerts, they were done almost exclusively for the diffusion and preservation of the Arbëreshë culture, in addition to the relationships that they allowed us to build with other communities in Italy and abroad. But we also met up with other minority language-speaking communities in Italy, those of Greek-speakers of Salento, the Slavic speakers of Molise, the French-Provençal speakers in Puglia, the Ladino speakers in Alto-Adige, etcetera. Our concerts in Albanian-speaking areas were those in Piana degli Albanesi in Sicily, Barile in Basilicata, Greci in Campania, Motecilfone, Ururi, Portocannone and Campomarino in Molise, at the Teatro della Provincia in Milan, for the present community in Lombardy. [We played concerts] for the Greek-speaking regions [in southern Puglia] and with the Gruppo Arbëresh "Katundy Yme" di San Marzano di San Giuseppe in Taranto...we also played in various other places that were not culturally Arbëreshë.<sup>84</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> "Si... mi ricordo molte canzoni. Tutte quelle che poi il gruppo di Angela Dell'Aquila ha registrato negli anni '80. Ma ho imparato anche perché mio papà e mia mamma avevano comprato due dischi e lo facevano sentire a noi figli." (Email communication with Antonio De Lillis, April 14, 2011).

<sup>83</sup> This saying is a common self-referential expression among Italy's Arbëreshë. See Perta, *Language Decline*, 5, and Maria Teresa Massaro, 15.

<sup>84</sup> "Per quanto riguarda i nostri concerti, erano fatti quasi esclusivamente per la diffusione e la salvaguardia della cultura Arbereshe, oltre che per i rapporti che si stringevano sia con le nostre

***Si të le u më ngë të pe!*—Since I left you no longer do I see you  
Arbëreshë abroad**

With these efforts to disseminate their regional music and local traditions to wider audiences, the Guppo Arbëresh was promoting not only their language and culture, but their very unique sense of place. In *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache*, Keith Basso describes how Apache children who grow up without the historical language and stories from their culture are said to be “losing the land,” something that, he says, “they can ill afford to do, for geographical features have served the people for centuries as indispensable mnemonic pegs on which to hang the moral teachings of their history.” He invokes Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of *chronotopes*, or the “points in the geography of a community where time and space intersect and fuse,” which reflect, essentially, the cultural identity of a community.<sup>85</sup>

Basso also describes how landscapes as symbols can be translated into songs and

---

comunità in Italia che all'estero, ma anche per incontri con altre minoranze linguistiche presenti in Italia, quelle GRECANICHE del Salento, quelle SLAVE del molise, quelle FRANCO-PROVENZALI della Puglia, quelle LADINE dell'Alto Adige ecc. I nostri concerti nelle aree albanofone sono stati quelli di PIANA DEGLI ALBANESI in Sicilia; BARILE in Basilicata, GRECI in Campania, MONTECILFONE, URURI, PORTOCANNONE e CAMPOMARINO nel Molise; MILANO (Teatro della Provincia) per la comunità in Lombardia. Per le aree grecofone: LECCE -Università degli Studi-Facoltà di Lettere (Sindacato Nazionale Scrittori) con una rappresentanza importante delle minoranze GRECANICHE quale "IL CANZONIERE GRECANICO SALENTINO" e il Gruppo Arbereshe "KATUNDY YME" di San Marzano di San Giuseppe (Taranto). Per le minoranze Francofone: TROIA, FAETO, CELLE SAN VITO (minoranze franco-provenzali) della Puglia (Università degli Studi di Troia) - facoltà di Lingue e letterature straniere Istituto di Glottologia. Altri concerti in luoghi vari non di cultura Arbëreshë." (Email communication with Donato Meola, April 19, 2011).

<sup>85</sup> Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 62.

stories, where they are “‘detached’ from their fixed spatial moorings and...thus transformed, [become] eminently portable possessions to which individuals can maintain deep and abiding attachments, regardless of where they travel.”<sup>86</sup>

Arbëresh songs, like most traditional songs that were penned in the pre-modern past of our imaginings, contain myriad references to the natural world. For Arbëresh musicians, landscape as symbol is represented in songs in profound ways, which suggests, following Basso, that continuing a relationship with old songs and stories allows the deep connections with place and the past to be experienced in the present, no matter where you roam. Several songs reference penetrating longing, displacement, and, as in “Rine Rine,” the pull of a distant mountain. Rine’s lover/mountain may signify the actual mountains just visible at the edge of Chieuti’s horizon, evoking a general longing for any unreachable, yearned-for thing. It also may symbolize the lost mountainous Albanian homeland. The song “Bukura More” which the Gruppo Arbëresh included on their first cassettes and was familiar in Albanian communities throughout Italy, is filled with nostalgia for home. Morea was the medieval name for the Peloponnesian peninsula, where many Albanian émigrés traveled before settling in Italy. The popularity of this song illuminates the abiding sense of exile that was braided into Arbëreshë identity:

---

<sup>86</sup> Basso, 75.

## O E BUKURA MORE

O e bukura More  
Si të le  
u më ngë të pe!

Si të le  
Si të le  
Si të le  
U më ngë të pe!

Atje kam u zotin tat  
Atje kam u zojën meme  
Atje kam edhe t'im vëlla

## O BEAUTIFUL MOREA

O beautiful Morea  
Since I left you  
No longer do I see you

Since I left you  
Since I left you  
Since I left you  
No longer do I see you

There I have a father  
There I have a mother  
There I have my brother too.

Rine's mountain may also represent a world of tantalizing adventure beyond the closed village walls. Viewed as the clash between a mother who remains close to home tending the hearth and a daughter who is lured by the temptation to explore the larger world, "Rine Rine" is suggestive of how the departure of so many Chieutini has impacted on this community's fractured sense of collective identity. The experience of emigration is surely not new to Chieuti, but each community member who is compelled to migrate leaves a void that spotlights the accelerating dissolution of their unique culture for those who remain. Everyone in Chieuti has strong ties to family members and friends who have departed for distant climes. Angela and Giorgio, for example, have another sister and brother, both of whom left Chieuti decades ago in search of better jobs. Giorgio and Maria's daughter Manuela has recently relocated to London,

and scores of young people leave for economic and educational opportunities in other Italian cities and abroad. Reflecting on the experience of exile, Donato Meola wonders if those who have migrated might have given themselves an advantage by being spared the pain born by those who are left to witness the process of language loss:

You know that the Arbëreshë who are living outside today, who live in places like Milan, are always trying—surely you integrate into the new culture—but the Arbëreshë who live here, we who continue to live here, have always lived here, for us I think that the trauma is worse. Because we are losing our identity, with the language and traditions, we are losing them. But in exchange we don't succeed in assimilating with another identity. That is, you lose your identity without receiving in exchange another that you can see from another culture. That whoever can move on to live in another country, in London, so surely you would adapt yourself to your new reality, you would intergrate the new ways of your society. We are a little like...we are neither fish nor fowl. We have lost the language. As it was earlier when we lost our religion, the Greek Orthodox rite, so today we are Catholic, Catholic Christians, but we have lost our religion, but we haven't gotten another in exchange. Even if you belong, even if you are a member—we are Christians, after all—but the Catholics conquered us completely. In fact in Chieuti it isn't like in Serracapriola [the nearest town five kilometers up the road] where even men go to church. Here it's maybe a decade since it started, that some of the men will go at the urging of the wife, of the wife who is not a Chieutina. So you have in exchange, you receive in exchange what we received when we lost our religion. We lost our religion, we got another one in exchange. And that puts me in mind of another answer. So in reality it isn't this way. We appear to be Catholic, and maybe today more than ever we can say this is so. I imagine in the 1700s when you lost your position...now because in Rome, the Greek Orthodox rite will be Catholic Christian. Okay, fine. But whoever [converted] regreted it. It is the same with the language. We lost our language, we acquired that official Italian, today we also speak English because we are compelled to—when we have to travel out in the world it is the most useful language for work, all our graduates who work know English really well because if you work in London, if you work in New York, if you work abroad, these are the things that it is necessary to do. For those Albanians who remain?

Leo's son—my brother Leo—the one who works in Milan, Matteo, what will he have of our culture? Nothing, especially because his mother isn't from Chieuti.<sup>87</sup>

Angela listens thoughtfully to Donato's melancholy monologue. Her response to it is telling, for she remembers Matteo as a child in her classroom: "But he he loved school, as a boy, how he learned the songs—every one of them—at that time, with joy!"<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>87</sup> Sai che gli arbëreshë che vive oggi fuori, che vive fuori tipo a Milano cerca di sempre di...sicuramente si integrera nella nuova cultura. Ma l'arbëreshë che vive qua, noi che continuiamo a vivere qua, noi che abbiamo continuato, sempre vissuto qua, per noi penso che trauma e maggiore. Perché noi stiamo perdendo la nostra identità; colla lingua colle tradizioni, le perdiamo. Ma in cambio, noi riusciamo neanche ad assimilare un'altra identità. Ciò è perde la tua identità senza ricevere in cambio un'altra che puoi vedere da un'altra cultura. Che puoi se avanta se vivere all'estero, a Londra, quindi sicuramente si altererebbe alla nuova realtà, s'integrebbe uno nuovo modo di società. Noi siamo un po'...noi siamo né carne né pesce. Abbiamo perso, perdiamo la lingua. Come era primo quando noi abbiamo perso la nostra religione, il nostro rito Greco, ortodosso, però oggi siamo di religion cattolica, cristiana cattolica, ma noi abbiamo perso la nostra religione, ma noi non abbiamo avuto in cambio ad un'altra. Anche se apparentemente siamo appartenzati, siamo, però non siamo cristiani, cattolici convinti complete. Infatti a Chieuti si vuol dire che non è com'è a Serra, a Serracapriola dove vanno in chiesa anche gli uomini. Qua gli uomini forse sarà un decennio che l'inizio, che qualche degli uomini sarà ad andare forse per condizionato dagli moglie, dalla moglie che non è Chieutina. Allora si hai in cambio, si riceva in cambio quello che abbiamo ricevuto colla perso della religione. Abbiamo perso una religione, e abbiamo avuto in cambio un'altra. E siamo in prende mente siamo passati dall'altro risponda. Però, in realtà non è così. Siamo risultiamo cattolici forse oggi più che mai, ecco diciamo così. Immagino nelle settecento quando c'era un posto voi perdeti, adesso perché a Roma così vuoi, perché il rito Greco è sarete cristiani cattolici. Sì, okay, va bene, però, chi lo è stato si penta. E è così pure colla lingua. Noi abbiamo perso nostra lingua, abbiamo acquisito quello ufficiale itliano, oggi parliamo anche in inglese perché siamo costretti in quanto dobbiamo in giro nel mondo ti servi la lingua, lavoriamo, per lavorare, per tutti nostri laureate che lavorano conoscono inglese perfettamente perché chi lavora a Londra, chi lavora a New York, chi lavora all'estero, per forza della cosa si costringa. Per cui è l'albanese che cosa rimana di più? Il figlio di Leo (il mio fratello) che lavora a Milano, Matteo, che cosa avra della nostra cultura? Nulla, anche perché la mamma non è di Chieuti. (Conversation with Donato Meola, March 11, 2011).

<sup>88</sup> "Però, lui li che voleva alla scuola, il bambino, come ha imperato le canzone, tutti quanti! E una volta con gioia!" (Conversation with Angela Dell'Aquila, March 11, 2011).

*“La capacità dei bambini supera l’insegnante” –*  
**“The capacity of the children exceeds that of the teacher”**  
**Teaching songs to children**

For Angela, providing the children of Chieuti with songs and stories in their ancestral language, as well as through movement in dances and plays, was a lifelong mission that countered the loss of the language in their homes. Although her curriculum was not officially recognized and was taught primarily to her students in the earliest grades, there is evidence that she made a strong impact, giving them something vital that may remain with them, even if they leave their hometown.

Antonio De Lillis supports the notion that Angela’s efforts in the classroom reinforced his sense of identity as “Arbëresh from Chieuti.” When asked if he remembers the songs that Angela taught at school, Antonio responded that

Yes, certainly I remember them, the music and the songs gave me a strong sense of belonging. I hope you know what I mean. I feel myself to be Chieutino, to be Albanian, even if most of my life hasn’t been lived in Chieuti. But when I think about these songs I always get a little melancholy.<sup>89</sup>

Angela is a born performer. As her anecdote about organizing recitals in the living room for family and neighbors attests, she loved to sing and dance as a child, and besides performing with musical groups she was also active in local theater productions

---

<sup>89</sup> “Sì, sicuramente... la musica e le canzoni mi hanno donato un forte senso di appartenenza. I hope you know what I mean. Io mi sento chieutino e albanese, anche se la maggior parte della mia vita non l’ho passata a Chieuti. Ma quando penso a quelle canzoni mi viene sempre un po’ di malinconia.” (Email communication with Antonio DeLillis, April 14, 2011)

throughout her life. Her animated conversational style and hilarious way with a story make it easy to imagine that she was a captivating presence in the classroom. She says that she always wanted to become a teacher, and that she had always intended to teach Arbëresh music to her students. Until the passage of Italian Law 482 in 1999, which legally recognized minority languages and allowed for them to be taught in the schools, there was no official policy with regard to Arbëresh instruction in Chieti. Carmela Perta attributes the difficulty of enforcing formal Arbëresh instruction to the fact that “a coded Arbëresh language does not exist,”<sup>90</sup> which was due to the wide variation in regional dialects and the general lack of a written language.<sup>91</sup> It therefore fell to the efforts of individual teachers to implement a course of study, and Angela designed her own curriculum. Because she is a musician, her method was to use music. In addition to traditional folk songs, she translated popular Italian songs into Arbëresh and taught those as well. She outlines her technique, and the challenges she faced with keeping a roomful of five-year-olds focused:

It is clear that for the little children it is very important that it is passed on. For the kids it is hard, very hard, to get them to learn the dances, but it unleashes their imaginations. You work more as a teacher, because the capacity of the children exceeds that of the teacher. They all get tired. You want to repeat things in a certain way, but you don't want them to get tired. Their attention spans last for ten minutes, twelve, fifteen minutes at the most, after that no. So you have to try—you, the teacher—you have to try to keep their interest in

---

<sup>90</sup> Perta, *Language Decline*, xxiii.

<sup>91</sup> Perta, *Language Decline*, 14-16.

another way, to return again, so this time a little with the guitar. The guitar charms them, it captures their attention. They used to call me “Angela with the guitar.” The teacher with the guitar,” that was me!<sup>92</sup>

Angela developed a reputation for her commitment to teaching Albanian language and culture to the children of Chieti, and was eventually charged with implementing projects for all grades:

At the middle school we did another project with the principal. I was the one who was responsible for the nursery school, the elementary school, and the middle school. So I was working with the middle school teacher who had accepted this project, I worked in the school with them. I was the person who functioned as what they called the “objective function,” because I served as this person, it was me who carried out the objective of this project regarding Albanian curriculum, the Arbëresh.

Then I wanted to do some [other] projects, but without compensation, without getting any payment in exchange, no. I didn’t want to do that. So with the costumes, I made the costumes with the kids, also we made a cassette, and each one of them had it, but I didn’t have it. For so many years even the principal of the school, of our school said, “Thank you. I didn’t understand anything, but it was marvelous.” Because she wasn’t from here. But it was a magnificent thing.<sup>93</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup> “Eh, si. Per i bambini è chiaro che... per i bambini piccoli è molto importante, ciò è, che viene trasmesso. Per i bambini poi, è molto laborioso, laborioso, per far imparare i balletti, e le sturo la fantasia. Quindi lavori più dell’insegnante ma la capacità dei bambini supera l’insegnante. Tutti puoi stancare quando vuoi, a ripetere, in un certo modo, perché non devi stancare, poi l’attenzione è un po’ durare dieci minuti, dodici, al massimo quindici minuti, dopo di che non. Quindi devi cercare di...poi tu—insegnate—cercare di interessavi però in altro modo, per ritornare poi di nuovo, quindi un po’ con la chitarra, che l’incantava di catturavano. Allora mi chiamavano “Angela colla chitarra,” “La Maestra colla chitarra!” Sono io! (Conversation with Angela Dell’Aquila, July 26, 2011).

<sup>93</sup> “Alla scuola media quando abbiamo fatto un altro progetto col preside—io ero quella che ha avuto la responsabile la scuola elementare, media, e della materna. Quindi io stavo con le professoresse della scuola media che hanno accettato di fare questo progetto, e però, chi lavorava come se, come se m’interno pure io, perché pure ero anche una figura che aveva una funzione che si chiamava “funzione

## Ethnomimesis

Robert Cantwell's theory of ethnomimesis elucidates the way in which cultural identities are transmitted from generation to generation, and inter-communally across the boundaries that define localized communities. Cantwell defines ethnomimesis as "the learning that arises between, among, of, and by people in the realm of social relations which includes most of what we call 'culture,' but especially that unconscious mimicry through which we take the deposits of a particular influence, tradition or culture to ourselves, and by which others recognize them in us."<sup>94</sup> Cantwell employs multiple linguistic analogies as he spells out the intricacies involved in the process of ethnomimesis and the development of *habitus*, especially as it was understood by Pierre Bourdieu as the "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations" that comprise one's behaviors and expressions of sense of culture.<sup>95</sup> Many linguists and linguistic anthropologists investigating the

---

obiettiva" perché doveva fungere questa persona—che era io—di portare avanti questo obiettivo di quell progetto, di riguardava poi la scuola albanese, l'arbereshe. Sì.

Poi ho voluto fare dei progetti, ma senza avere la riparazione, senza avere in cambio di pagamente, non. Non ho voluto farlo io. E quindi, con i costumi, ho fatto fare i costumi, coi bambini, quindi anche la cassetta, ce l'ha ad ognuno, non ce l'ho io. Di tanti anni anche la preside della scuola, della nostra scuola, ha detto, "grazie, però io non ho capito niente. Ma è stato stupendo." Perché lei non era di qua. Ma è stato una cosa grandiosa." (Conversation with Angela Dell'Acquila, July 26, 2010).

<sup>94</sup> Robert Cantwell, *Ethnomimesis: Folklore and the Representation of Culture*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 5.

<sup>95</sup> Robert Cantwell, "Habitus, Ethnomimesis: A Note on the Logic of Practice," *Journal of Folklore Research* 36 (1999), 219.

course of language shift and maintenance are careful to infuse their writings with the grave caveat that reversal of the progression of language death is futile, or an exercise in encapsulation at best, a portrait much like Roelandt Saverij's eleventh hour renderings of the dodo bird. "When patterns of association change," Cantwell writes, "*habitus*, while remaining essentially unchanged in itself, will dispose inconsistently and unpredictably until it ultimately achieves, ethnomimetically, the necessary accommodation . . . Culture, like nature, must replicate to live." Yet,

Replication implies variation. As replication can only occur ethnomimetically *habitus* cannot produce change until idiosyncratic variations, arising at random, from immediate practical expedience, or transmuted from existing forms, have assumed through ethnomimesis a social character. The social/cultural 'pioneer' emerges then not only from a simple reaction to new objective conditions but from the new patterns of association arising from it, the nascent social style dilating into an emergent ethnomimetic field that gradually harmonizes and consolidates into a frangible mode of individuation in a context of social identity..."<sup>96</sup>

There is much that is nostalgic in Angela's pioneering endeavors to transmit folksongs to her students, an apparently simple performance practice that is in fact loaded with complex significances for language, identity and tradition bearing. Because in the case of Arbëresh relatives of the particular dialect of Chieuti still exist and are viably functioning in Albania—as opposed to entire language families which are disappearing completely—the desire to encapsulate the whole of the community's past

---

<sup>96</sup> Cantwell, "Habitus," 221.

*habitus* and transmit it in the stylized mode of song suggests a deliberate and political registration of a local, cultural distinctiveness. In this way she and others who use music to reinforce connectedness to Chieuti's past are adapting new ways to "create spaces in which identities can be rehearsed and developed, new social realities assembled, and cultural stances negotiated from a position of security and strength."<sup>97</sup>

The ethnomimetic process correlates to the concept of worldview, which also uses linguistic models to describe an individual's way of perceiving, interpreting, and expressing reality. Barre Toelken argues that language acquisition and spatial perceptions are embedded in a child's psyche, and uniquely, deeply affected by the immediate culture a child experiences. He asserts that "while the child is learning his verbal language, he is also becoming acquainted with the deeper cultural language of time and space from those about him. . . society reproduces, through patterning on *all* levels of expression, those codes, structures, and cultural premises which can be summed up in the term 'worldview.'"<sup>98</sup> Toelken saw worldview as "inculcated at an early age through the informal, traditional agencies. . . interdependent and reciprocating parts of the deep structure of what we might call cultural language

---

<sup>97</sup> Llewellyn, Meic, "Popular Music in the Welsh Language and the Affirmation of Youth Identities," *Popular Music* 19 (2000), 335.

<sup>98</sup> Barre Toelken, "Folklore, Worldview, and Communication," *Folklore: Performance and Communication*, Dan Ben-Amos and Kenneth S. Goldstein, eds., (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), 266.

(culturally-oriented structures of thought, logic, and expression), that are learned chiefly before school age.”<sup>99</sup>

Clearly there is good reason to continue to impart songs and stories to the children of Chieuti at school, starting at the earliest possible levels. But even if Arbëresh families are not transmitting language to their children at home, as long as they continue to identify with their ancestral culture, practice Arbëresh traditions in the community and at home, and express their sense of inherited cultural traits, their children will acquire a sense of belonging to Arbëresh culture whether or not they speak the language. Though Antonio De Lillis did not formally learn to speak Arbëresh, he still identifies with recognized elements of Albanian heritage. When I asked him how he considers himself to be Arbëreshë he responded:

That’s a difficult question. I don’t know. Maybe stubbornness, force of will and a spirit of sacrifice are some of the characteristics of many Arbëreshë. But who knows?<sup>100</sup>

Though he struggles to articulate it, his answer reveals that the centuries-old celebrated Arbëresh qualities continue to be markers of identity for young Chieutini. It is true that some young Chieutini have difficulty finding words to describe their sense of inheriting Albanian ancestry, and most of them point to outward, community-oriented

---

<sup>99</sup> Toelken,” 267.

<sup>100</sup> “Domanda difficile. Sai che non lo so? Forse la caparbietà, la forza di volontà e lo spirito di sacrificio sono delle caratteristiche di molti arberesh... ma chissà... (Email communication with Antonio De Lillis, April 6, 2011).

traditions like the *Corsa di Carri*, the oxcart race that is the highlight of their most important feast day, *La Festa di San Giorgio*, on April twenty-third. This exhilarating event, in which squads of horseback riders and groups of men in carriages drive teams of oxen eight kilometers up the main road from the sea to the center of town, inspires the same kind of fervent fandom that is typical of the World Cup or NCAA basketball. It is also a way for the different Arbëresh communities to get together, as squads come from neighboring towns of Portocannone and Ururi as well.<sup>101</sup>

Angela considers such a signification of identity among young Arbëreshë to be a “rather sentimental form,”<sup>102</sup> and backs the notion that there is more to acquiring the essence of being Arbëreshë than simply speaking the language:

The sense [of being Arbëreshë]? It can be something inside you, right? It isn't finished just because the children don't speak [the language], so you can't say that you don't have a feeling of being Arbëreshë. More than anything else you can feel it when the oxcarts run, but it is deeper than that. So a feeling, certainly... Here also there is a sense maybe of sorrow, because we aren't speaking [Albanian]. But maybe, I hope, maybe if you can you have to do something. This is why you have to ask yourself—is this the moment when I show my hand? Do you have to be finished? And why does it have to be finished? Up until now...now does it really have to collapse, to close completely? It isn't completely over yet.<sup>103</sup>

---

<sup>101</sup> Angela told me that continuing the tradition of *Corsa di Carri* is tenuous as it has recently become the target of animal rights activists. She expressed real anxiety about how Arbëresh identity would be celebrated in Chieti if this event were to be outlawed.

<sup>102</sup> “E lo dico subito secondo me. È proprio una forma alquanto romantica. Arbëreshë e uguale a la corsa di carri.” (Conversation with Angela Dell'Aquila, March 11, 2011).

<sup>103</sup> “Il senso, forse? Può essere che qualcosa c'è dentro di noi, non? Non è, non può finire che non le ha parlato dai bambino, quindi non può dire non hai senso. Più degli altre perché puoi sentirti c'è mandato i carri, quindi è approfondito. Quindi un senso, certamente...da qui anche c'è un senso forse anche di dispiacere, perché ne stiamo parlando e magari spero, magari si può devi fare qualcosa. Questo perché si

David Samuels observed this same process among the Apache communities with whom he worked in Arizona. Apache musicians and audiences appreciate American country music songs, which are generally performed in English, although the vocal style and arrangements are manipulated so that they convey a uniquely Apache outlook and sensibility. They also occasionally sing country songs in Apache. Samuels argues that there is value in both expressions for members of the native community, and that their sense of belonging as Apache remains intact. “To say that San Carlos Apaches have held onto or lost certain traditions,” he asserts, “is not the same as saying that they have held onto or lost their identity. Identity is no longer tied exclusively to practices that are objectifiable as traditions, important as they are...production and expression of identity are contextualized within the contradictions of everyday life in the contemporary reservations communities.”<sup>104</sup>

*Latini* who have settled in Chieuti exhibit a commitment to upholding both linguistic and non-linguistic facets of the town’s heritage. Though she comes from nearby Serracapriola and Arbëresh was not spoken with their children in their home,

---

fa questa domanda si pone dal momento in cui fa a scoprire le carte si dice ma, devi finire? E perché deva finisce? Se è stato fino al adesso.. adesso perché dovrebbe proprio sprofondare quindi chiudere completamente? Non è anche ancora di più proprio chiudere completamente.” (Conversastion with Angela Dell’Aquila, March 11, 2011).

<sup>104</sup> David Samuels, *Putting a Song on Top of It*, (Tucson, University of Arizona Press: 2004), 244.

Donato's wife Virginia embraces the Arbëresh culture of her husband's family and has learned all the songs and some of the language, sharing a sense of pride in the culture of her adopted home town. Mario Massaro's son Gianfranco has settled in Chieuti with his wife Francesca, who is from Abruzzo. Their first child was born in January 2011, and Nina reports with pride that her daughter-in-law — who has a degree in foreign language study — has picked up her husband's *lingua madre* by listening to his family and speaks to their newborn daughter in Arbëresh.<sup>105</sup>

Still others have made deliberate efforts to familiarize their children with their language. At the most positive extreme is the family of Antonella Massaro, the youngest daughter of Mario and Nina. She and her husband speak only Arbëresh at home and as a result their two children, Carolina and Giorgio, are completely bilingual. Mario jokes that they “speak Albanian better than me! Why? Because it is the mother tongue, the language of home, of the family.”<sup>106</sup> Even if they are not completely immersed in the language at home, there are those who express pride in their familiarity with the Arbëresh language. Angela continues to tutor secondary-school-

---

<sup>105</sup> “Allora. Ascolta. Mio figlio è sposato con un ragazzo Abbruzzese. Si chiama Francesca. Lei è laureata nelle lingue — inglese, tedesco, non lo so. Si è sposata siccome con mio figlio e sono venuti abitare qua, hanno una casa vicino della chiesa, la casa nostra vecchia, vicino alla chiesa. E adesso c'è una piccola bambina — ah! Na poco...è nata quindici gennaio. Io non ho imparato niente, ha rimasto ascoltare, lei ascoltava e lei la cambiava, e le parlava in albanese, in arbëresh. E le diceva che la piangeva — “keto keto”. . . “vaiza vaiza” — perché è una bambina. A lei è perché è una passione. E loro non abitano qua, hanno casa sua.” (Conversation with Nina Florio, March 8, 2011).

<sup>106</sup> “Imparano senza i problem. Mia nipote, la figlia di mia figlia, quella parla albanese meglio che me! Hai capito? Perché? Perché e la lingua sua, e la lingua maternal, e la lingua della casa, della famiglia.” (Conversation with Mario Massaro, March 8, 2011)

aged students in the afternoons, and one of them, Michela, whose mother is Arbëreshë from Chieuti, is proud of her ability to recognize words when the older people speak in Albanian.<sup>107</sup> Another young student of Angela's, Giorgia, who is five years old, loves to sing along to the Arbëresh songs her Chieutino father has downloaded on their computer. Her mother, who is from Serracapriola, reports that she knows lots of songs in Albanian, and Giorgia, who is an extremely shy, quiet child, becomes illuminated with joy when Angela sings Arbëresh songs with her.<sup>108</sup>

---

<sup>107</sup> Both Michela and her friend Desiree were extremely interested in my research and were very honored that anyone from outside their community would want to write about it.

<sup>108</sup> Personal communication, March 13, 2011.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Poetics of Song

So if songs are to be one method by which young Chieutini inherit the language of their ancestors, what value do they contain, even if they remain only as relics of a language once it is forgotten? Is it possible for culture to manifest in these songs? As we have already seen, the historically oral transmission of the language prevented the development of a literary language that would unify Arbëresh-speaking communities in Italy, making it difficult to implement an official national Arbëresh language curriculum or engage the larger community in its upkeep.<sup>109</sup> However, the language of Chieuti was codified in the eighteenth century, in the manuscript written by the Orthodox priest Papas Nichola Figlia. This document, which was called “Codice Chieutino” and was reprinted in 1912 by Michele Marchiano, records sacred and traditional songs and stories and, says Mario, “Thanks to this savior we have our

---

<sup>109</sup> Perta, *Language Decline*, 7. “There is neither a common Arbëresh language of reference nor a common literary language.”

culture.”<sup>110</sup> Through later documentation efforts by Roberto Ruberto and the Gruppo Arbëresh di Chieuti, the language was captured in its later form through a new collection of songs and stories, however stylized in their poetic form.

### Creating A Literary Language

Revivalist efforts starting in the 1960s made great strides to encapsulate the language, and others continue to be engaged in efforts to actively cultivate a written language for Chieuti’s Arbëreshë.<sup>111</sup> Creating a literary language is challenging, and perusing the various transcriptions of songs and stories over the years, Mario Massaro is critical of the way that Arbëresh was transcribed by early researchers and linguists who tried to apply an Italian phonology to the written language. It was not until Albanian scholars used Albanian phonetical and phonological standards did a written language begin to emerge that made sense to its literate speakers. In 2010 Massaro published a comparative dictionary of Arbëresh and Italian, for which he labored over creating

---

<sup>110</sup> “Grazie a questo noi ci troviamo nostra cultura questo salvatore.” (Conversation with Mario Massaro, March 8, 2011.) See also Maria Teresa Massaro, 15.

<sup>111</sup> As part of the revivalist fervor several doctoral theses emerged in the 1960s and 1970s which surveyed the stories, songs, sayings, games, proverbs, traditions, customs, and foodways of the Arbëreshë communities in Capitanata. Many of them are housed in the collection of the public library in Portocannone. In addition to the thesis completed by Mario Massaro in 1968, I also perused “Chieuti e le sue tradizione popolare” by Filomena Musacchio (Università degli Studi Roma Facoltà di Lettere, 1968), “Gli albanese di Portocannone: alcuni elementi per definire una identità etnica” by Maria Pina Manes (Università degli Studi di Padova, 1979), and “Canti Popolare Albanesi nel Molise” by Maria Regina Specchia (Istituto Universitario di Magistero Femminile “Suor Orsola Bnincasa” Napoli, 1978).

accurate transcriptions for words. The dictionary focuses on Chieuti and its fellow upper-Puglian Arbëresh village of Casalvecchio because, he notes,

The Arbëresh language has this characteristic: each Arbëresh town has its own language. It was formed together with so many people, people who came from various places, from different time periods, and so it was always modified by different languages. Each one has its own characteristics. As a matter of fact, among us and for those of Casalvecchio we have our own diverse characteristics. So the issue really is that we can't speak of *one Arbëresh language*, no. It is better to say *the Arbëresh langauges*, because each community has its own language.<sup>112</sup>

The proximate evolution of these two communities allows their dialects to share enough similarity, though Massaro notes distinctions when they arise. His research and investigation activities made him realize with surprise that both dialects continue to be actively spoken today, albeit most frequently by the elderly. His aim with the publication of the book, he writes, was not to be exhaustive, but “to be a small contribution to the preservation of an important linguistic heritage.” He recognizes that the continued vitality of the two languages made it necessary for him to include “neologisms” that have entered the language as a result of its natural progression, but that, “unfortunately the abandonment of the original language on the part of the young

---

<sup>112</sup> “La lingua arbëreshe ha una carratteristica: ogni paese Arbëreshë ha una propria lingua. Si è formata col insieme di tante persone o di persone che venivano dalle varie luoghe, in tempi diverse, e quindi portavano sempre modificate diversi lingue. Ognuno ha avuto e ha una sua carratteristica. Infatti tra noi e da Castelvecchio abbiamo nostre carratteristiche diverse.” (Conversation with Mario Massaro, March 8, 2011).

has condemned Arbëresh to death in many communities, while in others they are now recording acute losses that have eroded the morphological system.”<sup>113</sup>

Mario, his wife Nina and daughter Antonella all endeavor to keep the language alive by writing poetry in their *lingua madre*. Their poems celebrate, among other themes, a deep love for their history and heritage and sorrow for watching it fall fallow. As part of a national movement to support the upkeep of a literary Arbëreshë tradition, the Concorso Nazionale di Poesia in Lingua Arbëreshe poetry contest awards the “Prince Giorgio Castriota Skanderbeg” prize each year. In 2009 Nina Florio won for her poem “*Shena Dimri* (Winter Scene).” On the remarkable achievement of developing a written Arbëresh language within her lifetime, Nina observes,

Meanwhile, with time we have had the realization that little by little we have even learned to read and write. Certainly we didn’t have much preparation for this, it didn’t exist, we didn’t have it. But I could never have imagined that I could write poetry in Albanian and win a prize for it.<sup>114</sup>

---

<sup>113</sup> Mario Massaro, *Dizionario Comparato*, 10, 12. “Man mano, però, che procedevo nelle mie ricerche e nelle mie indagini per il recupero della nostra parlata arbëreshe, mi sono reso conto che, in fondo, anche nelle nostre comunità la lingua è ancora largamente parlata, anche se più frequentemente dalle persone anziane. . . L’adstrato romanzo, che circonda le parlate albanesi italiane, ne ha fortemente condizionato il lessico anche a causa della necessità imposta dal progresso di creare neologismi. Purtroppo l’abbandono della lingua originaria da parte dei giovani ha condannato in molte comunità l’arbëresh alla morte, ed in altre si registrano ormai perdite gravi che intaccano già il sistema morfologico. . . . Il presente lavoro non ha pretese di esaustività, ma vuole essere un piccolo contributo alla conservazione di un importante patrimonio linguistico.”

<sup>114</sup> “Intanto, col tempo, abbiamo la presa di coscienza piano piano fino che abbiamo imperato pure a leggere a scrivere..Certo non abbiamo un grande preparazione, non c’era, non abbiamo. Però, io non potevo mai immaginare che io potevo scrivere una piccolo poesia in Albanese e vinci un premio.” (Conversation with Nina Florio, March 8, 2011).

With these actions, the Massaros and other Italo-Albanian poets are actively anticipating prospective texts to emerge in Arbëresh. It is a determined act of preservation spirit, which Richard Bauman, quoting Bakhtin, recognizes in the way that “each act of textual production presupposes antecedent texts and anticipates prospective ones. For Bakhtin, dialogue, the orientation of the now-said and the to-be-said, is ubiquitous and foundational, comprehending all of the ways that utterances can resonate with other utterances and constitutive of consciousness, society, and culture.”<sup>115</sup> The fact that this contest has a special section for children’s poetry demonstrates that Arbëreshë throughout Italy are committed to cultivating the literary language among their offspring.

Similarly, in performing, recording and distributing Albanian songs the Gruppo Arbëresh, along with other musical groups throughout Italy, evince Bauman’s dynamic by continuing a social conversation about tradition, belonging, identity, and community through music.<sup>116</sup> If we allow the text of songs to operate as part of a greater dialogic apparatus, one that communicates along with everyday discourse but on a more abstract level, then its very linguistic structure functions to codify the language.

Carmela Perta asserts that languages in danger of obsolescence are still capable of retaining important linguistic codes. Though they are “now no longer used in normal

---

<sup>115</sup> Bauman, *A World of Others’ Words*, 4-5.

<sup>116</sup> A similar contest exists for songs in the Festival della Canzone Arbëreshe, which is held each August in the Calabrian town of San Demetrio Corone.

communicative contexts, sometimes [they] are conserved as secret codes or ritual languages."<sup>117</sup> She even observes marked structural changes to everyday speech in languages in decline, and attributes this to the emotional and psychological experience of losing the language:

Semi speakers show an imperfect knowledge of the abandoned language. This may include defective morphology, absence of some grammatical categories, together with a deep insecurity over communication skill. Phonetics and phonology only seem not to be affected. The linguistic impoverishment registers some feedback on the speakers' socio-psychological evaluation, since their language fails to serve high prestige functions. . . This is the cause of several psychological problems: as long as the abandoned language is present in their environment, semi-speakers feel frustrated. A kind of collective linguistic pathology arises on the basis of which many semi-speakers avoid speaking the language they are not completely confident with, causing, paradoxically, an acceleration of the death of the abandoned language."<sup>118</sup>

The most extreme consequence of this shift [where dominant language becomes the minority language and vice versa] in the communicative behavior of the speakers is constituted by the voluntary interruption of language transmission to the new generation. The single source of data from language A is at the disposal of the learners who will be then be made up of those who only occasionally hear it in the familiar atmosphere, whose stimuli are not sufficient for the development of full competence in language A. From a structural point of view, the consequence of this is that the codes in Language A exhibit a profound phenomenon of breaking up.<sup>119</sup>

---

<sup>117</sup> Carmela Perta, "Language Death: Il Caso Dell' Arbëresh Molisano: Risultati di uno studio pilota," *Plurilinguismo: Contatti di Lingue e Culture* 10 (2003), 210. "Tale lingua, ormai non più utilizzata nei normali contesti comunicative, a volte è conservata come codice segreto o lingua ritual."

<sup>118</sup> Perta, *Language Decline*, 29. As shown above, such psychological factors also play a tremendous part in families choosing not to teach the language to their children.

<sup>119</sup> Perta, "Language Death," 209. "La conseguenza estrema di questo cambiamento nel comportamento comunicativo dei parlanti è costituita dall'interruzione volontaria della trasmissione linguistica (*language transmission* (LT)) alla nuova generazione. L'unica fonte di dati della lingua A a disposizione

So while endangered languages undergo distinct structural alterations as their use declines, the language of recorded songs and stories remains constant. As long as Arbëresh continues to exist in the stylized realms of performance there is still value to be gained from its maintenance in songs, wherein marked elements of language continue to communicate important features of identity. John Edwards concurs that after the traditional language falls to disuse and no longer functions as the primary method of communication,

it may, however, be retained in a symbolic fashion, may continue to exist as a valued part of group history and culture, may even be used on special or ceremonial occasions, and so on. Some have seen this as a bitter retreat, and there is no doubt that an ongoing communicative use of language is the strongest and most obvious pillar of a group's collective identity. My point is simply that, if circumstances bring about language shift, this needs not imply an overall *cultural* shift. A continuation of the social and psychological cohesion of the group as a unique entity may be predicted to last for some considerable time...a language that is no longer regularly spoken may yet have a role to play in the maintenance of group boundaries.<sup>120</sup>

---

degli apprendenti sarà allora costituito da ciò che occasionalmente si sente nell'ambiente familiare, i cui stimoli non sono sufficienti affinché si sviluppi una piena competenza nella lingua A: in conseguenza di tutto ciò il codice della lingua A presenta profondi fenomeni di sfaldamento dal punto di vista strutturale."

<sup>120</sup> Edwards, 6. Italics original.

## *“Ostrenenie” – Making Strange In Order to Carry On*

Linguist Mark Janse argues that “every language is the guardian of its speakers’ history and culture...The conservation of oral traditions in endangered languages will help us understand more about human values, culture, world view, verbal art, oral literature, and much more.”<sup>121</sup> Mario Massaro says that our language “reads to us from the past, it gives us the history, and [without it] these things are no more,”<sup>122</sup> There is, then, something unique in the telling of ones own history in the language of those who lived it. I recognize that my limitations as a non-speaker of Arbëresh make it impossible to conduct a genuinely thorough study of language in the song “Rine Rine.” However, examining it in translation—twice removed, first into Italian and from there into English—helps to elucidate the particular communication challenges that transitional speakers of a language in the process of obsolescence experience.

Through their exploration of the place where “poetics meets performance” — the voice—Steven Feld, Aaron Fox, Thomas Porcello and David Samuels argue that “social agency, difference, social imagination, and identity” are evident in the way that “language’s musicality—its tonal, timbral, prosodic, and gradient dynamic qualities—highlights the role of vocal performance for linguistic

---

<sup>121</sup> Janse and Tols, xiii.

<sup>122</sup> “...quello che ci caratterizza, che distingue, ci legge dal passato, ci danno la storia, insomma, non è più...” (Conversation with Mario Massaro, March 8, 2011).

meaning. Music's language—the texted dimensions of songs and other sung poetic genres—highlights verbal art as vocal art.”<sup>123</sup> They express the difficulties inherent in such an analysis:

From a semiotic point of view, music seems far more syntactically redundant and over determined when compared to language... forms of repetition, cyclicity, and predictable recursiveness dominate musical structure more than language structure. In this sense music may seem a similar formal system to describe with logical rules. But at the same time, meaning in music is notoriously more complex to formally characterize when compared to the semantic structures of language.”<sup>124</sup>

Despite such challenges, there is a case to be made that the poetics of song might act as a conduit to signify complex issues of identity and agency. In addition to obvious modes of analysis of the meaning of words, cultural significance may be coded in the very structure of language. Writing in the same volume Giorgio Banti and Francesco Giannattasio draw parallels to the way in which the singing voice expresses the mechanics of language in their discussion of poetry, arguing that

singing in its proper sense [seems] to be a sort of link between language and music...indeed the sung word is not only the locus of maximal expression for all the musical features of speech—such as intonation, emphasis, onomatopoeia, sound and rhythm correspondences, etc.—but also the source of discourse-like features of music, such as musical phrases and periods, syntactic and strophic structures, refrains, punctuation markers such as breaths and rests, and so on,

---

<sup>123</sup> Steven Feld, Aaron A. Fox, Thomas Porcello, and David Samuels, “Vocal Anthropology: From the Music of Language to the Language of Song,” in *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*, (Maldon, Massachusetts: 2004), 323

<sup>124</sup> Feld, Steven, et al., 322.

upon which also the so-called pure, i.e. instrumental music is mainly based in several cultures.<sup>125</sup>

If we accept this relationship between sung and written verse, a cursory examination of poetic function will help to clarify the way that a song might work to communicate issues of identity.

Terrence Hawkes, in his wonderful condensation of the complicated morass of semiotics, writes that

poetic language is deliberately self-conscious, self-aware. It emphasizes itself as a 'medium' over and above the 'message' it contains. It characteristically draws attention to itself and systematically intensifies its own linguistic qualities. As result, words in poetry have the status not simply of vehicles for thoughts but of objects in their own right, autonomous concrete entities. In Saussure's terms, then, they cease to be signifiers and become 'signifieds.'<sup>126</sup>

The linguists and literary critics of the Prague Circle were concerned with the function of poetry, and although they were dedicated to working out the features of poetic language that set it apart from standard language (Saussure's *langue*), Jan Mukařovský argued that the "unifying and diversifying functions of language" are

---

<sup>125</sup> Giorgio Banti and Francesco Giannattasio, "Poetry," in *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*, (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 295.

<sup>126</sup> Terrence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics*, (Oxford: Routledge, 2003), 48.

inseparable.<sup>127</sup> “The function of poetic language,” he writes, “consists in the maximum of foregrounding of the utterance. Foregrounding is the opposite of automatization, that is, the deautomatization of an act; the more an act is automatized, the less it is consciously executed; the more it is foregrounded, the more completely conscious does it become.”<sup>128</sup> He argues for these two coexisting yet inseparable forms of language in order to establish that poetic language was valuable for its own sake; foregrounding was important for the way it subordinates the communicative function of words in order to spotlight their existence as words, beyond their capacities as signifiers. As his colleague Roman Jakobson further elaborates:

The distinctive feature of poetry lies in the fact that a word is perceived as a word and not merely a proxy for the denoted object or an outburst of an emotion, that words and their arrangement, their meaning, their outward and inward form acquire weight and value of their own.<sup>129</sup>

So words in their poetic arrangement have a twofold capacity: to be experienced for their aesthetic qualities, the way they sound, look, and feel, and how they work together with other words; but also for the way they can mean something other than the customary meaning assigned to them. This is roughly a part of the formalist concept of

---

<sup>127</sup> Jan Mukařovský, “Standard Language and Poetic Language,” in *The Routledge Language and Cultural Theory Reader*, Lucy Burke, Tony Crowley and Alan Girvin, eds., (London: Routledge, 2000), 221.

<sup>128</sup> Mukařovský, 225-226.

<sup>129</sup> Roman Jakobson quoted in Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History-Doctrine*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), 183.

*ostranenie*, or making strange. For the formalists, the function of poetry is to stylize the language to which we have become accustomed, which heightens our awareness of and focuses our attention on words themselves, as well as their literal or figurative meanings. Removed from our habitual association with language, we are able to respond to it with a new concentration. When the language itself is already somewhat strange—for example as the now seldom-used language of your grandparents and ancestors as in Arbëresh—your relationship to the words you sing is colored by an added layer of *ostranenie*. Hawkes suggests how knowledge of a language affects this process in formalism's emphasis on language's "basic anaesthetic function:"

In essence, the overriding device of alienation has one main purpose, to shock us out of the anaesthetic grip our language maintains on our perceptions. ...Saussure points out that native speakers tend to assume a necessary 'fitness' an unquestionable 'identity' between signifier and signified, between the sound image made by the word 'tree' and the concept of an actual tree. This assumption is the basis of language's anaesthetic function. The poet's job...requires him to refuse to permit that anaesthetic to operate. ... And so what is important in any poem is not the poet's or the reader's attitude to reality, but the poet's attitude towards *language* which, when successfully communicated, 'wakes up' the reader and makes him see the structure of his language, and so that of his 'world' anew."<sup>130</sup>

Mukařovský was additionally concerned that poetry remain free to experiment with language in order for a process of 'anaesthetics' or 'deautomotizing' to evolve the language. Literary history has shown that innovations in poetic language influence the

---

<sup>130</sup> Hawke, 54.

spoken language, and “the more the norm of the standard is stabilized in a given language, the more varied can be its violation, and therefore the more possibilities for poetry in that language.”<sup>131</sup> Furthermore,

the possibility of distorting the norm of the standard, if we henceforth limit ourselves to this particular background of foregrounding, is indispensable to poetry. Without it there would be no poetry. . . Proof of the intensity with which a new trend in poetry is perceived as a distortion of the traditional canon is the negative attitude of conservative criticism which considers deliberate deviation from the canon errors against the very essence of poetry.<sup>132</sup>

If having a poetic language means acknowledging the existence of a standard language, when poetic language remains the living vestige of a language that has ceased to exist, it then operates as a new standard from which a current language might grow and evolve. The changeability of poetic language necessitates the existence of a canon against which future works might rebel. If we accept this concept for poetry, then for a language which has lost its vitality as a mode of daily discourse it falls to its literary, poetic forms, which manifest also in the form of songs and stories, to become the genesis for a new canonical standard from which a new form of language might advance.

---

<sup>131</sup> Mukařovský, 226

<sup>132</sup> Mukařovský, 229.

*“La Voce Prodiga” – “A Lush Voice”*  
**The Essence of Language in Voice**

By exploring the relationship between Rine and her mother—or, more precisely, between Angela Dell’Aquila and her singing partner Raffaella Tamaro, we observe how the Arbëresh language carries out this poetic function, isolated as it is in the context of song, and how its ability to “de-anaesthetize” the language allows it to carry the burden of tradition bearing for this community. Angela represents—in fact is one of—the generations of Chieutini who conducted their lives, and perceived and communicated the world around them, in the language that had been spoken in their community for centuries. Raffaella was born into that same community but acquired her sense of the world, and her position in it, in Italian. And though her particular worldview certainly included identification as Arbëreshë, her knowledge of it was articulated in a language other than Arbëresh. As John Edwards observes, the language shift that occurred in her generation probably did not dramatically shift her overall cultural identity, though her sense of it would be summarily different from that of previous generations, since she did not acquire and express it using the same characteristic qualities unique to Arbëresh in that process. She did, however, sing songs in Albanian, and so she was able to access its color palette.

In the Gruppo Arbëresh di Chieuti’s recording of “Rine Rine,” the voices of Raffaella as Rine and Angela as her mother are hard panned across the two speakers,

invoking their distance and distinction from one another. It is not until they join together on the final verses, where the tone of the lyrics shifts from a dialogue to an admiration of the charms of the mountain, do they come to the center to sing together. In this way the recording acts like a play, and the listener may visualize the characters and their movements as they inhabit specific positions on the stage. As Rine couches her amorous adventure in expressions of natural beauty, we imagine her dancing over the countryside, enchanted and awakened by the freshness of the world she observes.

Because songs must be sung, they rely on the *voice*—perhaps more than any other genre—to convey their poetic language. In singing this adventure Raffaella’s voice is clear, strong and pure; Donato Meola described it as *prodiga* in his notes, which may be translated as “lavish” or “lush.” Angela also has a rich alto with a soft rasp that is beautifully expressive as it ascends and descends melismatic inclines. Both voices embody what Roland Barthes found so attractive in voices which have a “grain:” each voice is *felt* as it is emitted from the body, and movingly recalls something coded deep in the ancient language in which it sings. Barthes applied this same sense of connection to language to the bass voice of a Russian cantor, in which

something is there, manifest and stubborn (one hears only *that*) beyond (or before) the meaning of the words, their form (the litany) the melisma, and even the styles of execution: something which is directly the cantor’s body, brought to your ears in one and the same movement from deep down in the cavities, the muscles, the membranes, the cartilages, and from deep down in the Slavonic language, as though a single skin lined the inner flesh of the performer and the music he sings. The voice is not personal, it expresses nothing of the cantor, of his soul, it is not original (all Russian cantors have roughly the same voice), and

at the same time it is individual; it has us hear a body which has no civil identity, no personality, but which is nevertheless a separate body. Above all this voice bears along directly the symbolic, over the intelligible, the expressive... The 'grain' is that: the materiality of the body speaking its mother tongue; perhaps the letter, almost certainly *significance*.<sup>133</sup>

Barthes then is arguing that the voice itself transmits the symbolic meaning of a song's words. Here his emphasis on the grain's ability to **be** *significance* assigns semiotic power to the voice itself. Raffaella's young voice articulates a sense of place, of the past; it is essentially nostalgic, even for someone who never lived it. Such an exercise is part of the appeal of singing old songs in any language. Perhaps, as Barthes seems to suggest, the grain of the voice is capable of transmitting historical memory as it is carried in the body. The progression of *habitus*, the embodiment of a group's cultural identity, relies on memory as it is continually processed in the present; the essence of a culture is contained in language and communicated in song. Barthes recognized this in the way the grain of the voice communicates the essence of language:

The 'grain' of the voice is not—or is not merely—its timbre; the *significance* it opens cannot better be defined, indeed, than by the very friction between the music and something else, which something else is the particular language (and nowise the message). The song must speak, must *write*—for what is produced at the level of the *genosong* is finally writing. This sung writing of language is, as I see it, what the French *melodie* sometimes tried to accomplish....the historical meaning of the *melodie* is a certain culture of the French language. ...Romantic poetry of France is more oratorical than textual; what the poetry cannot

---

<sup>133</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, (Fontana Press, 19), 181-182.

accomplish on its own however the *melodie* has occasionally accomplished with it, working at the language through the poem.<sup>134</sup>

Barthes distinguishes the *pheno-song*—“everything in the performance which is in the service of communication, representation, expression, everything which it is customary to talk about, which forms the tissues of cultural values (the matter of acknowledged tastes, of fashions of critical commentaries), which takes its bearing directly on the ideological alibis of a period ‘subjectivity,’ ‘expressivity,’ ‘dramaticism,’ ‘personality’ of the artist” —from the *geno song*, which he describes as

the volume of the singing and speaking voice, the space where significations germinate ‘from within language and in its very materiality’; it forms a signifying play having nothing to do with communication, representation (of feelings), expression; it is that apex (or that depth) of production where the melody really works at the language—not at what it says, but the voluptuousness of its sounds-signifiers, of its letters—where melody explores how the language works and identifies with that work. It is, in a very simple word but which must be taken seriously, the diction of the language.<sup>135</sup>

Those of us who do not understand the Arbëresh language can only hear “Rine Rine” as a *geno-song*, and experience it in terms of the sound of the words. We feel the wave crash of sibilants into the walls of consonants as in *ku ishtë*, the alliteration in phrases like *mëma jime* and *luljo luljo lulejza*, and the buzz in *kan ullinjazit tëzeza* and *si ka sut të zeza vajza*. Even as words signifying no particular meaning, the lyrics of “Rine Rine”

---

<sup>134</sup> Barthes, 185-186.

<sup>135</sup> Barthes, 182-183.

impart a personality to the language which marks it differently from Italian, or any other language. What is really lost, then, when a language ceases to exist and its speakers adopt another form of communication? Its essence is as difficult to describe as the essence of music. The volumes that have been written by linguists, philosophers, literary theorists, psychologists, anthropologists and others analyzing the vagaries of structure, form, semantics, and semiotics are wonderful scientific explorations into the mechanics of how languages function, but attempts to describe how language affects and shapes the cultural sensibilities of its speakers are much more difficult. In the language of song, however, its own identity offers a sense of identity to those who sing it.

## IN CONCLUSION

### *“Lo spirito ricorda” – “The spirit remembers”*

Ultimately song is a highly stylized form of language; it carries a different semiotic burden than that of words used in ordinary discourse. How effective is it as a tool for transmitting a language in the process of extinction? John Edwards argues that “the single most important aspect of human language—beyond its obvious instrumental and communicative function—lies in its relationship to group identity. Consequently, when we read of languages at risk, there is usually a deeper and more emotionally charged sub-text.”<sup>136</sup> It is difficult to ignore the complexity of emotions that beset a community in flux. Raffaella went off to attend university in England and eventually settled there, succumbing to the indisputable allure of the mountain. Her departure is a loss the remaining members of the Gruppo Arbëresh recount wistfully. Emotion permeates conversations about the state of the language in Chieuti. Mario speaks incredulously and passionately as he wonders how people were not able to

---

<sup>136</sup> Edwards, 3.

recognize “the riches, the treasure” of their own language that they did not pass to their children.<sup>137</sup> Donato describes it as the aftershock of some kind of trauma:

But certainly for someone who is nostalgic it is difficult to abandon, to abandon the idea of aligning yourself with a different model from your own circumstances. Today you can only do what you can to help it continue. It still persists in the behavior of the “wounded” of our culture. Only a certain kind of great will, of desiring this even if you have unfortunately left...Our culture is truly diluted, it is fading, it is overwhelmed.<sup>138</sup>

Mario describes the rapidity of loss in the last fifty years, and can only offer a grim prospect for the future:

The thing is, truly, too much time has been lost. I am very skeptical of a revival. I think that there won't be a few more generations and it will be finished.<sup>139</sup>

Listening to her husband mourn the dramatic decrease in Arbëresh-speaking in the last fifty years Nina Florio is quiet for a moment and then offers, calmly and resolutely, that “the spirit remembers.”<sup>140</sup>

---

<sup>137</sup> “Ma se tu hai i figli, e non trasferisci ai figli questa proprietà, questa ricchezza, questa tesora ...è pochi noi difendere...” (Conversation with Mario Massaro, March 8, 2011).

<sup>138</sup> “Ma certamente per la nostalgico è difficile abbandonare, abbondare l’idea di uniformarsi una modello diversi dalla proprio occasione. Per cui ciò che può oggi aiutare solamente a la continuare, diciamo persiste anche nei comportamenti per ciò che riguarda nel comportamento dei feriti di nostra cultura. Solamente una specie di un grosso voglio di volerlo questo anche se purtroppo sei andato più... sempre più...ciò è la nostra cultura vero diluita, scompari la..sopraffata. (Conversation with Donato Meola, March 11, 2011).

<sup>139</sup> “Quindi la cosa che, si davvero, fare, è perduto troppo il tempo io sono molto scettico, insomma, ad una ripresa. Io penso che non passerà qualche generazione e finisce.” (Conversation with Mario Massaro, March 8, 2011).

<sup>140</sup> “Lo spirito ricorda.” (Conversation with Nina Florio, March 8, 2011).

## Chances for language revival

As Mario gloomily admits, the prospects for a full scale revival of Arbëresh in southern Italy seem grim. In the case of Chieuti, for most people the Arbëresh language lives as a performance form rather than as the aqueduct of everyday discourse, but it requires active participation for its upkeep. According to psychologist John Edwards, “it is very common to find that concerted attention to an endangered language comes rather late in the day. Common, but also entirely understandable, because it is often only with hindsight that one can see where and when remedial action was first indicated.” He also points out that undertaking a successful intervention would require “much larger-scale social upheaval” than members of a community, especially a small one, are likely to be equipped to handle. He regretfully describes the prospect for permanent reversal of language shift to be “an illusory hope.”<sup>141</sup> Mark Janse admits that the only real resistance to the process of language death lies in its documentation:

The description of endangered languages is an urgent task for various reasons. First, every language expresses thoughts and ideas in unique ways, both grammatically and semantically. The quest for universal grammar tends to obliterate the diversity of natural languages, even though studies of hitherto undescribed languages tend to reveal ‘same but different’ structures time and

---

<sup>141</sup> Edwards, 5.

again. The study of such languages are of the utmost importance for our general understanding of the sum total of the possibilities of the formal and semantic expression of human thought patterns. Second, the study and description of endangered languages saves them from oblivion after the death of their last speaker. This is not only of interest to future linguists, but equally importantly, it may enable the descendants of the last speakers to acquaint themselves with and even to relearn their ancestral language. [...] Every language is the guardian of its speakers' history and culture...The conservation of oral traditions in endangered languages will help us understand more about human values, culture, world view, verbal art, oral literature, and much more."<sup>142</sup>

It is then essential that the relics of linguistic health, including stories, songs, proverbs, and oral histories, be recorded in any language. Perta counters the skeptical pronouncements of these scholars with positive data and theories for a successful revival strategy:

According to Fishman, when a language is no longer being passed on at home, efforts to promote it outside that domain—in church or in schools—usually end up being symbolic and ceremonial. Nevertheless, the expansion of use of the language into new domains is an important aspect in the process, but it could be achieved after the reinforment of the mother tongue transmission only.<sup>143</sup>

There must then be collective willingness, a formal decision on the part of the entire community to participate in the effort of language maintenance, both at home with the family and in civic life.<sup>144</sup> This is difficult for an Arbëresh community that has become diffuse with Italian speakers and families are mixed, but it is not impossible.

---

<sup>142</sup> Janse and Tols, xiii.

<sup>143</sup> Perta, *Language Decline*, 51.

<sup>144</sup> Perta, *Language Decline*, 53.

*“Non si perde tutto, si evolve” – “Everything isn't lost, it is evolving”*  
**The support of the community**

When Maria Teresa Massaro asked Arbëresh speakers in Chieuti what it means to be Arbëreshë today, many of them answered that it means: “to be repositories of an important cultural heritage, to be bearers of a valour, to be custodians of the cultural identity of our own ancestors. The same bias is evident in the moment in which 84% of the interviewees declare their own attitude as a “favorable asset” in comparison with the language, but when you ask them if society is sensitive to a recovery of Arbëresh identity in the community only 28% consider that it is.”<sup>145</sup>

Even if it seems to lack support, taken as a whole there appear to be pockets of interest in revitalizing Arbëresh, which indicates that a caretaker level of language maintenance has begun. Chieuti is one community among an array of Italian-Albanian communities in Italy, each experiencing its own revivalist sensibilities with varying degrees of community support, efforts that succeed in maintaining at least a familiarity with their language. Giorgio Dell’Aquila describes the efforts of his adopted town of Portocannone to promote Arbëresh use in the community, like the installation of a traditional Albanian crèche every Christmas, publishing informative, illustrated

---

<sup>145</sup> Maria Teresa Massaro, 36. “Quando invece si chiede loro “che cosa vuol dire, oggi, essere arbëresh?”, molti hanno risposto che vuol dire: essere depositario di un patrimonio culturale importante, essere portatore di un valore, essere custode dell’identità culturale dei propri avi. Lo stesso *bias* è riscontrabile nel momento in cui l’84% degli intervistati dichiara il proprio atteggiamento come “favorevole attivo” nei confronti della lingua, ma quando si chiede loro se la società civile sia sensibile al recupero dell’identità arbëreshe della comunità solo il 28% ritiene che lo sia.”

calendars and pamphlets that contain the words to ritual songs during *Il Carnevale* that are distributed for display in shops and homes, and the implementation of a formal education program in elementary schools. He exhibits the famous Arbëreshë obstinance in his optimism for the future of their culture:

So it isn't that everything is lost, everything isn't lost, it is evolving. Our ancient origins will always remain inside of us, and will then be mirrored in the people. They can be recovered at another time, the things of the past. So many of the proverbs and some of the wit is challenged. [Recognizing the importance of] origins, traditions, songs, practices, customs comes late. So this means that even if the language and the traditions changed, for the old people the origins remain always in the hearts of the people. It is true that [traditional practices] always be offered.<sup>146</sup>

In Chieuti this is happening via the support of cultural brokers like Mario Massaro and ethnomusicologist Salvatore Villani, who runs the Centro Studi Tradizioni Popolari del Gargano e della Capitanata, a folklife center dedicated to promoting the culture of the region. Villani regularly produces festival events and symposia which stimulate continuing conversations about Arbëresh traditions in the area, ensuring that their rich history and experience as longstanding contributors to the regional identity are not forgotten. Donato's devotion to accuracy and musicological veracity, a mission

---

<sup>146</sup> Però non è che si è perso tutto, non si perde, si evolve. Però dentro di noi restono sempre le nostre origine antiche che poi la gente riflette, si vanno ripescare un'altra volta le cose di prima. Tanto dei proverbi già e qualche di genio si tende...arrivano tarde le origine, le tradizione, le canzone, gli usi, le costume. . .Quindi, questo significa che anche se la lingua e le tradizione sono cambiate però per i vecchi, le origine restono sempre nella cuore della gente, tanto è vero che lei li propone sempre. (Conversation with Giorgio Dell'Aquila, March 6, 2011).

he inherited from his mentor Giorgio Ruberto, as well as to a forward-thinking artistry as a modern performer of Arbëresh songs, makes him one of the few remaining practitioners on local Arbëresh folk music traditions in the region. And Angela Dell'Aquila, despite her retirement, is extraordinarily active. Her after-school tutoring sessions for middle school and high school children and her catechism classes for preschool-aged children on Sundays give her continued opportunities to share her knowledge of local Albanian culture. Moreover, Salvatore Villani assists her with appointments to teach Arbëresh music and language at state-sponsored programs in the region, and Mario Massaro recently sent her to represent their community at a symposium on diasporic Albanian populations in Kosovo. Both Angela and Donato continue to perform as the remaining members of the Gruppo Arbëresh.

The real future of this community's Arbëresh traditions seems to lie with Mario Massaro's family, and those like them. He and his wife Nina have truly imparted to their children a love and devotion to their inherited cultural traditions, which they are in turn bequeathing to their children. His daughter Antonella, who is a primary school teacher, carries on where Angela left off by including Arbëresh culture and language in her lessons. Arbëresh is the language spoken in her home, which ensures that her young children are maintaining a facility with the language that Mario and Nina remark is "better than ours!" Their newborn granddaughter will likely speak Arbëresh as a result of the commitment of their son Gianfranco and his wife Francesca, and their

daughter Maria Teresa, who lives in Palermo, maintains her family's association with the language through her work and through ties to the nearby Arbëresh town of Piano Degli Albanese.<sup>147</sup>

As far as a future for the traditional music of Chieuti, in my short time there I did not see any evidence that young musicians are interested in performing the folk music of their town, or even modern popular music, in the Arbëresh language. Unlike in Wales and in the Cajun communities of Louisiana, Arbëresh speakers in this region do not have a viable popular musical tradition that attracts young people and inspires them to write songs in their ancestral language. The Festival della Canzone di San Demetrio Corone in Calabria might be able to change that, but it is too early to tell.<sup>148</sup> When I asked Antonio De Lillis if he feels an affinity for the traditional music he heard as a childn he responded that he “used to love to play that music.” As a teenager he was a rock fan and then gravitated toward jazz, and though he has attempted to arrange traditional songs for jazz combos, nothing has come of it so far. He has not given up on the idea and still dreams of a future project in which these songs might be reimaged further still, given new life in reinterpretations that take into account the

---

<sup>147</sup> There may be others in Chieuti who continue to maintain this level of commitment to the everyday use of Arbëresh, but I was not introduced to them.

<sup>148</sup> For an account of the popular music movement among young Welsh language activists see Meic Llewellyn, “Popular Music in the Welsh Language.” For accounts of the successful reimplementation of Cajun French in Southern Louisiana through music, see Mark Mattern, “Cajun Music, Cultural Revival: Theorizing Political Action in Popular Music;” Barry Ancelot, *Cajun and Creole Music Makers*; and Katherine Doss, “Louisiana Romp.”

experiences and senses of identity that are unique to the generation of Chieutini who grew up speaking Italian.<sup>149</sup> Antonio's passionate expressions of his Arbëreshë identity make him a viable candidate for giving musical expression to what it means to be Arbëreshë today.

Though he has moved away, Antonio has not abandoned the world he absorbed as a child. He becomes movingly poetic when he describes what being from Chieuti means to him. In articulating this sense of identity, he evokes the sights, tastes, and smells of his childhood home, revealing that he has indeed internalized the culture of his parents, clear evidence that his "spriti remembers:"

I remember the smell of the old houses, I remember the market in the summer... the terrible heat, the sea and the lemon popsicles.... I remember the old ladies who would sit in chairs outside the doors of their houses...

Fields of wheat the color of yellow gold.... Red poppies, the scent of the olive trees, the fragrance of just-picked olives...

The smell of the big pots that they still use every August to prepare tomato sauce that will be put up for the whole year... and in September the sour smell of grapes used to make wine in the humid cantinas that that they all know are musty....

---

<sup>149</sup> "Non so. Ho suonato e cantato musica tradizionale pochissimo. Poi mi sono appassionato al Rock, e poi, da circa 15 anni alla musica Jazz. Ma con tutte le competenze che ho acquisito, sai, mi piacerebbe suonare quella musica. Chissà cosa verrebbe fuori. Alcuni anni fa avevo chiesto a dei miei colleghi di suonare insieme dalle canzoni in arberesh e di fare degli arrangiamenti jazz. Purtroppo poi non si è riuscito a fare più niente." (Email communication with Antonio De Lillis, April 14, 2011).

I remember the simple, country life, beautiful and terrible at the same time. You know, there is so much ignorance in a place like that. But I remember only the wonderful things!<sup>150</sup>

Richard Bauman and Raymond Briggs have noted that “an adequate analysis of a single performance [...] requires a sensitive ethnographic study of how its form and meaning index a broad range of discourse types, some of which are not framed as performance.”<sup>151</sup> My literary interpretation of the lyrical content of “Rine Rine” is entirely speculative, intuitive, and applied to Chieuti’s position as a unique linguistic and cultural locale in the process of language shift as an allegorical device.<sup>152</sup> A lyrical reading of the fable of “Rine Rine” reveals multiple binary tensions: between romantic and family love; the pull of independence against the support of home and community;

---

<sup>150</sup> “Mi ricordano l’odore delle vecchie case, mi ricorda il mercato d’estate... il grande caldo... il mare e i ghiaccioli al limone... mi ricordano le vecchiette che si mettevano a sedere con la sedia fuori dalla porta di casa...

I campi di grano di colore giallo oro... i papaveri rossi... l’odore degli alberi d’olivo, il profumo dell’olio appena molito...

L’odore dei pentoloni che vengono usati tutt’oggi ad agosto per preparare la salsa di pomodoro da mantenere tutto l’anno... e a settembre l’odore acido dell’uva usata per fare il vino nelle cantine umide che sapevano di muffa...

Mi ricorda una vita semplice, contadina... bellissima e terribile allo stesso tempo. Sai, c’è tanta ignoranza in un posto così.

Ma io ricordo solo le cose belle!” (Email communication with Antonio De Lillis, April 14, 2011).

<sup>151</sup> Richard Bauman and Raymond Briggs, “Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life,” in *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19 (1990), 61.

<sup>152</sup> I asked Donato and Angela several times if my interpretation of “Rine Rine” as an allegory for generation gaps in Chieuti’s linguistic and social history was an acceptable way to proceed, and they repeatedly gave me the okay, with such casualness even that I wondered if it wasn’t news to them already.

and the yearning for adventure against the comfort and security of the familiar. These dynamics have always played themselves out in the experience of the Arbëreshë of Chieuti, like they do for the denizens of small, tightly knit communities the world over. The questions that have been raised in this paper, particularly with regard to the essence of the poetic language of songs and its ability to foster cultural identity, deserve a more intensive exploration and a broader field of inquiry. More time to spend with the people of Chieuti would surely invite a wealth of deeper insights, and maybe even refute some that are offered here. It is too early to pronounce the death of Arbëresh—as Angela remarked, “It isn’t completely over yet”—but for Chieutini who grew up speaking Albanian with their families, its loss is sorely felt. Still, with characteristic fortitude they withstand. They bestride two shores and span the shift that, like the passage of their exiled ancestors, connects their future to their past.



Angela is sitting at her kitchen table with a guitar in her lap, singing the beautiful ballad “Qifti.” Her voice is strong and pure, floating easily over the words of its mysterious melody, its gentle melisma and ancient rhymes. *Qift* means “hawk” in Albanian, the name the Arbëreshë exiles gave to their town of Chieuti.

### QIFTI

Ishi një ditë  
Ka muoji të majit  
Me shumë diell  
E me pak vare.

U ngri jta syt  
Lart te qielli  
Paç një qift  
Çë flisji gja ne

Ai më vareji  
Me ata sy  
Gja tallandishëra  
E zonjëza Shën Mëri

Mora e kalojta  
Poshtë te kopshti  
Paç një lule  
Çë kishi hije

Paç një lule  
Çë kishi hije  
U ngjajta dorën  
E e mbodha me hare.

E kur e kjejta  
Përpara te mëma  
Ajo më pyesi:

Çë lule ishtë kjo?

Kjo ishi lulja  
Çë kishi hije  
U ngjajta dorën  
E e mbodha me hare

### THE HAWK

There was a day  
In the month of May  
With much sun  
And little wind

I lifted my eyes  
High in the sky  
I saw a hawk  
That spoke as we

He was watching me  
Making eyes at me  
Like the swallows  
Of the Lady Madonna

So I ran  
Toward the garden  
There I saw a flower  
How it attracted me

There I saw a flower  
How it attracted me  
I reached out my hand  
And I picked it with joy

When I took it  
To my mother  
She asked me:

What flower is this?

This is the flower  
Just right for me  
I reached out my hand  
And I picked it with joy

She pauses to go over the lyrics with me, helping me with pronunciation and patiently lining out verses and nuances that set Arbëresh apart from the Italian we are speaking in. I notice how the girl in this song, unlike Rine, returns home to her mother with a freshly picked flower in hand, and doesn't feel the need to conceal her venture into the wild. I tell Angela of my ideas for this work, of my hope that somehow the beautiful language that is locked in these songs will keep its memory alive. I want her to tell me that it is okay, that I have her permission to make this case on behalf of the generations of Chieutini who may be the last to speak in their *lingua madre*. She clucks gently and smiles, eyes twinkling, soft and steely at the same time. "*È passata di acqua sotto i ponti,*" she tell me, "*ma noi stiamo ancora qua.*"

"It is water under the bridge, but we are still here."

## Appendix

### RINE RINE

Rine Rine, te ku vajte?  
Lulj- o,  
Lulj- o lulejza jime  
zëmbëra moj, zëmbëra  
me këndon.

--Mëma jime, vajta për ujë...

Bija jime ujët te ku ishtë? ...

--Mëma jime m'u ça vuca...

Bija jime, lagëzit te ku ishtë?

--Dolli dielli e m'e shukojti...

Bija jime, dielli te ku ishte? ...

--Mëmë jime, e zuri rea...

Bija jime, re ate ku ishtë?

--Mëma jime, e zuri mali...

Cë hajdhi kan ata male?...

Kan mollazit të kuqa...  
si ka faqën vajza...  
kan ullinjazit të zeza...  
Si ka sijt të zeza vajza...

### RINA RINA \*

Rina Rina  
Dove sei andata?  
Fiore fiore fiorellino  
Il cuore, oh, il cuore  
mi canta.

--Madre mia, sono andata per  
acqua...

Figlia mia dov'è l'acqua?...

--Madre mia, si rompe il barile...

Figlia mia dov'è il bagnato?

--L'ha asciugato il sole...

Figlia mia, dov'è il sole?

--Madre mia, l'ha preso la nuvola...

Figlia mia, la nuvola dov'è?

--Madre mia l'ha presa il monte...

Che grazie hanno quei monti?

Hanno le mele rosse...  
come ha le guance la ragazza...  
Hanno olive nere...  
come gli occhi della ragazza...

### RINA RINA ♦

Rina Rina  
Where did you go?  
Flower, flower, dear little flower  
My heart, oh, my heart  
sings to me.

--Mother of mine, I went for water...

Daughter of mine, where is the  
water?

--Mother of mine, the cask broke.

Daughter of mine, where is the spill?

--it was all dried up by the sun

Daughter of mine, where is the sun?

--Mother of mine, the cloud took it

Daughter of mine, where is the  
cloud?

--Mother of mine, the mountain took  
it.

What charms have these mountains?

They have red apples  
like a girl's red cheeks  
They have black olives  
like a girl's dark eyes

---

\*Song Texts in Arbëresh and Italian  
from the "Gruppo Arbereshe di  
Chieuti" self-released cassette liner  
notes, 1981.

---

♦ English translations of song texts  
are from the Italian and were made  
by the author.

## CË BUKURA KAPILE

Cë bukura kapile  
Qeft janë  
Sa më të bukura janë  
Këmarin  
E vërnutile  
Portakanun janë  
Oj mem – o, çë m'e  
Dredhënjën  
Atë skarpinë  
E Munxhëlfun  
Gjuh-shkurta janë  
E vinjën era mbë  
Rozamarinë  
E xura nuse,  
Ke do veç Rrur  
E priru nuse, e shih  
Horëzën jote  
Sa dish dija çë  
Kishe e më ke  
E si të mundi kjo  
Malankunijë?

## CHE BELLE RAGAZZE

Che belle ragazze  
Ci sono a Chieuti,  
Ma più belle ci sono  
A Campormarino  
Brunettine  
Sono a Portocannone  
E sono delle  
Bravissime  
Danzatrici  
Quelle di Montecilfone  
Parlano poco  
E portano un odore  
Di rosmarino  
Ho Saputo o sposa  
Che vuoi maritarti  
Ad Urui  
Volgiti indietro  
E guarda  
Il pesello  
Tuo  
Ma ora, dimmi,  
Cosa ti succede  
E perchè ti lasci vincere  
Dalla malinconia?

## WHAT BEAUTIFUL GIRLS

What beautiful girls  
There are in Chieuti  
But the ones in Campomarino  
Are more beautiful still  
Brown-haired beauties they have in  
Portocannone, and there are some  
magnificent  
Dancers there too.  
The girls of Montecilfone  
Speak very little  
And carry the scent of rosemary,  
I knew o bride,  
That you wanted to be married  
In Ururi  
Turn yourself around and look  
At your little town  
But now, tell me,  
What is the matter with you?  
Why do you let yourself  
Be defeated  
By sadness?

**O E BUKURA MORE**

O e bukura More  
Si të le  
u më ngë të pe!

Si të le  
Si të le  
Si të le  
U më ngë të pe!

Atje kam u zotin tat  
Atje kam u zojën meme  
Atje kam edhe t'im vëlla

**O BELLA MOREA**

O bella Morea  
Da quando ti lasciai  
Più non ti vidi!

Da quando ti lasciai  
Da quando ti lasciai  
Da quando ti lasciai  
Più non ti vidi!

Là ho il signor padre  
Là ho la signora madre  
Là ho ancora mio fratello.

**O BEAUTIFUL MOREA**

O beautiful Morea  
Since I left you  
No longer do I see you

Since I left you  
Since I left you  
Since I left you  
No longer do I see you

There I have a father  
There I have a mother  
There I have my brother too.

## HORA JONE

Gja hora jone  
Në nëg isht mangu një  
Çë isht e bukurë kishtu  
U eca shekum i tërë  
Gja ne neng isht mosnjari  
Si duhami mir na shën  
Gjergj vetëm e di  
Hora jone isht e vogël  
Zëmbra jone isht e madhe  
E gja ne nëng isht mosnjari  
Gjaku shprishue na jmi  
gjëeri.

## PAESE NOSTRO

Come il nostro paese  
Non estiste un altro  
Come il nostro paese  
Che sia bello così come lui  
Ho girato e viaggiato  
pertutto il mondo  
Come noi non ci sono  
altre uguali  
Come ci vogliamo bene noi  
San Giorgio solo lo sa  
Il paese nostro e piccolo  
Il cuore nostro e grande  
E come noi non ci sono  
uguali  
Sangue sparso noi siamo  
parenti

## OUR TOWN

There is no other like our  
town  
No town is as lovely as our  
town  
I've wandered and traveled  
all over the world  
No people on earth can  
compare  
We love each other so  
San Giorgio alone knew this  
to be true  
Our town is small  
But its heart is big  
And as no one on earth can  
compare  
Our blood is shed  
We are all kin here

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Agamennone, Maurizio, and Vincenzo Lombardi, eds. *Musiche tradizionali del Molise : le registrazioni di Diego Carpitella e Alberto Mario Cirese (1954)*. Rome: Squilibri, 2005.
- Ancelot, Barry Jean. *Cajun and Creole Music Makers/Musiciens cadiens e creoles*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999.
- Ascenzi, Anna. *Education and the metamorphosis of citizenship in contemporary Italy*. Macerata: Edizione Università di Macerata, 2009.
- Banti, Giorgio and Francesco Giannattasio. "Poetry." In *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*. Edited by Alessandro Duranti, 290-320. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.
- Barthes, Roland. *Image, Music, Text*. Fontana Press, 1977.
- Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996.
- Bauman, Richard. *A World of Others' Words: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Intertextuality*. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.
- Bauman, Richard, and Charles L. Briggs. "Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19 (1990): 59-88.
- Berger, Harris M. and Giovanna P. Del Negro. *Identity and Everyday Life: Essays in the Study of Folklore, Music and Popular Culture*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2004.
- Broderick, George. *Language Death on the Isle of Man: An investigation into the decline and extinction of Manx Gaelic as a community language in the Isle of Man*. Linguistische Arbeiten 395. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1999.
- Bucholtz, Mary, and Kira Hall. "Language and Identity." In *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*, 369-394.. Maldon, Massachusetts: 2004.

- Cantwell, Robert. *Ethnomimesis: Folklife and the Representation of Culture*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press: 1993.
- Cantwell, Robert. "Habitus, Ethnomimesis: A note on the Logic of Practice." *Journal of Folklore Research* 36 (1999): 219-234.
- Dorian, Nancy C. *Language Death: The Life Cycle of a Scottish Gaelic Dialect*. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1981.
- Doss, Katherine Conrad. "Louisiana Romp: examining the performance of traditional Cajun music within a contemporary setting." Master's Thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: 2008.
- Edwards, John. *Minority Languages and Group Identity: Cases and Categories*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2010.
- Erlich, Victor. *Russian Formalism: History—Doctrine*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965.
- Feld, Steven, Aaron A. Fox, Thomas Porcello, and David Samuels. "Vocal Anthropology: From the Music of Language to the Language of Song." In *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*, edited by Alessandro Duranti, 321-346. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd, 2004.
- Fiorini, Stefano, Giuseppe Tagarelli, Alessio Boattini, Donata Luiselli, Anna Piro, Antonio Tagarelli, and Davide Pettener. "Ethnicity and Evolution of the Biodemographic Structure of Arbëreshe and Italian Populations of the Pollino Area, Southern Italy (1820-1984)." *American Anthropologist* 109 (2007): 735-746.
- Harrison, Gualtiero. *La Doppia Identità : Una Vertenza Antropologica Nella Minoranza Etnicolinguistica Arbëresh*. Collezione "Viaggi e Studi" 22. Caltanissetta, Roma: S. Sciascia, 1979.
- Hawkes, Terrence *Structuralism and Semiotics*. Oxford: Routledge, 2003.
- Janse, Mark, and Sijmen Tol, editors. *Language Death and Language Maintenance: Theoretical, practical and descriptive approaches*. Amsterdam: John Benjamin BV, 2003.
- Llewellyn, Meic. "Popular Music in the Welsh Language and the Affirmation of Youth Identities." *Popular Music* 19 (2000): 319-339.

- Massaro, Maria Teresa. "L'Identita Etnica nella Comunità Arbëreshe di Chieuti: Una Ricerca Empiria." Tesi di Laurea, Università degli Studi di Palermo, 2006.
- Massaro, Mario. *Dizionario Comparato delle parlate arbëreshë di Casalvecchio e Chieuti*. Apricena: Malatesta Editrice, 2010.
- Mark Mattern. "Cajun Music, Cultural Revival: Theorizing Political Action in Popular Music." *Popular Music and Society* 22:2 (1998), 31-48.
- Meola, Donato. *Canti Popolari Degli Albanesi D'Italia, Jugoslavia e Albania*. Liner notes to self-released audiocassette by the Gruppo Arbëreshë di Chieuti, 1978.
- Mukařovský, Jan. "Standard Language and Poetic Language (1923)." In *The Routledge Language and Cultural Theory Reader*, edited by Lucy Burke, Tony Crowley and Alan Girvin. London: Routledge, 2000.
- O'Neill, Maggie. "Making Connections: Ethno-mimesis, Migration and Diaspora." *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society* 14 (2009): 289-302.
- Parrocchia di San Giorgio Martire- Chieuti, Festa Patronale di "San Giorgio Martire. "Chieuti: cenni storici." 2010.
- Perta, Carmela. "Language Death: Il Caso Dell'Arbëresh Molisano: Risultati Di Uno Studio Pilota." *Plurilinguismo: Contatti Di Lingue e Culture* 10 (2003): 207-224.
- Perta, Carmela. *Language Decline and Death in Three Arbëresh Communities in Italy : A Sociolinguistic Study*. Quaderni Della Sezione Di Glottologia e Linguistica, Dipartimento Di Studi Medievali e Moderni, Università Degli Studi "G. D'Annunzio" Di Chieti. Supplementi 12. Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2004.
- Ricci, Antonello and Roberta Tucci, eds. *Musica Arbëreshe in Calabria : Le RegISTRAZIONI Di Diego Carpitella Ed Ernesto De Martino, 1954*. Rome: Squilibri, 2006.
- Ruberto, Roberto. *Il Lungo Inverno*. Foggia: I Quaderni Del Rosone 4, 1988.
- Samuels, David W. *Putting a Song on Top of It: Expression and Identity on the San Carlos Apache Reservation*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2004.
- Samuels, David W. "The Whole and the Sum of the Parts, or, How Cookie and the Cupcakes Told the Story of Apache History in San Carlos." *The Journal of American Folklore* 112 (1999): 464-474.

Shuman, Amy. "Dismantling Local Culture." *Western Folklore* 52 (1993): 354-364.

Stewart, Susan. *On Longing, Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984.

Tilmans, Karin, Frank van Vree and Jay Winter, eds. *Performing the past: memory, history and identity in modern Europe*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010

Toelken, Barre, "Folklore, Worldview and Communication." In *Folklore: Performance and Communication*. Ed. Dan Ben-Amos and Kenneth S. Goldstein. The Hague: Mouton, 1975.

Winter, Jay. "The Performance of the Past: Memory, History, Identity." In *Performing the Past: Memory, History and Identity in Modern Europe*. Edited by Karin Tilmans, Frank Van Vree and Jay Winter. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010.