STRING OF DECAYING RUINS: A TRANSNATIONAL ITALIAN AMERICAN
EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

CALE JAMES LASALATA: String of Decaying Ruins: A Transnational Italian American Experience.
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This dissertation examines the ethnography and historiography of the Italian American community and their southern Italian counterpart. It examines the phenomenon of Italian Unification, the socio-economics of organized crime, and the role women played in the social life of rural southern Italy. This project also examines the history of Italian immigration to the United States, the ethnic integration of Italian people into American society, and the state of Italian American ethnic identity and material culture. Through an analysis of the literary production of these two specific groups, this project underlines the existent parallels between southern Italy and the Italian American community and demonstrates that historically and culturally these two groups have shared a common experience of racial prejudice and systematized degradation; that because of nineteenth-century ideologies of race and progress, southern Italians in both Italy and North America were painted with the same brush of innate inferiority and alterity. To this end, this dissertation explores the history of the Italian south and its material culture and how these were reinterpreted within the American context. The aim of this dissertation is to provide Italian Americans with a more historically accurate and culturally sensitive analysis of their ethnic patrimony.

DEDICATION

To my parents, without whom none of this would have been possible. I will be forever grateful.

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To ERC, Grandma and Le Steinberg, RAS and EBS and family, and especially to my MDD,

whose friendship and love have meant the world to me.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"We speak the 'real' Italian," my grandmother always used to tell me. I never quite understood why she would say that, as if there were a fake Italian language that some percentage of the Italian population had been tricked into speaking. It wasn't until I got to high school and college that I fully appreciated what my grandmother was driving at: our dialect *is* Italian. As a child growing up in an Italian American community, the traditions and way of life seem to be as normal as any others, but as most Italian American writers will tell you, that all changes once you leave the neighborhood. The neighborhood becomes the image of the Old World: the homes, the dress, the gardens, and the interconnectedness. This became my vision of Italy. Our church bore the name of the southern Italian, Syracusan St. Lucy and we had feasts in her honor. My aunts would cook things like dandelions and zucchini flowers and my uncles played "fingers" and bocce. Growing up, I never imagined that there was a perceived sense of cultural difference on the part of Italians and it wasn't until I began travelling to Italy that I was made fully aware that I was not an Italian. I was still considered by Americans to be Italian but, to those in the know, I was a different entity.

Italian American ethnicity and identity have therefore become the focal point of my research. Why do Italian Americans consider themselves Italian and Italians consider them American? If we are not Italian, what are we? These questions form the foundation of this project and have become my most important points of examination. Italian American

conceptions of culture and ethnicity are based on two distinct ideas: tradition and perception, that

of the Italian American community by the dominant culture. These conceptions form the body of

many Italian American experiences, fragmented and skewed though they may be. This

investigation is a response to the fundamental misunderstanding that has plagued Italian

Americans since their arrival in the Americas beginning in the late nineteenth century to the

present day. The regeneration of cultural stereotypes with regard to Italian America is an

anachronism in the American experience: the perception that Italian Americans are inherently

violent, the notion that Italian Americans participate in the inner workings of the mafia, and that

Italian American males are dominated by an influential female figure, are all examples of the

lasting impact that Italian immigration has had on the American appreciation of Italian culture.

This project will try to understand why the presence of these peoples from the Italian south was

so unsettling to the dominant culture and how our conception of what it means to be an Italian

American has been heavily influenced by those within the dominant culture. This influence from

without has done much to further the confusion and misunderstandings about Italian American

cultural and historical patrimony as an ethnic group in America. One of the prime examples of

such cultural/ethnic distortion comes from American sociologist Edward Banfield's assertion

that people from the Meridione participate in what he termed "amoral familism," a term which is

defined:"… largely (but not entirely) by the inability of the villagers to act together for their

common good or, indeed, for any end transcending the immediate material interest of the nuclear

family" (10). This evaluation of southern Italian culture has had lasting influence but was by no

means the first of such analyses that categorized the Italian south and its people as incompatible

with notions of social advancement and economic progress. This assessment also has roots in the

historical phenomenon of the Italian Risorgimento during which the two halves of the Italian

peninsula were united under one flag and one king for the first time. Tommaso Astarita, in his history of southern Italy, highlights a quote from Luigi Carlo Farini, an agent of Cavour's new Italian government, in which he describes the new Italians from the south. "What lands are these Molise and the South! What barbarism! This is not Italy! This is Africa: compared to these peasants the Bedouins are the pinnacle of civilization" (qtd. on 286). By 1880, the attitude towards those from the south had not changed and, in fact, served as one of the motors that drove Italian emigration during the greatest period of southern Italian migration.

This project argues that, as a byproduct of the journalistic and propagandistic buildup to Italian Unification in 1861, southern Italy's perception as inherently backward was solidified in an attempt to rally support for the Risorgimento and the political unity of the Italian peninsula. The vitriol that was generated from 1848 to 1860, predominantly in the Italian north, was directed primarily at the Bourbon crown, symbol of the absolutism of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in the face of the progress and industrialization taking place all over northern Europe. By linking the agrarian south with theories of socio-economic and cultural stagnation, the forces of Unification began to construct a narrative of the Risorgimento: Italy shall be made one and Italy shall liberate the languishing southern populations from the oppressive Bourbon regime. With the arrival of Garibaldi and the *Spedizione dei mille* in 1860, the rapid collapse of the Bourbon kingdom, and the defeat of Francesco II in 1861, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies was rapidly annexed to the new Kingdom of Italy. It is to this end that this project will seek to underline and expand the socio-economic and historical anomalies that plagued the post-Unification period; the uneven process of political unity and the lasting effects of the anti-Bourbon narratives of the pre-Unification period.

Was the south as backward and mismanaged as the agents of the Piedmontese-dominated transitional government described it? Were the southern regions a "paradise inhabited by devils"? In order to better understand the ethnography and historiography of southern Italy, this project will look at the history of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies from the early eighteenth century to 1861, in order that we may determine for ourselves what is exaggerated and what is historically accurate. Our findings will demonstrate that the Unification narrative of southern Italian racial inferiority and economic disparity stem from larger, nineteenth-century conceptions of economic and social advancement that were comparative in approach. In an effort to resemble more closely those economies/societies of the industrialized nations of France or Great Britain, the new Kingdom of Italy would deploy economic and social policies that mirrored their northern European counterparts. What is more, these socio-economic policies would have a direct effect on the manner in which southern Italian people(s) were integrated into the new society. The twenty-year period from 1861 to roughly 1880 was marked by efforts to enforce an economic and political unity on the Italian peninsula; however, the results of these efforts often produced more disunity and disaffection than cohesion. Towards the end of this period, the prospect of economic amelioration lay not in Italy but across the Atlantic in North America. As more and more southern Italians began to turn their attention towards the financial benefits of emigration, millions of men, women, and children would soon become transients in their native country, leaving their roots and journeying towards the mysterious America of myth where the poor could improve their personal fortunes through determination and force of will.

This project will follow the Italian immigrant from Italy to arrival in North America and will demonstrate that, as a direct result of the propaganda created during the Unification process, the stereotype of the barbaric, racially inferior southern Italian would be once again picked up by

media outlets and promoted to the hegemonic WASP society of late nineteenth-century America. In so doing, the Italian immigrant was viewed as an impediment to social progress, intrinsically deficient and therefore totally incapable of truly appreciating American exceptionality. Italian Americans have therefore occupied a relatively marginalized space within American ethnography, never fully accepted as American and never totally accepted as Italian. This is a fundamental characteristic of the Italian American experience and has produced a body of scholarship that has sought to understand the Italian experience in this country by first defining what it means to be an Italian American. One of the finest considerations on this subject is Robert Viscusi's critical anthology, *Buried Caesars and Other Secrets of Italian American Writing* (2006), in which he underlines a primary problematic for the Italian American writer when he states that one of the dilemmas confronting Italian Americans is Italy itself: "First, plenty of Italian Americans have forgotten all about Italy. It has nothing to do with them … Second, many Italian Americans, particularly the ones who protest Mafia films, do not think of Italy as a problem but as a reason to boast. We painted the *Mona Lisa*. We discovered America. We invented opera" (2). This emphasis on the Italian half of Italian American is unsettling in that it perpetuates a conception of the Italian American that is removed from its southern Italian cultural history and identity. Viscusi's underlying thesis, and one that will inform the body of this project, is that Italian Americans deserve a more historically accurate and culturally sensitive appraisal of Italian American literary and cultural production (23-24).

Anthony Tamburri has underlined a different inconsistency within the genre of Italian American Studies: the relationship Italian Americans maintain with American society. Reworking the given description of "the great melting pot," Tamburri in his work, *A Semiotic of Ethnicity In (Re)cognition of the Italian/American Writer* (1998), attempts to designate the

Italian American writer not as an ethnic writer but rather as one whose contribution adds to the "kaleidoscopic socio/cultural mosaic" of America (5). The difference here being an acceptance of Italian Americans as an ethnic group whose literary and cultural production is not relegated to a subgenre of American literature; rather, it would be its own category, on par with African American, Hispanic American, and Jewish American literary genres. Tamburri's analysis considers the various stages of experience of the ethnic writer and underlines three stages of the Italian American writer: expressive, comparative, and synthetic (13).[1] The first stage, the expressive writer, details and recounts the experiences of the first- or second-generation ethnic writer. It is the stage in which the writer attempts to describe his/her culture to the dominant culture. The second stage, that of the second-generation writer, is one in which the writer compares his ethnic experience with regard to lives within the dominant culture. And lastly, the synthetic stage is the point in which the third-generation writer fuses the experiences of the previous generations and intellectually transcends them (12). I believe this approach will allow this project to maintain a generational interest in that, as a third-generation Italian American, I will seek to analyze the production of expressive and comparative stages of Italian America from the distinct position of one who studies Italian literature. I believe that this project will contribute to later generational conceptions of identity and ethnicity in that I will attempt to demonstrate a literary and cultural correlation vis-à-vis the Italian American experience and the southern Italian experience. This project will seek to extend the vision of Italian American ethnic identity by juxtaposing these two experiences in order to broaden our common understanding of an ethnic identity and to affirm the *Italianità* of the Italian American experience through a socio-cultural, literary analysis.

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[1] Fred Gardaphé's *Italian Signs, American Streets* (1996) develops a similar approach to generational Italian American writing, defining the three stages of artistic production as "poetic, mythic, and philosphic" (13).

What I seek to accomplish by means of this project is an exploration of the roots of Italian American material culture. What we as a community have yet to fully appreciate is the cultural heritage and literary tradition of a people from which we ourselves stem. We will never understand Italy until we fully comprehend the nature of our cultural past. We can no longer blindly accept the concept of an Italy that is entirely foreign to Italian American history. This project seeks to create a significant link between the historiographic, ethnographic, and literary production of Italian America and that of the Italian south. This dissertation will consider the topoi which, to our reading, have some of the most valuable interconnections with southern Italy, that of the southern Italian male, the socio-economics of organized crime, and the southern Italian woman

The first chapter of this project, "Il Risorgimento: Naples, Napoleon, and the Rise of the Liberal Left," treats the topic of the southern Italian immigrant and his experience during and after his settlement in America. It was men who first left the lands of the Meridione to build the new nation of Italy and when the new nation had no more use for these men, they were the first to emigrate. At the turn of the nineteenth century, these men were sold on the notion that America would be a cure to the grinding poverty, the limited access to education, and the other ills that afflicted southern Italy (La Storia 31-40). The image of an industrializing America was promoted by the Italians who had already made the journey across the Atlantic. But why was the Kingdom of Italy eager to abandon the southern bloc after less than twenty years as a unified state? Here we will detail the beginnings of Italian male stereotypes and their social and historical implications.

Beginning with the establishment of the Bourbon line in 1736 this chapter will begin its inquest into the historiography of southern Italy. As will be demonstrated, the comparative

ideologies of the nineteenth century obfuscated and marginalized various European and world economies based on comparisons with industrialized nations. As a result, the Bourbon-era in southern Italy was denounced as autocratic and despotic, incongruous with the modernizing forces of nineteenth-century industrialization. A closer examination will expose glaring inconsistencies with the ideological rhetoric of the Italian state and the Italian Risorgimento. Angelantonio Spagnoletti's study, *Storia del Regno delle Due Sicilie* (1997), underscores the reign of the first Bourbon monarch in southern Italy, Charles III, and the economic progress furthered by the social and cultural advancements that typified this period from 1736 to 1799: the excavations of Pompeii and Herculaneum, the opening of the Teatro San Carlo, and increased contact with both France and Austria (Spagnoletti 208-09). Ferdinand IV, son of Charles III, would continue his father's advancements opening public gardens and new building projects. Bourbon progress would be halted in 1799 with Napoleon's invasion of Italy and the Republican uprisings that would come to be called the "Decennio": the ten year period in which Ferdinand IV (also titled Ferdinand I) would be isolated in Sicily, protected by the British navy while continental southern Italy would come under the rule of Joseph Bonaparte in 1806 and, shortly thereafter, Joachim Murat in 1808 (Spagnoletti 39-40). Their combined efforts led to sweeping reform and laid much of the groundwork for the eventual Risorgimento.

The ten years from 1806 to 1815 were marked by political, economic, and social reforms at the hands of an intellectual elite and a revolutionary urban population intent on dismantling the absolutist policies of the Bourbon crown. Feudalism was abolished in 1806, the Neapolitan legal code was rewritten according to the Napoleonic version (Santoro 62; 97), and the constitution of 1806 enshrined civil rights for the masses and reformed the institutions of state (Astarita 259-60). The progress achieved during this period would be short-lived, as after the

defeat of Napoleon in Russia in 1814 and the fall of Joachim Murat in 1815 in a successful coup to reclaim the throne of Naples (Astarita 263), the kingdom was reclaimed by Ferdinand I who would, until the end of his reign, oppose any type of reform. Many of those exiled from the kingdom would find haven in Turin and Milan where they would initiate a media campaign dedicated to the discrediting of the Bourbon crown. Men like Giuseppe Massari would engage in a smear campaign that would quickly turn good intentions into racial ideology.

Political movements towards Italian Unification found their fullest expression under the leadership of the House of Savoy and the martial skills of Giuseppe Garibaldi in 1860 to 1861. During this brief period, Italy was united and made into a geo-political reality. It was also during this period that the affects of the hyper-sensationalistic campaign of anti-Bourbon, southern Italian intellectuals would come to bear. The institution of social and economic policy based on theories of southern Italian racial inferiority and the "Piedmontization" of the southern Italian regions in order that they might conform to a new national standard of Italian-ness became the hallmark of the post-Unification period (Petraccone 12; 18; 69-70). Unity meant the loss of prominence and economic stability in favor of a united but uncertain future in the new Italian state. The idea that will be developed further on is that in constructing a nation, the forces of Italian unity relied on social elements that sought only self-preservation and the status quo. As this attitude was shared by the nascent middle-class and the aristocracy of the Italian south, it was only natural that these strata of society would align themselves with forces of Unification. To this end we will examine Tomasi di Lampedusa's *Il Gattopardo* (1957) and examine the ways in which nation building, the establishment of the new, national order, took place in the Italian south; how the aristocracy of the Old Order viewed the arrival of Piedmontese as a means to preserve their own fortunes and how this contrasts with the manner in which the Italian

Unification was viewed by the rural poor. We will also see the rise of a new middle-class whose ascent represents both the best and the worst of the Italian Unification period and how social and political aspirations conspired to discredit the sincere intentions of the Italian Risorgimento.

In keeping with the theme of nation building, this chapter follows the southern Italian male as he immigrates to the industrializing North America of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The society that the Italian immigrant found in America was one that viewed the Italian as an alien element, a foreigner who would always remain so, irrespective of time spent working and living in America. The perceived alterity of southern Italians stemmed primarily from Italian sources which had influenced the attitudes of American society at large and American conceptions of the ethnic and racial superiority of the Anglo-Saxon Protestant races, most notably people(s) of northern European stock (La Gumina 24-25). It is here that we examines Pietro Di Donato's *Christ in Concrete* (1936), and the ways in which nation building in the American sense, required the manual labor of the immigrant; that in many ways Di Donato's work mirrors the establishment of the state in Lampedusa's *Il Gattopardo*, in that both narratives treat the experience of a nation in the process of redefining itself.

Di Donato's work is one of the first examples to detail the intimate lives of the nameless Italian immigrant men that sacrificed their physical health for the sake of their families so that their progeny might enjoy the freedoms and opportunities never afforded to them. During a period in which the Italian immigrant was viewed as a hostile presence, Di Donato's work was the first to render the languages, the customs, and the culture of the people of the Italian community. In so doing, Di Donato gives voice to the aspirations of those southern Italians whose lives in Italy were cut short by socio-economic disparities caused by Unification.

The second chapter of this dissertation, "La Rivoluzione Passiva: 19th-Century Sicily and the Rise of the Violent Middle Class," is an investigation, in part, of everybody's favorite villain, the Italian American mobster. The pervasive image of organized crime in America is one that is dominated by the Italian American who has typified for over half a century the upper echelon of the American underworld. Since the mid-1880s, there has existed in the American consciousness a perceived link between Italian people and crime; that in some way, shape, or form Italian Americans are inextricably linked to organized crime. This chapter will begin by examining the socioeconomic history of southern Italy and Sicily. We investigate the claims of southern Italian economic stagnancy and industrial shortcomings and how Italian Unification created an effect that southern Italy and Sicily have yet to overcome, that of organized crime. In examining the regional economies of the pre-Unification period, this chapter looks at those who had the controlling interest in an agricultural society, namely the land-owning class, the rural aristocracy. By investigating the socio-economic structure of the southern Italian *latifondo*, the great estates of the south, we seek to reexamine the southern Italian economy prior to and after Unification in order that we may better comprehend allegations of southern Italian backwardness and inferiority in terms of economic and industrial development.

This chapter details the regional economics of the Italian south and compare them with southern Italy's economic counterpart: nineteenth-century America, in particular the American south. Here we will focus primarily on the socio-economic structure of these two agricultural zones and underscore the commonalities of the two regional markets. This investigation will look at peripheral economies, namely those in heavily agrarian societies, and demonstrate that similar conceptions of socio-economic inferiority characterized the Antebellum American south and also the pre-Unification Italian south.

We examine the establishment of the new Italian state, how political and economic union was achieved in the south beginning in 1861. As we look towards the work of creating a unified Italian state, we will observe that a confluence of social and personal interests resulted in the creation of a new socioeconomic class, that of the landed middle-class. These new entrepreneurs would employ violence and intimidation in their pursuit of arable land. We will see that land, the acquisition and defense thereof, will become the rallying cries of social movements in post-Unification Sicily; that in part because of the discordant narratives of the state and Garibaldi with regard to land reform, social upheaval gripped Sicily and inaugurated a period in southern Italian social history that would lead to the perception of the violent middle-class as the defenders of order and traditional values. This chapter analyzes John Dickie's *Cosa Nostra: A History of the Sicilian Mafia* (2004), Salvatore Lupo's *History of the Mafia* (1996), and other social histories of organized crime in an attempt to trace the development of a social phenomenon that was both the source of and the means to control social disorder; a new social class who worked within the legal system to an illegal end.

This chapter follows the southern Italian immigrants as they arrive in North America and are greeted by the same pernicious evaluation generated during the post-Unification period; that southern Italians are inherently violent and barbarous, totally incompatible with a civilized society. We trace the evolution of the Italian immigrant through Prohibition and as the years move past Prohibition, the image of the quintessential, American gangster becomes decidedly Italianate. This perception would be solidified even further with the government inquiries of the Kefauver and MacClellan commissions of the 1950s and 1960s. To this end we will look at Fred Gardaphé's study *From Wiseguys to Wise Men* (2006) to follow the unique development of the

Italian criminal into various forms ranging from stereotypical street toughs to the paternalistic autocrat.

This chapter also examines two narrative renderings of the Italian criminal. The first of these is Leonardo Sciascia's *Il giorno della civetta* (1961), in which we will see a narrative confrontation between the forces of the Italian state and the social entity that it helped create. Sciascia's novel depicts the events surrounding the death of Colasberna and the subsequent investigation which leads the police chief Bellodi to one Don Mariano. Throughout his investigation, Captain Bellodi discovers the influence and financial prowess of Don Mariano who, in turn, presents an image of the archetypical middle-class criminal. In keeping with our approach to post-Unification socio-economics, Sciascia's portrayal epitomizes the metamorphosis of the man of order to mafioso.

The second novel we consider is Mario Puzo's *The Godfather* (1969) in which the reader is presented with one of the most celebrated gangsters of all-time. Don Corleone has become synonymous with Italian American organized crime, a paternal mobster whose family devotion provokes our admiration for such an honorable man. The criminal we are presented with is a most excellent marriage between American capitalism and southern Italian mores, an approach to organized crime that was based on an Italian American family construct. Puzo's intermingling of traditional southern Italian culture with American criminal pragmatism produce a character of mythological greatness, one so emblematic of Italian American criminality that after almost fifty years since it remains of the most popular sources of Italian American stereotypes.

The final chapter of this project, "'I'm Not Italian But My Last Name Is': Identity and Memory in Italian America," considers the evolution of Italian American ethnic identity and how social history influenced the development of an ethnic self. The purpose of this chapter is to

identify elements of material culture typical of both the southern Italian and Italian American people; the material culture that generations of Italian Americans have inherited in the form of memories and family histories. We give a more ethnograpically and historically sensitive analysis to questions of Italian American ethnic identity by underlining the significant connections with southern Italian cultural practices.

To begin this study we first turn to Ernesto De Martino's 1961 *The Land of Remorse* and his study of southern Italian tarantism. De Martino's research points to a socio-cultural phenomenon that was inspired and shaped by the agricultural cycle and the overwhelming participation of women in the practice (21; 25-26; 56-57). De Martino's findings define tarantism as an expression of psychosomatic tensions that plagued a socially conservative society, maladjustment and depression being two of the most common. De Martino's research demonstrates that tarantism is one of several manifestations of pan-Mediterranean practices that allowed women on both the physical and the metaphysical level to release and reorder psychic aberrations according to a socially understood form (178-82). In keeping with De Martino's findings, we will turn to other iterations of traditional southern Italian material culture, in particular, the iconography of the Christian Madonna; the metamorphosis from pre-Christian fertility deities to *Theotokos*.

This chapter also looks at the religious devotions of the Italian immigrant community of American Northeast. Describing the Italian community of Harlem, Robert Orsi's *The Madonna of 115th St* (1985) underlines the ways in which the Madonna was perceived by her Italian immigrant devotees; how her feast in July reproduced and reinterpreted southern Italian religious folkways that tie the Italian American community to their southern Italian roots. Orsi demonstrates that the days of the feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel were periods in which family,

community, and social values were presented on the public stage of ritual processions and internalized by the Italian American attendees. Throughout this public display of religious sentiment, a commonality emerges between the pre-emigrant, southern Italian religious culture and the Italian American, post-immigration conception of religious devotion, seeing in both a reliance on the shared memories and emotions of the community at large.

This leads into a literary discourse in which we will examine three narratives of both the southern Italian and the Italian American tradition. We will look at Mario Puzo's *The Fortunate Pilgrim* (1964) and address the ways in which inter-generational animosities have obscured the material culture of the Italian American community; how, through memory, the Italian American comes to a more complete understanding of their ethnic past. Puzo depicts an immigrant mother's experience which stands out as an iconic rendering of the sacrifices borne by the immigrant generation: the loss of loved ones, the alienation from Americanizing children, and the disintegration of traditional material culture and mores. This idea will be continued when we look at Helen Barolini's *Umbertina* (1979). Barolini's treatment of three generations of Italian American women will highlight the generational differences and the loss of an ethnic identity; how Americanization consumed the children of Italian immigrants and furthered the distance between the ethnic past and the American present. Barolini, much like Puzo, returns to the female progenitor in order to better understand her current self. Typifying these experiences are the feelings of loss and regret, a psychosomatic unease that eats away at the hyphenated American's sense of place within a multicultural society. In keeping with our southern Italian focus, this chapter will also consider Elio Vittorini's *Conversazione in Sicilia* (1941). Vittorini's protagonist discovers that in leaving his home in search of economic opportunity, he has lost a sense of who he is and a psychic malaise overtakes the protagonist. In an effort to address this

feeling of ill-ease, Vittorini brings the reader on a journey of self-rediscovery and the voyage that immigrants must make through memory to reconnect with their forbears in order to understand who they themselves are.

Finally, we will shift our focus to questions of Italian American identity and the traces of a southern Italian heritage within current constructions of Italian American ethnicity. We will look at Robert Viscusi's *Buried Caesars and Other Secrets of Italian American Writing* (2006), Anthony Julian Tamburri's *To Hyphenate Or Not to Hyphenate the Italian/American Writer: An Other American* (1991), and Fred Gardaphé's *Leaving Little Italy: Essaying Italian American Culture* (2004) whose writings will frame our discourse treating the effects on the subconscious level of Italian immigration. This point will be furthered by the personal essays of Maria Laurino's *Were You Always An Italian?* (2000) and Helen Barolini's *Chiaroscuro: Essays of Identity* (1997) in which we see that to be a proud American one would have to become ashamed to be Italian. This section will examine the subconscious effects of this type of ethnic integration and how despite the effort, the Italian immigrant culture survives in unforeseen ways. The wholesale denigration of Italian immigrant material culture has distanced subsequent generations of Italian Americans from a historically and culturally sensitive analysis of what it means to be an Italian in America. In total, the objectives of this chapter will be to identify the sources of an ethnic past, the cultural markers that define the boundaries of Italian ethnicity in America. In so doing, the parallels with southern Italian material culture emerge and help to better appreciate and understand those who no longer can speak for themselves: the immigrant ancestor. The source of Italian American ethnicity, the immigrant generation was at once disparaged, forgotten, and now, revived through memory in order to better understand what it means to be an Italian in America.

CHAPTER II

IL RISORGIMENTO: NAPLES, NAPOLEON, AND THE RISE OF THE LIBERAL LEFT

This chapter will primarily treat the subject of the Italian male, from the period of pre-Unification Italy to the period of mass emigration and settlement in North America, the United States more specifically. This chapter will begin with a reevaluation of the Bourbon Kingdom of the Two Sicilies from a historical and cultural perspective with specific attention paid to the history of the pre- and post-Risorgimento southern regions. The stereotype of the backward and autocratic (oft described as despotic) Bourbon Kingdom will be the first point of investigation. I will first analyze the history of the Bourbon Kingdom, beginning with Charles III and the creation of the Bourbon dynasty in the southern regions of the Italian peninsula and ending with Francis II, the last king of the Bourbon line. I will examine in what ways the accepted rationale for a unified Italian state mutated, after Unification, and developed into a cultural hierarchy that ultimately marginalized the southern Italian peoples. I will also concentrate on conceptions of "backwardness" and "innate barbarism" that colored the Risorgimento and the decades that immediately followed with respect to the peoples of the Bourbon south and how these stereotypes came into being and created a dichotomy that has since plagued homogenous conceptions of an Italian national identity. From politicians to intellectuals, the Unification period struggled with a fundamental question as to which vision of Italy would prevail. Consequently a binary opposition emerged that exists to this day: northern Italy as the progressive, European Italy and the south as backward, Mediterranean Italy.

To begin this analysis I first will examine the prevailing cultural ambient of the nineteenth century with a particular interest in conceptions of race and ethnicity. I will begin my discussion by first addressing the idea of "civilization" which was a dominant concept of nineteenth-century European thought. One of the foundational tenets of this particular pathos is the notion that superiority is predicated on the observable progress of a nation. Northern European industrialization and advancement provided the model after which many European nations fashioned themselves, Italy being no exception. Northern Europe radically forged an agenda of cultural and racial superiority that was reinforced by its dominance in nineteenth-century political and martial spheres. Examples of northern European superiority in cultural and political affairs were seen as fruits of its innate racial superiority, its institutions being shining examples of modernity and progress. It is within this context that I will situate my analysis of the movement within Italy toward a unified nation and of the degree to which the Unification process was tinged with ideas of cultural and racial superiority based on geographic proximities to these northern, enlightened societies; how distance from these societies was seen as difference and inferiority. As we will see in the case of the Italian states of the nineteenth century, great pains were taken to promote the notion of belonging to the greater entity of progressive, civilized Europe. With regard to the Italian peninsula, this geo-political alignment with northern European nations would be spearheaded by the House of Savoy under whose leadership the cause for Unification took its most significant and efficacious form.

The period leading up to the invasion of the south and the period directly following its incorporation into the new kingdom provide interesting historical highlights of the Unification process and the social dimensions that accompanied this operation. I will first underline the politics of the Risorgimento and how the new state would benefit from the annexation of the

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Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. What did the government of Cavour seek to accomplish by annexing the south? Was it specifically the unity of the peninsula? To this end I will also address the reactions of the delegates sent by Cavour to the former kingdom and how these appraisals, coupled with the manner in which the agents of the new government conducted their mission, created a social and economic policy dominated by northern interests and southern marginality. This chapter will also concern itself with the southern narrative representations of the Bourbon era during its decline. It is at this point that I will begin my analysis of the 1957 work of Tomasi di Lampedusa, *Il Gattopardo*. Lampedusa's work, for our purposes here, reinforces the history surrounding the abolition of the Old Order and what was expected of the south with regard to the building of the new nation of Italy. One of the novel's crucial and overriding themes that will serve as the lens through which we will interpret the history surrounding the period leading up to and directly following the Risorgimento is that things must change in order to stay the same.

The above-mentioned history and culture of this period -between 1848 and 1881- provides the basis through which this chapter will transition from Europe to the Americas of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: the America into which millions of Italian emigrants entered in search of a new life. As the emigrant Italians left the task of nation-building to those who remained in Italy, they quickly found themselves in a position of having to build the nation of the United States, only this time it was not an ideological nation-building but the literal reshaping of the American landscape through massive building projects around the industrial northeast and elsewhere. Immigrant labor provided the rapidly industrializing America with the necessary workforce that it so desperately needed; however, this relationship was not always a pleasant and mutually beneficial one. While it is true that the Italian immigrant laborer often found work in the New World, he also found that his place in that world was as marginal as it

had been in Italy. I will also underline the singularity of experience of the southern Italian during the post-Unification period and that of the Italian immigrant settling in North America. In both cases a hegemonic culture pressed the new citizens to assimilate into a specific culture and demanded that these individuals relinquish all claims to their former identities. It is also true, much in the same fashion as in the incorporation of the south into the new Italy, that the southern Italian immigrant soon found himself the target of hostility and misrepresentation. Following this analysis, I will analyze Pietro Di Donato's 1936, *Christ in Concrete.* As one of the first examples of Italian American writing, Di Donato's work is very much an attempt to give voice to his Italian culture for an American audience and to show that the people from whom he descended are just as human as any other American. More importantly for our present discourse, Di Donato's work focuses on what was expected of the immigrant laborer in his quest to help build both a new life for himself and his family and also participate in the building of an industrialized, modern America. Di Donato's work reflects the history that has plagued the peoples of the southern regions of Italy: grinding poverty and exploitation. When compared against one another, Di Donato's narrative and Lampedusa's work stand as the products of two distinct nineteenth-century phenomena: the Italian Risorgimento and Italian immigration and settlement in North America.

Part I: The Bourbons

To begin our examination of the Bourbon kingdom prior to Italian Unification, let us

begin with the installation in 1734 of Charles III, the first Bourbon king of Naples and the early

reign of Charles III's son Ferdinand. With the arrival of the Bourbons, Naples and the south in

general underwent substantial reform, from political and economic restructuring to the

beautifying of Naples and nurturing the arts. The Bourbon kingdom rapidly introduced a

progressive movement to establish itself as a modern, European state. Charles sought to create a

kingdom that reflected his own innovative spirit and pioneering persona. Charles, with regard to

his succession to the throne of Naples, had earned for himself one of the most intellectually and

culturally prominent territories in Europe, stemming from the Baroque seventeenth century when

Naples was the epicenter of European cultural ingenuity and invention. As Angelantonio

Spagnoletti, in his history *Storia del Regno delle Due Sicilie*, avers:

> Un intenso sviluppo economico aveva caratterizzato gli anni di Carlo; si era verificato in
> quel periodo un sostenuto incremento demografico che avrebbe portato la popolazione
> del regno a toccare – alla fine del secolo – i 5.000.000 di abitanti; si erano intensificate le
> relazioni commerciali con i paesi del Levante, con la Francia e con l'Austria; era
> aumentata la produzione di derrate agricole e, frutto di quella crescita, erano emersi
> cospicui gruppi borghesi che, per la prima volta, erano portatori di ideali diversi da quelli
> tipici del mondo nobiliar-feudale. (25)

Here I will briefly detail the short reign of Charles III and the modernization of the Italian south

that he originated.

Upon arrival in Naples in 1734 from Spain as the first king of continental southern Italy

in almost five-hundred years (Astarita 201), Charles undertook a project of epic proportions,

beginning with the financial and political overhaul of the kingdom. Charles's reign saw in 1738

the end of feudal jurisdiction in capital crimes. Charles also undertook a massive census intended

to serve as the base for financial reform. During the years from 1740 to 1750, agents of the

crown assessed all property, livestock, holdings, and households of the entire kingdom.[2] As such

the kingdom improved financially and agriculturally, seeing the exportation of southern citrus

crops. The Bourbon king also drained the swamps around Naples and established the "Albergo

dei Poveri," the city's largest poorhouse (Astarita 206).

The reign of Charles III and the early reign of Ferdinand are also responsible for the

continuing development of Naples as the great capital of the Bourbon kingdom. As Spagnoletti

states: "Napoli tendeva configurarsi come l'immensa testa di un gracile corpo…continuava a non

avere rivali nel contesto di un regno (almeno della sua parte continentale)" (20). Naples

expanded both in terms of its infrastructure and also in the arts and culture. It was during

Charles's reign that excavations were begun at Pompeii and Herculaneum (Astarita 209). In 1737

Charles oversaw the creation of new boulevards and the repair of others in the capital as well as

the opening of the Teatro San Carlo (Astarita 208-09). In 1736, Charles added new positions in

the sciences to the city's university, thus diminishing Church control and encouraging

intellectual freedom. As a byproduct, there was increased intellectual contact with Europe which

in turn developed into a boom for the tourist trade. Because of the archaeological excavations

and the crown's capital improvement and beautification projects – least of which is the Royal

Palace at Caserta begun in 1760- Naples became a destination for intellectuals and artists alike.[3]

The reign of Charles III did not last very long. Charles relinquished his crown to his son,

Ferdinand IV, and left the kingdom for the court at Madrid, never to return to the kingdom he so

effectively shaped. Beginning in 1760, the regency of Bernardo Tanucci saw the continuation of

policies of Charles III who maintained close contact with the regent of the kingdom. As

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[2] See Astarita, 206-07; Spagnoletti, 23.

[3] This particular history is drawn again from Astarita, 99; 208-10. This will also be addressed by Nelson Moe in his work, *The View from Vesuvius,* 15-36, where his analysis concentrates on the socio-cultural attitudes of northern Europeans vis-à-vis the Bourbon kingdom of the mid-eighteenth century.

Spagnoletti and Astarita affirm, this period was marked by an increased antagonism between the reformist currents in Neapolitan society and Tanucci who sought to retain for the crown the absolutist rights and privileges enjoyed by the monarch (Spagnoletti 25-26; Astarita 213). As Ferdinand IV came of age, he married in 1776 Maria Carolina of Habsburg, the daughter of Maria Theresa of Austria and sister to Marie Antoinette of France.[4] Much in the same fashion as his predecessor, Ferdinand IV continued to improve the kingdom he inherited: new gardens and public parks were opened in 1788, and in 1779 a new medical school was constructed at the Incurabili hospital (Astarita 208-09). It was also during the reign of Ferdinand that the first diplomatic relations between an Italian nation and the new United States of America was established (Astarita 270). As with his father before him, Ferdinand's reign was marked during the early years by support of the intellectual life of Naples, encouraging the growth of Enlightenment ideas and garnering for Ferdinand IV the reputation of being an enlightened ruler (Astarita 213); however, this particular side to the reign of Ferdinand is marred by events in northern Europe, namely the rise of Napoleon and the spread of his armies across Europe.

In 1798 Ferdinand IV led the army of the Kingdom of Naples to Rome to liberate the city from Napoleon's forces and to reestablish papal authority. The Neapolitan army was quickly routed and retreated southward with the French in pursuit. Because of Ferdinand's marriage to Maria Carolina of Habsburg, the Neapolitan sovereign ultimately maintained the diplomatic ties established by his marriage to the Habsburg princess. When Ferdinand fled to Sicily that same year, the French armies entered Naples and established a republican government. The months that followed were characterized by debates concerning the implementation of French, republican ideas, i.e. the reform of Neapolitan law to adhere more closely to the French standard. Due to the course of events that surrounded the entry of Napoleon into Italy and the Republican

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[4] See Astarita, 210; Spagnoletti, 26-27.

ideologies that were taking root in Neapolitan society, the crown began to tightly control social

discussions concerning reform of both civil and government institutions (Astarita 251).[5] From

1799 to 1805 the Bourbon kingdom vacillated between royal repression and Church-supported

social conservatism. Prisons overflowed with political dissenters and the newly-formed royal

police force, created in 1803, colluded with royalists and thugs ransacking the city in search of

perceived threats to the crown (Astarita 256-57). Ferdinand himself contributed to the disorder

by reneging on the Kingdom's neutral status vis-à-vis Napoleon and allowing British and

Russian forces to reside in the kingdom in 1805. That year Napoleon stated his intention to

invade the Kingdom of Naples after his victory over the Austrian and Russian forces at

Austerlitz, saying: "For ten years I have done everything to save the King of Naples; and he has

done everything to ruin himself… The Neapolitan dynasty has ceased to reign and its existence

is incompatible with the tranquility of Europe and the honour of my crown" (qtd. in Santoro 55).

Napoleon's forces once again entered Italy and routed Ferdinand's forces, forcing the court to

flee to Sicily where the sovereign enjoyed British naval protection (Astarita 256-7). The year

1806 marks the beginning of what is considered the Decennio and the reign of Joseph Bonaparte

and Joachim Murat, respectively brother and brother-in-law to Napoleon. The continental south

saw the implementation of the Jacobin ideals of 1799 with a total overhaul of the political,

economic, and civic life.

 With Ferdinand IV in Sicily, protected by Lord Nelson and the British navy and Naples

under French control, a type of peasant army was formed under the leadership of Cardinal

Fabrizio Ruffo. Declared the "Santa Fede" army and comprised of royalists and bandits, Cardinal

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[5] Noted Neapolitan patriot Vincenzo Cuoco who participated in the events of 1799, said that the failure of the
republic was due to the misunderstandings between the masses and the intellectuals: "The views of the patriots and
those of the people were not the same; they had different ideas, different habits and even two different languages"
(qtd. in Astarita 252).

Ruffo's band of men sought to eliminate the Jacobin presence in the kingdom and expel the Napoleonic forces. While feudalism was not totally abolished during the Neapolitan Republic, the expansion of civic rights guaranteed to the lower classes represents a significant move towards democratic reform of the southern regions.[6] The endeavors of the Neapolitan Republic and the Jacobin influence in the Kingdom of Naples from 1796-1799 represent the continued misunderstandings that plagued movements towards a reformation of civic and social life. As is underlined by Astarita, Spagnoletti, and Santoro, the ideological distance between those who supported the Jacobin causes, namely the intellectual elite, and the Neapolitan masses proved to be insurmountable, thus paving the way for the reestablishment of Ferdinand IV on the Neapolitan throne. In 1799, Cardinal Fabrizio Ruffo and the Santa Fede army, landing on the coast of Calabria, emancipated the southern regions from French control, ultimately establishing royal control over the kingdom in Naples on June 21, 1799.

Ferdinand's return to Naples in 1802 is characterized, during this period, as repressive and extreme. From 1802 to 1806, Ferdinand's government sought to root out the Jacobin elements of Neapolitan society that had colluded with the French during the Neapolitan Republic of 1799. This period is noted for draconian acts of censorship leveled at the university and the press and widespread bloodshed, chiefly as the result of public executions of suspected Republicans (Spagnoletti 35-36). As a result of Ferdinand's crackdown on the kingdom, the once-enlightened and free-thinking Kingdom of Naples would begin a steady decline, both internally and with regard to its international standing.[7] Moreover, the intellectual elite who had supported Ferdinand previously, now began to leave the kingdom and seek refuge in northern

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[6] For further reading on the Neapolitan constitution of 1799, see Spagnoletti, 31-33; Astarita, 251-54.

[7] A more detailed explanation of the perception of the Kingdom of Naples during this period is found in Nelson Moe's *The View from Vesuvius*, 76-81.

cities like Florence and Turin. As we shall see, this exodus of intellectuals would become a key element in the demise of the Bourbon crown.[8]

In 1806, the French invaded the Kingdom of Naples as a result of Ferdinand's permitting British and Russian troops to reside in the kingdom. Ferdinand is once again forced to flee to Sicily under British protection (Astarita 257), and the French, under Joseph Bonaparte reestablish French control over the continental part of the kingdom. The "Decennio" as it would later be called, was a period of dramatic reform and Jacobin ideology. On August 2, 1806 feudalism was officially abolished (Spagnoletti 39; Santoro 62). The judicial system was reorganized in 1808 and laws ensuring civic rights were codified; the public debt was consolidated and new means of collecting revenue were created in 1806 (Spagnoletti 40; Astarita 259). During this period the Napoleonic code was modified for the Neapolitan kingdom and instituted in 1806. As Tommaso Astarita points out: "The main features of the administrative model implemented during the Decennio were centralization and uniformity…The government appointed provincial intendants who implemented uniform administrative practices [and] central methods of tax collection" (259-60). Marked as it was by the ancient feudal order and the immense bureaucracy of the Bourbon crown, the Kingdom of Naples during this period rapidly reformed itself into a model of Jacobin order. It is true that this climate of reform was advantageous primarily for the upper classes (ex-barons and merchants) and that the poorer classes did not benefit, economically, from these reforms; however, the move toward social improvements through law demonstrates a radical change in the social order, removing a

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[8] The exodus of the southern intellectual class and their influence on the Risorgimento is considered a crucial link to calls for Italian unity, liberating the southerner from his repressive master (Spagnoletti, 292-93; Moe, 126-27).

centuries-old practice of feudalism that had defined the Kingdom of Naples.[9] As a result of this

restructuring, the Jacobin government decentralized the role of the capital city in order to address

the existent disparity between Naples and the provinces. Stemming from the fiscal reforms and

the restructuring of the government based on French models, Joachim Murat –who succeeded

Joseph Bonaparte as King of Naples in 1808– was able to balance the kingdom's budget in 1813

(Astarita 260), furthering the economic well-being of the kingdom. The Decennio and the rule of

Joseph Bonaparte and Joachim Murat represent some of the most expansive changes in the socio-

political and economic orders of the Kingdom of Naples; yet, they proved to be insufficient,

marred by local corruption and the influence of the agricultural bourgeoisie.

After the defeat of Napoleon in 1814, Joachim Murat, who had served with Napoleon in

the invasion of Russia in 1812, attempted to maintain his position as King of Naples to no avail.

As Napoleon, fresh from exile, returned to France to reclaim the throne, Murat left Naples to

support Napoleon's efforts (Astarita 263). The way was open for Ferdinand to return to Naples

and reestablish Bourbon authority. In 1815 Ferdinand reclaimed Naples.[10] The Congress of

Vienna in 1815 restored Ferdinand IV to his throne, thereby sanctioning the reestablishment of

the monarchical order of the pre-Jacobin period of 1802-1806 (Spagnoletti 43). The defeat of

Napoleon and the end of the Decennio signaled a return to the repressive measures enacted

during the few years following the Neapolitan Republic of 1799, namely the continued

censorship of reformist ideas and the recentralization of the capital and the crown (Spagnoletti

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[9] One of the finer histories on the subject of Italian immigration is Jerre Mangione and Ben Morreale's *La Storia: Five Centuries of the Italian American Experience*. In the section entitled "The Land they Left: Italy Before and After Unification," the Kingdom of Naples is understood almost exclusively through the framework of feudalism and the social order that it imposed on the future emigrants (31-40).

[10] As Tommaso Astarita details, Murat attempted to reclaim Naples and, with a small army, landed in Calabria where he was arrested, eventually ending in Naples where he was executed in 1815 (263). Tangentially, Gay Talese in his novel, *Unto the Sons*, recounts Murat's landing in Calabria where his great-grandmother watched his arrest and subsequent beating at the hands of royalists (175-180).

46-47). With the return of Ferdinand to Naples, the continental kingdom was officially united with the island of Sicily, thereby creating the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in 1815. While always officially part of the Kingdom of Naples, Sicily had, up until Ferdinand's isolation on the island at the hands of Napoleon's troops and Murat, been ruled by a viceroy (Astarita 260). Ferdinand's exile to Sicily from 1806-1815 produced the first Sicilian constitution in 1812 which abolished feudalism on the island. While almost entirely beneficial to the landed bourgeoisie, it did represent a trend that the Jacobins had initiated and the Bourbon crown, almost by necessity, had to follow (Astarita 264; Spagnoletti 47-48). Quoting Pietro Colletta, the Decennio and its ramifications were felt long after the return of Ferdinand:

> Although Murat had fallen in 1815, the laws, habits, opinions, and hopes which had been impressed on the minds of the people during the previous ten years did not fall with him…All of our institutions had been altered, and every part of society and the State had been changed, either for better or for worse. The civil code which had filled a hundred volumes, was now compressed into the Code Napoleon, a monument to political wisdom; and the penal code, which could only be defined with difficulty amidst the various documents and usages among the courts of law, was collected into one body of laws…Public discussion had succeeded the old secret and iniquitous system of trial; and a wise commercial code had been introduced. (qtd. in Santoro 97)

Resentment and political missteps characterize the final years of Ferdinand's reign. In his unwillingness to accept the Sicilian constitution of 1812 and the proposed Neapolitan version in 1820, Ferdinand's hostility toward reform precipitated a popular revolt in favor of a constitution in 1821 to which Ferdinand officially consented but made it the crown's policy not to be bound by it (Santoro 100-01; Spagnoletti 52-53). Ferdinand's reign continued to be characterized by a constant police presence in the capital and a strengthening of the relationship between the crown and the Church and the marginalizing of the intellectual elite who in 1815 had all been either expelled or fled of their own accord (Spagnoletti 44-45). In 1825, the last year of Ferdinand IV's reign, an economic crisis erupted as a result of the constant warfare of the period between 1799 and 1815 and continued to plague the beginning years of the reign of Francis I, Ferdinand's

successor. Francis I's policies were a continuation of the corruption and favoritism that the backlash from the Decennio provoked resulting in the brutal exploitation of the lower classes who were believed to support Republican reforms (Santoro 101-03;128; Spagnoletti 54).

Ascending to the throne in 1830, Ferdinand II was viewed as a new Charles III and the beginning of his reign was marked by continued cultural and technological advancements: the first railroad in Italy was constructed in 1839; the city was third, behind Paris and London, to be illuminated by gas lights in 1839 (Astarita 208). There was also hope that Ferdinand II would also attempt to enact reforms based on the economic reforms of the past decade. The Kingdom of the Two Sicilies did make progress in the fields of the sciences and the arts, especially with the opening of the Vesuvius Observatory in 1845 (Astarita 270). Naples itself grew, seeing the building of new neighborhoods and experiencing a general beautification project much like that of Ferdinand's grandfather, Charles III (Astarita 271). However, Ferdinand II's reign was continually plagued by a growing disconnect between the crown, the agricultural bourgeoisie, and the intellectuals (Spagnoletti 57). Between 1844 and 1848 popular uprisings from the Abruzzi to Sicily broke out across the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in favor of constitutional and social reform, with Sicily even seeking independence (Santoro 142-50). Put down by Ferdinand II's forces, these uprisings in 1848 marked the beginning of the end of the Bourbon crown (Spagnoletti 58) as they provided some of the first examples of whisperings of Italian unity, stemming from a desire for a constitutional form of government (Santoro 141). From this period onward, Ferdinand II's tenure is marked by constant insurrections in favor of political reform and campaigns waged by intellectuals of the kingdom, Luigi Settembrini being one of the more prominent (Astarita 280; Spagnoletti 64). Mixing with liberal political agitators and the

Carbonari whose own revolutionary activity began in 1806 (Santoro 105), the capital and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies were rife with reformist activity.

With the outbreak of cholera across the kingdom between 1836 and 1837 and nearly one-hundred and seventy thousand deaths as a result, the perception of the Bourbon crown began to erode; the economy faltered because of constant internal insurrections and roads and railway projects were overlooked in favor of maritime projects (Spagnoletti 238-244). As a result, the kingdom slid ever more rapidly into isolation, as externally the desire to dissolve the Bourbon kingdom grew. As the cause for Italian unity gained strength in intellectual circles in northern cities like Genoa and Turin, southern intellectuals joined with their northern counterparts in legitimizing the cause for uniting the peninsula into a new, united Italian nation. The *Società Nazionale*, founded in 1857 in Turin, along with Mazzini's *Giovine Italia* in 1831 (Spagnoletti 66) promoted a national vision for the Italian peninsula, diametrically opposed to the autocratic rule of the Bourbon crown. Ferdinand II became the ultimate personification of the perceived evils of the Bourbon dynasty. Ferdinand's regime, while progressive and innovative in its own right, was consistently contrasted with kingdoms/nations of northern Europe, namely France and England. Quoting the Neapolitan historian Giacinto De Sivo, Spagnoletti underlines the underwhelming results produced by these comparisons and the unreasonable conclusions drawn there from: "Molti saccenti credono esser civiltà e progresso quello che vedono in Francia e in Inghilterra, e quanto dissomiglia dicon barbarie…noi Napoletani…abbiam singolarissime usanze…e modi di vita tenaci, che paion talvolta incivili allo straniero che in fretta giudica dalla scorza"(230).

With such comparisons in mind, the later years of Ferdinand II's reign (1848-1858) were marked by a steady decline and the creation of a new history regarding the Bourbon dynasty.

Ideas of progress and civilization drawn from the British and French models, served as the means through which the Unification movement demonized and delegitimized the southern kingdom. Albeit that agricultural and economic development continued under Ferdinand II's reign (Spagnoletti 244), it was the comparison of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies with other European states that ultimately gave momentum to the causes of Italian Unification. As such, the Bourbon dynasty was classified as outdated and stood in opposition to real progress. At the same time, these movements, most of which (if not all) operated outside of the kingdom, never took into consideration the socio-political reality of the kingdom when defaming it. Ferdinand II's death in 1859 and the ascension to the throne of Francis II hastened the end of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and Bourbon rule in southern Italy, a dynasty that can be credited with overseeing one of the finer periods of southern Italian history and one of the most fertile periods with regard to Italian innovation in engineering and technology in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Piedmont, Cavour, Unification, and the Annexation of the south

With the death of Ferdinand II in 1859 and the ascension to the throne of Francis II, the time seemed well-suited to begin the wars of Unification, uniting the Bourbon kingdom to the northern Italian state of Piedmont. In the years after the insurrections of 1848, the House of Savoy adopted the primary role of leadership amongst those who desired a unified Italian state and it appeared to be the natural choice in whom the forces of Unification would place their hopes. Under the leadership of the Piedmontese Liberal government of Count Camillo Benso di Cavour and with support from southern intellectuals and northern news outlets, the forces of Unification attempted to unify ideologically the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies to the Savoy crown. As will be discussed later, the politics of the Risorgimento centered on a desire to achieve an ancient goal of a unified Italian state, free from foreign domination; a nation that would recapture the ancient glory of its Roman past and bring the Italian peoples under a single monarch and state. This theory will be underscored, however, by a cultural agenda, an agenda that promoted a specific vision of Piedmontese and/or northern cultural homogeny for the future Italian kingdom. It is with these points in mind that I will begin an account of the period from 1848 to 1861.

By virtue of Italy's geography and its peninsular push toward the south and east, the Italian states that occupied the peninsula had been considered "southern European". As Nelson Moe illustrates, northern Europe of the nineteenth century (namely England and France) viewed itself juxtaposed to other nations, drawing definitive conclusions as to the superiority of some nations and the inferiority of others:

> The vision of Italy that takes form between the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries thus alternates between denunciations of backwardness and exaltations of picturesqueness. In the former case, a more or less explicit comparison is made, and Italy is found to be inferior. In the latter case, Italy in its decadence and backwardness offers

the bourgeois subject an encounter with remnants of an ancient past and the experience of a warm, verdant natural world that cannot be found north of the Alps. (17)

By nature of its touristic appeal, little was known about various regions of the Italian peninsula outside the realm of its ancient attractions and quaint customs and it is here, with regard to Italian culture, that the Italian Unification process would center its aims on creating a unified vision of what it meant to be Italian.[11] As there had not existed an Italian nation prior to the nineteenth century, the Unification process therefore became a product of the nineteenth century. As such, the future Italian state was subject to the ideological currents of nineteenth-century Europe, one of which was the supposed correlation between climate and cultural superiority or inferiority. The following is a passage from the French philosopher Charles Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws*, in which nineteenth-century European attitudes on culture are defined according to geography: "'In northern climates, you shall find peoples who have few vices, a sufficient number of virtues, and a lot of frankness and sincerity. Draw near the southern countries, and you will think you have left morality itself far behind: the liveliest passions proliferate crimes; each person seeks to take advantage of everyone else…'" (qtd. in Moe 24). Naples and Rome are frequently compared to Africa and the East (Moe 71). Carlo Cattaneo's publication, *Rivista Europea*, in 1845, cites several determining factors in labeling the south as inferior to the northern regions of the Italian peninsula, chief amongst them the existence of savings banks in the north and the predominance of social unrest in the south (Moe 105-06). Carlo Cattaneo, considered to be one of the first authorities on the Italian Risorgimento, concentrated his work primarily on underlining contributions of Italian peoples to European history. Cattaneo states that Italy's greatest contribution to western history was the creation of

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[11] Nelson Moe's work, *The View from Vesuvius*, details the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century fascination of northern Europeans with the ancient, oft described as primordial character of the southern Italian landscape, 15-23.

the "municipal principle" (Moe 111), which lauded the development of urban life in the Italian peninsula, serving as a model for other European nations. It is also worth noting that during the Napoleonic period in Italy, there was an attempt by the French to connect Napoleon's endeavors with those of the ancient Romans, citing legal and social reforms. As Anne Lyttleton points out, the Napoleonic period was marked by attempts at reclaiming an ancient tradition, while the Risorgimento and the lead-up to Italian Unification demonstrated the inherent flaws in that argumentation: "…it was not the tradition of ancient Latin civilization that had survived and which had ultimately civilized the barbarians, but that of the Roman Catholic Church"(Lyttleton 45). This principle would be used, in future discussions on the nature of the new Italy, to differentiate between the north and the south of Italy, prizing northern urban development and decrying the southern exception. Here it would be worth mentioning that Cattaneo's essays on southern difference served most often, according to Nelson Moe, as a means by which Italy could align itself with conceptions of northern European advancement and shake off the stigma of "southern" and the "Orient".[12] There developed in the years prior to Unification a distinct discourse with respect to the differences amongst the Italian peoples, one that would be centered on northern European concepts of superiority of persons and cultures that would have a direct impact on the manner in which the Italian south was viewed when it was incorporated into the new Italian state in 1861. If Italy were to become a unified country, what would that Italy look like? Which culture would predominate? Which language? These would become the main questions that would plague the cause for unity leading up to and even after its declaration in 1861.

As was discussed previously in this chapter, the exiled intellectuals of the Bourbon kingdom were instrumental in fomenting the causes for southern liberation. Citing Luigi

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[12] See Moe, 106-09.

Settembrini's assessment of the Bourbon kingdom of the 1840s, Nelson Moe states: "Southern Italy, in its present state, has fallen so far on the scale of European civilization that it has been displaced by a barbarian people, overtaken by the Turks in the march of progress" (qtd. in Moe 135). Here it is clear that the appraisal of the Bourbon Kingdom of the Two Sicilies is again aligned with the Orient or the East which, in nineteenth-century terms, equated to barbarism and backwardness. This will be highlighted again by Giuseppe Massari who, in 1849, published his treatise, *I casi di Napoli*, in which he cites Bourbon power as being the antithesis of civilization (Moe 136-37). Bourbon misrule was one of the most frequently cited examples of the causes of southern backwardness and difference. Francesco Trinchera, an exiled Neapolitan living in Turin, published his views on Bourbon misrule, further conflating the link between southern difference and the Bourbon regime. As Nelson Moe points out, Trinchera's argument was one that sought the overthrow of the Bourbons by the armies of the Piedmont, aided by England and France (Moe 144). These hostilities, as Nelson Moe (145) and Claudia Petraccone (6) point out, were the result of the Bourbon crown's reaction to the revolutionary activities of 1799 and 1848. Ultimately the campaign against the Bourbon crown lost the distinction drawn between the government and the people, grouping the two into the southern bloc of difference and incompatibility with European civilization and progress.[13] As of the 1850s, the House of Savoy and the region of Piedmont were believed to be the best hope for national Unification. Due in large part to the number of exiles and foreigners in the Piedmont, the nationalist movement saw in the House of Savoy the ability to unify the peninsula, as Piedmont and the central-north of Italy had begun, in the Napoleonic period, to develop political and economic relations amongst each other (Moe 128-29). The aforementioned southern intellectuals and others (Gioberti being the most preeminent on the northern side [Moe 113-20]), diffused the idea that Italian

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[13] See Moe, 145-46.

nationalism and independence depended on the House of Savoy to lead the way. Beginning in 1861 and over a period of less than two years, the Italian peninsula was united and declared a nation; yet, the Italian Risorgimento proved itself to be an incomplete endeavor.

In 1860, the Piedmontese entered the city of Naples and the dream of national unity appeared to be complete. As this was the first real contact with the former Bourbon kingdom, those sent by Camillo Benso di Cavour to be his representatives in the provisional government of Naples, had never been there before and most of what they thought they knew about Naples and the south came from writings by those who had either traveled there or had been exiled from there (Astarita 286). It is through these eyes and through their "eyewitness" testimonies that Cavour received communications as to the economic conditions of the new regions, how the government's policies should be implemented, and what was the general character and composition of the new subjects. During this period of Piedmontese occupation of the southern regions, and in particular Naples, countless messages from Cavour's personal correspondents in the south endorsed force as an effective tool of the new government and a social agenda that considered the southern peoples inferior and incapable of being civilized. One of the most preeminent assessments comes from Massimo D'Azeglio in 1860: "'In tutti i modi la fusione coi napoletani mi fa paura; è come mettersi a letto con un vaiuoloso'"(qtd. in Petraccone 31). The word "vaiuolo" here is telling, putting the Neapolitans, and southerners in general, on par with smallpox. This would certainly not be the last time the south was described as a disease.

The same year, 1860, the belief that had shaped the Risorgimento –the desire for national unity– showed its most significant cracks. As Claudia Petraccone demonstrates with respect to Cavour:

> Lo stesso Cavour, ancora alla vigilia dell'unità, non pensava affatto che essa potesse riguardare tutta la penisola: nel 1854 aveva confidato a Rattazzi che l'unità italiana come

traguardo prossimo del movimento nazionale era da considerarsi una 'vera pazzia'; alla fine del 1859 disse a Massari che occorreva 'lasciar Napoli da parte' e aggiunse: 'l'Italia una sarà opera dei nostri figli; io mi contento di ciò che c'è.' (12)

As stated earlier, it was the commonly held view that the Bourbon regime had been incompetent and, as a result, the peoples of the south under that regime had greatly fallen behind "Alta Italia" (Astarita 269) both in technology and government.[14] Now as the Kingdom of Italy was declared in 1860 by a questionable plebiscite vote in which the south overwhelmingly voted to join the Kingdom of Italy (Astarita 283), the first real movements toward political and social Unification take place, the results of which would later consolidate popular and government attitudes with respect to the south.

In 1860, Luigi Carlo Farini became the first deputy of the Mezzogiorno, the southern provinces of the new Italy. Upon arrival in the south Farini relates the following observations in a letter to Cavour: "'Ma, amico mio, che paesi son mai questi, il Molise e Terra di Lavoro! Che barbarie! Altro che Italia! Questa è Africa: i beduini… sono fior di virtù civile'"(qtd. in Petraccone 15). The aforementioned theme of disease again peppers Farini's correspondence with Cavour, which in turn had a significant impact when read against the political, social, and economic structure the new Italian government sought to impose: "'L'annessione di Napoli diventa la cancrena del rimanente Stato'"(qtd. in Petraccone 18). Farini should also be noted for his suggestion regarding the establishment of the new state in the south, that if government presence were not sufficient then force would take its place: "Sarà difficile dare opinione di governo forte alle salvatiche popolazioni senza mostrare ed all'uopo usar la forza" (qtd. in Petraccone 19). It is clear that the literary campaigns of the exiled southerners in 1850 and

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[14] As Claudia Petraccone points out, in northern Italian newspapers in 1860, the southern kingdom's dismal conditions are attributed to the misrule of the Bourbon dynasty, however biased and unfounded they might have been (25).

beyond against the Bourbon crown had saturated the northern regions with tales of barbarism and difference that now bore their fruit.

In 1861, the first Italian parliament was inaugurated and one of the principal concerns was the newly annexed south. Giuseppe Massari, the exiled Neapolitan and loyal supporter of Cavour, opened the discussion on the south: "'When a wound bleeds and is about to turn gangrene, it is necessary…to treat it with the hot iron of open discussion'"(qtd. in Moe 177). The combination of the hot iron and open discussion stand as both instrument and ploy of the new government. Even before 1860, Cavour believed the south worthy of authoritarian rule and incapable of civil government (Moe 161).[15] With annexation, the former southern kingdom lost its legal code, discarded in favor of the Piedmontese code (Petraccone 69-70). The once acclaimed city of Naples was reduced to a regional backwater (Santoro 201). Quoting the economist Ludovico Bianchini, the Unification of Italy was one of the most tragic and destructive events for southern Italy: "'L'Italia meridionale aveva peggiorato in tutto'"(qtd. in Petraccone 88). Foremost in the establishment of the new Italian state was a process known as "Piedmontization," in which the newly annexed southern regions would conform to and adopt Piedmontese inspired language, social mores, and forms of civic life (Petraccone 74). This was viewed as a necessary component to the Unification process as it would provide cultural and social unity amongst the new Italians. Owing in large part to the private sentiments conveyed to Cavour by his agents in the south (Farini; Costantino Nigra, Farini's successor; and Diomede Pantaleoni, representative for the interior minister Domenico Minghetti), Piedmontization was ultimately the cure for the perceived southern inadequacy and difference of culture. As Claudia Petraccone writes with regard to Cavour's communications with the provisional government,

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[15] For an interesting counterpoint, see Petraccone, 77-80, citing Enrico Cenni's writings on southern Italian cultural supremacy.

there had been from the beginning an accepted notion of different culture and a disdain for the culture, peoples, and institutions of the former Bourbon kingdom (50).

One of the more frequent tools of the proponents of Piedmontization and the unity of Italian culture was the press. Especially active during the years preceding Unification in Turin and Milan, the Italian press began to expose, to a greater audience, the apparent disparity between northern Italy and the southern provinces. From Carlo Cattaneo's 1845 *Rivista europea*, to the Florentine journal, *Nuova antologia* in 1861, images of the south were created based on reaction to the perceived "other:" As Nelson Moe points out, the other in this case being the newly annexed southern bloc (189-90). As a function of the belief in Piedmontese and northern superiority, the southern "other" was often an exaggerated character, based largely on stories recounted in travel journals.[16] It is here that we find an interesting, cultural parallel with the lands to which southern Italy had most often been compared: the Middle East and Asia. Concentrating on the theme of the "other," I will investigate briefly Edward Said's *Orientalism* and how this can be integrated into our discussion here.

Beginning in his introduction, Edward Said delineates the foundational concept of nineteenth-century European thought: Europe and the "other:"

> … it can be argued that the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside of Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures. There is in addition the hegemony of European ideas about the Orient, themselves reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness, usually overriding the possibility that a more independent, or more skeptical, thinker might have had different views on the matter. (7)

As Said goes on to say, any study of the Orient will begin at a referential point of culture, saying that, in approaching the Orient, the individual: "…comes up against the Orient as a European or

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[16] Nelson Moe describes this at length and demonstrates that almost all constructions of the south were based largely on travel writings (126-55).

American first, as an individual second" (11). Said's project, beginning with the Napoleonic campaigns of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, created the dynamic of "us" and "them" (43); that the "other" stood in opposition to the individual European whose notion of culture was based on his belief in the inherent superiority of northern European civilization (43). By means of this construction, nineteenth-century European thought, much as in the case of the Italian Unification, understood itself in terms of the categories Europe itself created, e.g. culture, history, and traditions. This, according to Said, led to distinctions between Europe and the "other," viewing the world in terms of Eurocentric dominance. Said illuminates the concept that for the European, the Orient "vacillates between the West's contempt for what is familiar and its shivers of delight in –or fear of– novelty"(59). In dealing with the organism of the southern regions, the central-north government of the 1860s, and also central-northern society on the whole, reacted to the south much in the same ways as the European powers of Britain and France with regard to their colonial territories: a mixture of horror and fascination.

Also in the same vein are the events Said describes with regard to England's presence in Egypt. Citing Arthur James Balfour's address to the House of Commons in 1910, Said stresses that Balfour's reasoning behind England's control of and policy for Egypt is predicated on knowledge: "As Balfour justifies the necessity for British occupation of Egypt, supremacy in his mind is associated with 'our' knowledge of Egypt"(32). Said goes on to say: "To have such knowledge of such a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it…England knows Egypt; Egypt is what England knows; England knows that Egypt cannot have self-government; England confirms that by occupying Egypt" (32-34). As Said demonstrates, the way in which the Orient was understood and conceptualized by Europe derived, in large part, by what was known about these places in terms of their encounters with Europe in the nineteenth century. Here it can be

said that, much like the case of Europe with the Orient, the central-north's annexation of and attitudes toward the south were based largely on what Italians "knew" of the south. As we have seen before, the information regarding the south came from limited interactions and were mostly framed by civil and economic unrest. Consequently, the new Italy framed its attitudes and policies according to what was believed to be true about the south, particularly the concepts of difference and indolence that plagued the provisional governments of Farini and Nigra. Categories of northern virtues and southern vices contributed to the political decisions enacted by the new Italian state regarding the south: governmental power shifted to the north, along with industry, intellectuals, and the capital of the Bourbon dynasty, all to be invested into northern projects.[17]

The period immediately after 1861 appears to be one of the most important for the history of the Italian Risorgimento. It is during this period that we see a new Italian political and socio-cultural identity emerge. This identity was largely shaped by the propaganda campaign leading up to Unification and developed further by the policies enacted by the provisional government in the south demonstrating an inability to reconcile the two halves of the peninsula; a cultural divide that was too great to overcome. The dynamic that developed was that northern equated to civilized, truly Italian, and much more civic-minded; while the south equated to docility, barbarism, and Oriental inferiority. This dynamic, therefore, made the imposition of a northern cultural and economic hegemony over the south that much easier when viewed as the act of one segment of the population acting on behalf of those who didn't know any better. If southerners knew or had the capacity to truly appreciate the current state of affairs, they would have immediately recognized the rightness of the Piedmontese cause. If this was the lens through

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[17] For more information regarding the liquidation of the Bourbon kingdom's assets, see Astarita, 291-92; Santoro, 187; Alianello, 127-36.

which the newly annexed south was viewed, how then were the Piedmontese able to subdue the southern masses who found themselves in precisely the same state (if not worse) as they had been under the former regime? How could this be the manner in which these "new" Italians were joined to the new nation? Was the support of aristocrats of the Old Order or indifference the only ally of the Piedmontese? I will begin here with a literary analysis of Tomasi di Lampedusa's 1957 *Il Gattopardo* that will offer a great deal of insight into how Unification was achieved in the south.

Il Gattopardo is a narrative glimpse into the world of the former Bourbon regime at the twilight of its existence. Don Fabrizio Corbera, Prince of Salina, stands at the intersection of tradition and current events: a man of the old regime faced with the arrival of an unknown invader who speaks of brotherhood and unity for all Italians. Beginning in May of 1860, Lampedusa's narrative recalls the last days of the Bourbon dynasty in Sicily on the eve of the Spedizione dei Mille on May 11th of that year and the months following. Lampedusa's narrative, in a way, emanates the waning rays of the setting sun of the Bourbon dynasty, and consequently, underscores the ascendency of the new Italy with reflections of former traditions and glories of the Old Order. One of the first glimpses into the current climate in the House of Salina comes at the beginning of the text with the recollection of the soldier that was found dead in the villa's garden: "Ricordava il ribrezzo che le zaffate dolciastre avevano diffuso in tutta la villa prima che ne venisse rimossa la causa: il cadavere di un giovane soldato del 5° Battaglione Cacciatori che, ferito nella zuffa di S. Lorenzo contro le squadre dei ribelli era venuto a morire, solo, sotto un albero di limone"(35). From the beginning, Don Fabrizio's world is depicted against the presence of death and the prospects of more to come, not least of which will be the death of the Old Order of which Don Fabrizio appeared to be its last representative. As Melo Freni

underlines: "*Il Gattopardo* affida al suo protagonista, il principe Fabrizio, di esaminare questa storia dall'ottica della sua condizione sociale, l'aristocrazia, e già dall'inizio incentra il suo obbiettivo sul declino dell'antica nobiltà…"(27). Our analysis will concentrate primarily on the function of Don Fabrizio in the provisional period between 1860 and 1862: how the Prince understood his position within the new social and political order and how this may be developed further in the context of the annexation of the southern kingdom during this period. I will contend that the establishment of the Kingdom of Italy was effectuated by southern aristocratic indifference to the forces of Unification as a means to maintain their privileged position. I also argue that the establishment of the new state required a passive aristocracy, support for the Piedmontese invasion, and the influence of the rising middle class. Each of these elements is present within the text and aid in understanding how the new order was established on the island and how the idea of a new nation was centered on Don Fabrizio's nephew Tancredi's maxim: "Se vogliamo che tutto rimanga come è, bisogna che tutto cambi"(Lampedusa 50).

To begin, we will examine the person of Don Fabrizio Corbera and his place within the declining Bourbon dynasty. The landed aristocracy of Sicily, a vital and often adversarial element within the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies,[18] was isolated in a sense due to the distance between the island and the court at Naples. Don Fabrizio's character, therefore, is emblematic of the Sicilian difference, characterized by a sense of isolation. In the opening lines of the narrative, Don Fabrizio describes his audiences with Ferdinand II (37-39) and concludes his recollections with a telling statement with regard to the future of the Neapolitan crown and another Italian noble, Victor Emmanuel: "Il Piemontese, il cosidetto Galantuomo che faceva tanto chiasso nella sua piccola capitale fuor di mano? Non sarebbe stato lo stesso? Dialetto torinese invece che

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[18] This is in reference to the period of the crown's residence on the island from 1806-1815, in which the landed aristocracy of Sicily attempted to quash constitutional reforms sought by the growing middle class (Astarita 264).

napoletano; e basta"(39). Unfolding around the Prince are the events that precipitated the arrival

of the Piedmontese with the presence of Tancredi, Don Fabrizio's nephew and *garibaldino* who

would later aid in the Spedizione dei Mille and introduce his Piedmontese compatriots to the

Sicilian House of Salina. Tancredi, entrusted to Don Fabrizio by Ferdinand II (38), joins with the

Piedmontese forces at Corleone to fight the forces of Francis II (49), thereby renouncing loyalty

to the dynasty to which he owed fealty. The Prince's reaction to Tancredi's actions against the

Bourbon crown characterizes the process of annexation in 1860, whereby support amongst the

aristocracy of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies was won by promises of nonaggression towards

the nobility. If things were going to stay the same, they were going to have to change.

The events surrounding the Prince's stay at Donnafugata will also expand our analysis of

the establishment of Piedmontese control in Sicily. It is during his residence at Donnafugata that

one of the most important events of the Unification process takes place: the national referendum.

In keeping with Tancredi's words that things would have to change in order to stay the same,

Don Fabrizio encourages the people of his fiefdom of Donnafugata to vote in favor of unity with

Piedmont: "Prima della votazione molte persone erano venute da lui a chiedere consiglio; tutte

sinceramente erano state esortate a votare in modo affermativo" (117). Don Fabrizio's vote is

underscored by his belief that unity with Piedmont would take place, even if the votes did not

support such a cause: "Don Fabrizio infatti non concepiva neppure come si potesse fare

altrimenti, sia di fronte al fatto compiuto come rispetto alla teatrale banalità dell'atto,…" (117).

The results of the referendum reflect the seemingly overwhelming support of the villagers of

Donnafugata to the forces of unity: "Alla folla invisibile nelle tenebre annunziò che a

Donnafugata il Plebiscito aveva dato questi risultati: Iscritti 515; votanti 512; 'sì' 512; 'no'

zero"(121). This referendum marks the end of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, but it certainly

did not signal the end of the House of Salina. Although a new order was to be put in its place, the

nobility of the Bourbon dynasty, and in this case Don Fabrizio and the Corbera line, would

continue to enjoy the privileges associated with their title; a change, but still the same: "I grandi

interessi del Regno (delle Due Sicilie), gl'interessi della propria classe, i suoi vantaggi privati

uscivano da tutti questi avvenimenti ammaccati ma ancora vitali"(122).

The referendum in August of 1860 also provides the reader with another interesting

comment on the nature of the Sicilian liberal movement. In conversation with Ciccio Tumeo,

Don Fabrizio asks how he voted and interestingly Ciccio responds: "Io, Eccellenza, avevo votato

'no'. 'No,' cento volte 'no'" (122). Ciccio also recalls the Prince's words in favor of Unification

saying: "Ricordavo quello che mi avevate detto: la necessità, l'inutilità, l'unità, l'opportunità"

(122). Ciccio's vote represents an ambivalent attitude toward government. The arrival of the new

government brought a new local power, Don Calogero Sedàra: "Per voi signori è un'altra cosa.

Si può essere ingrati per un feudo in più; per un pezzo di pane la riconoscenza è un obbligo. Un

altro paio di maniche ancora è per i trafficanti come Sedàra per i quali approfittare è legge di

natura. Per noi piccola gente le cose sono come sono"(123). Ciccio is loyal to that power which

had shown him great kindness over the years, from sending money when the family was in need

(124) to furnishing the means to educate Ciccio (124). In Ciccio's rationale it would be the

ultimate betrayal to those who had given to him and his family so willingly:

> e negli anni di maggior bisogno quando mia madre mandava una supplica a corte, le cinque 'onze' di soccorso arrivavano sicure come la morte, perché a Napoli ci volevano bene, sapevano che eravamo buona gente e sudditi fedeli. Quando il Re veniva erano manacciate sulla spalla di mio padre e: 'Don Lionà, ne vurria tante come a vuie, fedeli sostegni del Trono e della Persona mia.' L'aiutante di campo, poi, distribuiva le monete d'oro. Elemosine le chiamano ora, queste generosità di veri Re…Lo so, Eccellenza, le persone come voi me lo hanno detto, queste cose da parte dei Reali non significano niente, fanno parte del loro mestiere! Sarà vero, è vero, anzi. Ma le cinque onze d'oro c'erano, è un fatto, e con esse ci si aiutava a campare l'inverno. E ora che potevo riparare

il debito, niente. 'Tu non ci sei.' Il mio 'no' diventa un 'sì'. Ero un 'fedele suddito', sono
diventato un 'borbonico schifoso'. (124)

Ciccio's monologue reflects the rapid, almost overnight change that occurred in Sicily in 1860.

Ciccio, as stated earlier, has no illusions as to his future, because for the poorer classes life will

remain the same. But remembering the generosity of the Bourbon monarchs has made Ciccio a

loyalist and anathema to the new order, rendering him unable to renounce his former loyalties

and identities in favor of the new nationalist, Piedmontese-dominated government.

Ciccio's mention of Don Calogero engenders our next point of analysis. Don Calogero

Sedàra rises in a time of political and social upheaval, transforming almost instantaneously into

one of the most prominent men in Donnafugata: "Poi vennero le notizie private che si adunavano

attorno al grande fatto dell'annata: la continua rapida ascesa della fortuna di don Calogero

Sedàra…Insieme alla ricchezza cresceva anche la sua influenza politica; era divenuto il capo dei

liberali a Donnafugata ed anche nei borghi vicini" (81). Here we see the rise of a new man from

the south, one who is self-made and who benefitted from the arrival of the Piedmontese,

acquiring land and property during the last days of the Bourbon crown in Sicily (81). As the Old

Order gives way to the new, we see the same static structure of southern Italian society: the

Bourbon nobles, with a few Piedmontese additions, the powerful agricultural bourgeois, and the

working poor. With the arrival of the House of Savoy and the establishment of the unified Italian

kingdom, the southern regions received little benefit from Unification, with the exception of men

like Don Calogero. Don Calogero and men of his ilk would soon insert themselves into the arena

of national politics, seeking positions in the new Italian government in Turin. As was said of Don

Calogero from the beginning: "quando ci sarebbero state le elezioni era sicuro di essere inviato

deputato a Torino"(81).

The arrival of Chevalley di Monterzuolo to Donnafugata is underlined by the anxiety that

the northern noble felt during his stay in Sicily during the provisional government period of

1860. After a month on the island, Chevalley's head is filled with tales of brigandage thereby

forcing him to suspect everyone around him (170). He ultimately reflects the general attitude of

the new Piedmontese administrators, one of derision and suspicion with regard to all strata of

southern society, including the Prince of Salina. One particular reflection of Chevalley during his

first encounter with the Prince amplifies this point: "A cena mangiò bene per la prima volta da

quando aveva toccato le sponde sicule…e le grandi maniere di Don Fabrizio lo convinsero che il

palazzo di Donnafugata non era l'antro del bandito Capraro e che da esso sarebbe probabilmente

uscito vivo"(171-72). Later in the text, Chevalley's reason for visiting the Prince was to offer

him a seat in the Senate of the Kingdom of Italy. Chevalley is asked by Don Fabrizio to explain

what his function in the Senate would be, to which Chevalley replies: "Quando avrà accettato di

prendervi posto, Lei rappresenterà la Sicilia alla pari dei deputati eletti, farà udire la voce di

questa sua bellissima terra che si affaccia adesso al panorama del mondo moderno, con tante

piaghe da sanare, con tanti giusti desideri da esaudire" (177). The Prince's response is one that is

couched in Sicilian history in order to explain his refusal to participate in the new Italy, despite,

as Chevalley points out, his liberal attitude towards Unification: "Avevo detto 'adesione' non

'partecipazione.' In questi sei ultimi mesi, da quando il vostro Garibaldi ha posto piede a

Marsala, troppe cose sono state fatte senza consultarci perché adesso si possa chiedere a un

membro della vecchia classe dirigente di svilupparle e portarle a compimento" (177-78). Don

Fabrizio goes on to describe the political history of Sicily, noting the foreign dimension to every

power ever to rule the island:

> Questa violenza del paesaggio, questa crudeltà del clima, questa tensione continua di ogni
> aspetto, questi monumenti, anche, del passato, magnifici ma incomprensibili perché non

edificati da noi e che ci stanno intorno come bellissimi fantasmi muti; tutti questi governi, sbarcati in armi da chissà dove, subito serviti, presto detestati e sempre incompresi, che si sono espressi soltanto con opere d'arte per noi enigmatiche e con concretissimi esattori d'imposte spese poi altrove. (180)

In rejecting the Piedmontese offer of a seat in the new Senate, Don Fabrizio resigns himself to the fate of the last of the Old Order: an aging, resigned noble desperate to be left alone. Viewing the events of 1860 and the fall of the Bourbon dynasty, Don Fabrizio's intent is to leave the governance of Sicily in the hands of men like Calogero Sedàra, whom he nominates for Senate in his stead: "C'è un nome che io vorrei suggerire per il Senato: quello di Calogero Sedàra; egli ha più meriti di me per sedervi; il casato, mi è detto, è antico o finirà con esserlo"(181). It is revealed that in 1870, ten years later, Don Calogero ultimately becomes a senator (182). Having participated in the Risorgimento and having benefitted financially and socially in the process, Don Calogero and others like the Prince's dependents, Don Ferrara and Russo (54-56), successfully garnered for themselves the opportunity to rise above their previous status as employees of a local lord and gain property and status that had once been thought unattainable. As such, their motives for supporting the new Italy may have been self-serving, seeking only personal advancement and taking advantage of an opportune moment, as the arrival of Garibaldi and the Piedmontese proved itself to be. Here, where the Old Order gives way to the new, the Prince resigns himself to be the last of his line and observe as Sicily is once again brought into union with another foreign power that will misunderstand and misrepresent the island in the years to come.

Continuing with the years after 1860, let us examine the last stage of the annexation of the south with the influence of the writings of Leopoldo Franchetti and Sidney Sonnino whose works greatly informed the perception of the south in the 1870s and contributed to the mass misrepresentation of the south in both social and political life. In 1863, the noted Neapolitan

intellectual and patriot Francesco De Sanctis offered this insight into the creation of an Italian

nation: "'Diventando italiani non abbiamo cessato d'essere napoletani. L'Italia ha l'orgoglio di

chiudere nel suo seno le più ricche differenze, ciò che rende altero il lombardo, il toscano, il

napoletano, il piemontese, il romano, il siciliano; è una nazione che ha in sé la ricchezza di molte

nazioni'"(qtd.. in Petraccone 67).[19] As Italy sought to create a national sense of itself in the years

following 1861, a cultural divide continued to grow with the annexation of the southern kingdom

that same year. While national unity was declared accomplished, there was still a great disparity

between the central-north and the south in terms of mutual understanding. As was highlighted in

Il Gattopardo and rendered in historical terms by Nelson Moe and Claudia Petraccone, the

context of the encounter between the north and the south had greatly been influenced by the

previously discussed southern intellectuals of the pre-Risorgimento period (Massari, Villari,

Settembrini, etc.). Their views on the southern regions informed public opinion and later affected

government policy which had had an adverse effect on the south: the southern regions were the

highest taxed in the new kingdom and most of the financial wealth and industry of the former

Bourbon kingdom had been exported to the north of Italy (Astarita 286-88; Alianello 127-36). In

the years between 1860-1874, the central-northern power structure that had been established

through Piedmont's spearheading of the Risorgimento maintained an often hostile position with

regard to the south, viewing the southern regions more as annexed property than as Italian

citizens. In 1874, the writers Leopoldo Franchetti and Sidney Sonnino embarked on a journey

through the southern regions so as to better understand these new Italian regions.

Franchetti observes the new government in the south had the propensity to: "vedere la

classe inferiore acquistare prematuramente idee d'inpendenza proprie di uno stato di civiltà, di

_____

[19] Don Fabrizio calling to mind the cultural melting pot of historical Sicily, refers to the island as: "…quest'America dell'antichità"(114).

ricchezza e d'industria, di relazioni sociali ed economiche molto superiore" (qtd.. in Petraccone

107). Franchetti also believed, as is underlined by Nelson Moe, that the incorporation of Sicily

into the new nation would prove to be incompatible with the forces of unity (244). Claudia

Petraccone also reveals another interesting conclusion drawn from Franchetti and Sonnino's

study of the south, that of the necessity of one civilization to conquer the other: "Una volta

ammesso che la Sicilia faceva e doveva continuare a far parte dell'Italia, il nodo fondamentale da

sciogliere per garantire l'esistenza stessa della nazione era, per Franchetti, la scomparsa di una

delle due civiltà"(105). These reactions to the south and Sicily in particular were also peppered

with tales of mafia and brigands (Moe 238-39). That same year, 1874, the south overwhelmingly

voted against the Liberal government of the historic Right. The governments of the Right which

had produced the nation of Italy, was out of power.

With the nomination of Francesco Crispi in 1887 as the first southern *Presidente del*

Consiglio, the new nation again began to pose questions of race and ethnic difference. Claudia

Petraccone lucidates: "La concezione delle 'due civiltà' fu così alla base delle due questioni più

importanti per la sopravvivenza dello Stato, legate l'una all'altra, la settentrionale e la

meridionale"(122). Petraccone goes on to cite Ferruccio Macola, the director of the *Gazzetta di*

Venezia, with regard to an Italian Parliament that represents both north and south:

> Il Mezzogiorno manda alla Camera uomini di spirito e di intraprendenza; i quali educati
> in ambiente assai diverso dal nostro non provano, presi in massa, gli scrupoli dei nostri
> buoni settentrionali. Uniti e compatti in tutte le questioni regionali essi hanno saputo
> imporsi, e conquistare al Mezzogiorno un posto predominante in tutte le grandi
> amministrazioni dello Stato; mentre assai prima, essi avevano risolto splendidamente il
> problema di pagare molto meno di noi, gridando però sempre di più. (qtd.. in Petraccone
> 123)

The reaction to the election of Crispi as head of government was framed by an unwillingness to

allow a representative of the south to govern the entire nation. News articles calling for regional

autonomy and government decentralization began appearing in northern newspapers (Petraccone

122-23). It is once again the belief in a northern superiority of character and innate civic competence that define the period of Crispi's election. I will contend that this period ultimately informed and influenced the exodus of hundreds of thousands of southerners beginning in the 1880s. The Great Migration, as it would later be called, found southern Italians emigrating from the new Italy and settling in new lands across the Atlantic. For our study here, I will focus on Italian immigration to North America. It is upon arrival in the rapidly industrializing America of the late nineteenth century that southern Italians were once again called upon to build a nation physically and culturally, participate in the modernizing of the American state, contribute to its technological advancement, and divest themselves of any attachment to the Old World and become "honest Americans." I contend that the social and cultural climate that the southern Italian masses left was precisely the same climate into which they now immigrated. A culture obsessed with uniformity and fearful of difference, the America of the late nineteenth century was almost identical, socially speaking, to the new Italy of the post-Unification period. It is here that I will begin my investigation into the parallels between the southern Italian experience in pre- and post-Unification Italy and in the America to which these peoples immigrated.

<u>Emigration, Arrival, Assimilation, and New Nation Building</u>

The Unification process declared complete (with the exception of Trent, Trieste, and Rome) in 1861, the new nation faced its largest and most daunting task: creating "Italians". The new government had its residence in Turin, later to settle in Rome in 1870. Naples, which had been the capital of the Bourbon kingdom, was now relegated to the status of a regional capital. All influence moved north. This repositioning of power and influence away from the south had the effect of isolating the southern regions and maintaining the aristocratic status quo. This isolation was in part effected by the general northern horror and dismay at the southern Italian peoples. Through a journalistic campaign that spanned the entirety of the Unification period (from 1860-1875), a national ill will was created towards the southern regions orchestrated in large part by editorials decrying the savagery and barbarism of the Italian south and pointing to the backward and "Oriental" customs of the southern peoples and their ability to be good citizens only at the point of a knife.[20] With this climate in mind it is not difficult, therefore, to appreciate the nature of the policies that the new government adopted with respect to the south. As we will discuss later, the socio-cultural tenor of the new Italy left no room for the "backward" southerners who were expected to assimilate according to a northern conception of what it now meant to be an Italian. The new Kingdom of Italy demanded cultural homogeneity and because of this, the southern regions were never fully incorporated into the Italian state as a result of the well-diffused belief that southern society was antithetical to national unity. Ultimately this political climate of northern or federal indifference toward the south, tinged with its bigoted overtones, will frame the departure of thousands of southern Italians but also the arrival of these emigrants in the New World. As I will demonstrate, the Italian Unification and the establishment

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[20] See Moe, 134; Astarita, 285-87.

of the Italian state did not go unnoticed by the American press and the hostility towards the southern peoples was transmitted across the Atlantic to greet the Italian arrivals. Because of this I contend that the reception of southern Italians in North America was almost identical to their reception by the northern Italians of the Risorgimento period. The period from 1860 to 1880 stands out in the history of the Italian state as a period in which the new nation began to develop a true sense of a national identity and establish a social and economic structure that would later come to define the Italian state. This vision, however, appears to be intended for the northern segment of the population. For the inhabitants of the former Bourbon kingdom, their place in the realm of national Italian life seemed minimal at best. The new Italian government was able, in a span of less than twenty years, to turn the oldest of the kingdoms on the Italian peninsula into a regional backwater, a geographical wasteland left to its absentee lords and barons and subject to the highest level of taxation in the new country. The economic policies notwithstanding, the Liberal government was also able to control voting rights by mandating literacy as a prerequisite (Astarita 286). It would seem that the government of the new Italy was hostile, or at least indifferent, to the southern regions of the new Italy. It was not until the government of Crispi, a Sicilian, that the level of hostility towards southerners was brought to bear upon the whole of Italy and the rest of the world. As was discussed previously, Crispi's election to the position of *Presidente del Consiglio* marked both the end of north-central domination of Parliament and the birth of the *questione meridionale*, the southern question. In the years immediately following 1860, the Piedmontese government sought to unify all strata of the Italian peninsula, from the economy to the culture, requiring total allegiance to the nation as a whole, rather than to one's native region or former loyalties. The climate in the Houses of Parliament during this period was one of hostility and suspicion, mostly directed towards southerners. Quoting Michele Torraca, a

representative from the south, Claudia Petraccone highlights the continued antagonism reserved

for the southern regions:

> Noi meridionali non siamo stimati abbastanza dagli altri popoli d'Italia […]. Per disgrazia, nelle provincie superiori, specialmente nei grandi centri, quando vi ascoltano, e dall'accento si accorgono d'onde siete, cominciano dal guardarvi con diffidenza. Tal fama, in complesso, corre di noi, che in ogni meridionale si sospetta, a bella prima, il compaesano de' camorristi e de' mafiosi, ed è il più: o un mezzo imbroglione, uno stracciafaccende, uno, insomma, da cui bisogni tenersi in guardi, ed è il meno. (qtd. in Petraccone 117)

Even the esteemed Giustino Fortunato, southern historian, scholar, and politician, decried in

1880 the manner in which unity had established itself in the years after 1860: "'Cessato

l'entusiasmo di que' primi anni, durante i quali una sola e grande poesia ci accomunò tutti, noi ci

siamo seperati come al momento…; ci siam visti quel che eravamo in fatti: estranei gli uni agli

altri…'"(qtd. in Petraccone 145).

It is not surprising, therefore, after twenty years of "unity," that the prevailing opinion of

the south was almost entirely negative. Northern newspapers published reports of southern

brigandage, northern over-taxation, and southern ineptitude, continuously espousing the view

that Italian unity, at best, was tenuous and that its current state was such due to southern

inferiority and backwardness. As Claudia Petraccone states: "Ancora una volta affiorava in

superficie la coscienza della differenza delle popolazioni che avevano formato l'Italia e della

necessità di tener conto di questa estrema varietà, visto che per più di trent'anni si era

sperimentata la difficoltà di renderle omogenee" (140). As a result of this inability to reconcile

the two halves of the Italian peninsula, the period from the 1880s onward marks what is called

the "Great Migration," the mass exodus of thousands of Italians from the southern regions and

their migration to North America. Here I will begin my analysis of the period from 1880 to 1920

with a brief discussion on the southern Italian's decision to emigrate.

In their fundamental study, *La Storia: Five Centuries of the Italian American Experience* (1992), Jerre Mangione and Ben Morreale state that almost four fifths of the emigrants from Italy came from the south (33). By 1930, almost 4.5 million Italians had immigrated to the United States, decimating the villages of southern Italy.[21] This is a result, as Fred Gardaphé has also noted in his study, *Leaving Little Italy: Essaying Italian American Culture* (2004), of the Italian Risorgimento and its attempts to unify the Italian peninsula into a homogenous cultural and economic block: "True integration was never achieved and northern culture soon assumed a hegemony that exists to this day. As the Italian state economy was capitalized and industrialized, the north exploited the south, some would even say colonized it"(4). An inhospitable and hostile climate provided ample opportunity, beginning in the 1880s, for southern Italians to seek their fortunes outside of Italy. North America, teeming with rapidly industrializing centers like New York, proved to be the destination of choice for millions of southern Italians. These immigrants would soon constitute the base of an enormous workforce, one that would be willing to work in the massive construction and revitalization projects of late nineteenth-century America. As Mark Choate describes in his study, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad* (2008), the years from 1881 to 1898 saw the departure of millions of Italians, often not knowing to which America they would be immigrating:

> Between 1881 and 1898, millions of Italians left their country in an unprecedented transatlantic mass migration, establishing their own American colonies. For Italians, America did not mean the United States, but the land named for Amerigo Vespucci: North and South America. Even more broadly, America meant migration outside Europe and the Mediterranean Basin… 'America' became a legend of employment, opportunity, and sacrifice. Hundreds of thousands of Italians traveled to the Americas for work, without ever having traveled to Rome or Florence for pleasure. (23)

Based mostly in the desire for work and economic opportunity, tens of thousands of Italian emigrants poured into the Americas, and for our present study, to New York harbor in particular.

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[21] See Mangione, Morreale, 86-104; Astarita, 289.

But the social and historical climate that these Italian immigrants attempted to leave behind, in actuality met them upon their arrival in North America. Here I will contend that the political events of the 1870s and early 1880s informed to a large extent the popular conception of the Italian immigrants: who they were, from whence they came, and their character as humans. I assert that the politics of cultural hegemony with which the Piedmontese policies of the post-Risorgimento period sought to dominate the new nation were the same as those employed by the American elite to impose their own vision of cultural homogeneity in late -nineteenth-century America.

To begin, let us recall what Luigi Carlo Farini had said upon arriving in the south in 1860 as the head of the Piedmontese provisional government: "'Ma, amico mio, che paesi son mai questi, il Molise e Terra di Lavoro! Che barbarie! Altro che Italia! Quest'è Africa: i beduini, a riscontro di questi cafoni, sono fior di virtù civile'"(qtd.. in Petraccone 15). As we have seen, this attitude was the primary one adopted by the new, Italian national government with regard to the south. In the years following 1860, successive waves of policies from the central-northern-led government, subjected the south to the highest tax rate in the nation and restricted voting rights (Astarita 288). These developments spurred mass emigration but they also informed the arrival of the new immigrants, especially with regard to United States. As in the history of northern Italian annexation of the south, the cultural capital that was promoted was one that was Piedmontese and would not tolerate any deviation.[22] As a result, the north controlled the means by which southern Italians were depicted and received by the nation of Italy as a whole. This would also prove to be the case as Italians arrived in North America, beginning en masse in the mid-1880s. For our present study, let us examine a few , selected news articles drawn from

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[22] This is treated at length in Nelson Moe's chapter, "The North Looks South, 1825-1848," in his book *The View from Vesuvius*, 85-125.

Salvatore La Gumina's study, *Wop! A Documentary History of Anti-Italian Discrimination in the United States* (1973), in which he exposes a journalistic campaign directed against the new Italian arrivals and demonstrates that the events of the 1870s and 1880s in Italy did not go unnoticed by the New York press and the American, intellectual elite.

To begin his documentary study, La Gumina underlines the uniqueness of the Italian experience in the United States and the role conceptions of racial difference played in Italian integration into American society of the late nineteenth-century:

> An examination of anti-Italianism in American history is instructive because it reveals that Italians in America were subject to some of the most scurrilous campaigns ever directed against any immigrant group…Italians earned a low score of acceptability, not only when compared to immigrants from Northwestern Europe, but even when evaluated against other latecomers of the post-Civil War migration…As to their character in general, 'they show the beginnings of a degenerate class.' At one point Italians may have ranked even lower than the blacks in the social evaluation of Americans. During one Congressional hearing in the 1890s, a member of the committee surprised a construction-boss witness with the remark, 'You don't call…an Italian a white man?' 'No, sir, an Italian is a dago,' was the reply. (11)

La Gumina's study identifies the reporting of the historical events taking place in Italy prior to and after 1880 as a fundamental influence on these conceptions of Italian people in the United States: "Newspapers regularly reported about conditions of crime and instability in Italy, as well as the low standard of life practiced among Italian immigrants to the United States. Clearly, this contributed to the creation of an unwelcome stereotype about Italians even before their arrival in large numbers"(24). Much in the same fashion of the journalism of the 1850s and 1860s with regard to the southern incorporation into the new Italy, these reports on southern difference were almost always written from the perspective of Anglo-Saxon cultural superiority (23). One of the best examples of such an attitude comes in the form of an opinion piece from the *New York Times* in 1875. Quoted in La Gumina's work, this article illuminates our contention that the events of the pre- and post-Risorgimento period in Italy did not go unnoticed across the Atlantic;

moreover, it shaped and, in fact, created the social context into which these Italian immigrants would soon find themselves:

> We have lately been several times reminded, in the discussions that have been going on in Parliament, that there are at the present time detained in the prisons of Italy 80,000 persons, either convicted of crime or waiting for trial on charges of offenses against the laws. It is added that the number is equal to the combined numbers in the prisons of the two countries of France and England…Dr. Pantaleoni, in a speech to the Senate in reply to the often-repeated rhetorical assertion that Italy must maintain or regain the primacy which she has before held in one or another sphere of national eminence, reminded the Senate that in the department of criminal abuses, Italy at present holds undisputed superiority…It is sufficiently well known that the percentage of crime is much larger in the southern that in the northern provinces of the kingdom. (24-25)

It is interesting to note that it is Diomede Pantaleoni that is cited as the source of information regarding lawlessness and crime in the kingdom, believing since 1861, when sent by Interior Minister Minghetti, that: "'La civiltà di queste provincie è molto diversa ed inferiore a quella dell'Italia superiore'"(qtd.. in Petraccone 34). Panteleoni's appraisals of the south are almost exclusively derogatory in tone and viewed most often from the position of cultural and racial superiority.[23] Much in the same fashion as in Italy, southern Italian immigrants' culture was viewed as a danger to American society and pointed to the need for the Italian populations to be Americanized in order to civilize themselves. As Jerre Mangione and Ben Morreale have pointed out: "The enormous increase in immigrants with little or no grounding in Anglo-Saxon culture intensified the general fear that, unless the newcomers were quickly Americanized, the national culture would be endangered"(216). As Fred Gardaphé outlines in his study on Italian American culture with regard to Americanization:

> It was not a problem of knowing what being American was; rather, the problem came in trying to avoid everything that common knowledge said being American was not. As a kid, I thoroughly despised any mark of *Italianità* and did my best to rid myself of evidence such as darker skin (I would not go shirtless in the summer). Once relatives

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[23] For further reading on Diomede Pantaleoni's travels and attitudes toward the south in 1861 and beyond, see Petraccone, 34-35; Moe, 190-91.

from Italy visited us and I ignored them. I told my non-Italian American friends (the ones who had pointed them out in my yard as though they were some circus oddity) that those 'wops' were strangers who had missed a plane and my family was putting them up until the next plane left for Italy.[24] (16)

As this experience clearly delineates, the Italian immigrant and the subsequent second generation understood quite well that they were an unwelcomed presence in the hegemonic Anglo-Saxon culture of late nineteenth-century America and beyond. Consequently, as Jerre Mangione and Ben Morreale have underlined, public opinion regarding Italian immigration was overwhelmingly unfavorable. They turn to Ellwood Cubberly, a New York educator who, in 1909, revealed that twenty years of Italian migration to the United States and settlement in their new home had done nothing to the southern Italian's reputation as an inferior being:

> These Southern and Eastern Europeans are of a very different type from the Northern Europeans who precede them. Illiterate, docile, lacking in self-reliance and initiative, and not possessing the Anglo-Teutonic conceptions of law, order and government, their coming has corrupted our civic life…Our task is to break up these groups of settlements, to assimilate and amalgamate these people as part of our American race, and to implant in their children as far as can be done, the Anglo-Saxon conception of righteousness, law and order, and popular government, and to awaken in them a reverence for our democratic institutions and/ or those things in our national life which we as a people hold to be of abiding worth. (qtd. in Mangione, Morreale 216)

The Italian populations in America during the late nineteenth-century and beyond were viewed through the lens of their innate barbarism and propensity for crime (La Gumina 62-63). They were also considered to be bearers of exotic plagues like the "Italian flea" (La Gumina 66-69). These concepts were not solely privately held feelings; on the contrary, they were publicly espoused by news outlets like the *New York Times* and intellectuals, such as Henry James and even Woodrow Wilson.[25] As we have seen, the reception of Italians in North America was one that was predicated on the events of the 1860s and 1870s in Italy and the evaluations of the southern Italians by the Piedmontese, particularly Pantaleoni. We have also seen how these

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[24] This is drawn from Fred Gardaphé's work, *Leaving Little Italy: Essaying Italian American Culture*.

[25] See Mangione, Morreale, 217.

reactions and prejudices informed the Anglo-American populations from the 1880s to the early

1900s and how Americanization became the tool by which the dominant culture of the time

sought to control and shape the identity of the Italian arrivals, and the effects this type of

Americanization had on subsequent generations. We will now turn our attention to the immigrant

reaction to arrival and settlement in North America during the height of Italian emigration, from

1880 to 1920.

The North America to which thousands of southern Italians immigrated was a rapidly

growing and industrializing destination. As Thomas Ferraro underscores in his study, *Feeling

Italian: The Art of Ethnicity in America* (2005), the reality of nineteenth-century and early

twentieth-century America must have been shocking to the Italian immigrant as he saw the

American port city of New York: "The principal response of each and every one must have been

mind-bending, body-wracking shock, of being utterly overwhelmed not only by the arduousness

of the journey and the rough uncertainties ahead, but also by changes of movement and sound,

dimensions of time and space that did not, by any known measure, compute"(32). Being aliens in

a new land, the Italian tendency was to settle in communities that had significant Italian

populations, like New York City's Lower East Side. The Italian immigrants sought solace in the

company of their fellow Italians; however, this also had an adverse effect on the perception of

the Italian communities in North America in that Americans believed that these communities

were rife with murder, debauchery, and un-American activity. The following is an opinion piece

that was published in the *New York Times* in 1884:

> New York City affords excellent opportunities for brigandage of the genuine Italian
> model. A band of brigands would find the rookeries of Mulberry Street much more
> comfortable than the Calabrian forests, and much safer…Perhaps even now the Italian
> quarters of the City have their bands of brigands, and sentinels armed with rifles… (qtd.
> in La Gumina 64)

These Italians, so maligned and misrepresented, did serve one vital purpose for the rapidly

industrializing America of the late nineteenth-century: a cheap source of manual labor. As Jerre

Mangione and Ben Morreale again underline: "Regardless of how they earned their livelihood in

Italy, all had to adjust and work at the jobs that were available in America. Teachers became

miners; lawyers, grocery store owners; and many peasants…became bootblacks, miners and

factory workers, fieldhands, and common laborers"(273). Coupled with the desperate need to

work and survive, and informed by the dominant culture's disdain for these new arrivals, Italians

in North America experienced bigotry in all levels of American society. As was the case after the

creation of the Kingdom of Italy, the southern Italian was understood solely according to his

supposed ethnic difference; that his role within the creation of the new nation was to bear the

financial and physical burden of the new kingdom's construction. The southerner's image was

created by those who had never been to the former Bourbon kingdom and was therefore a

product of hearsay. This particular history appears to be repeated with regard to arrival in North

America, where what was known about these new immigrants stemmed from Italian sources

hostile to southern Italians and superficial evaluations of the Italian immigrants. A cultural

framework of Anglo-Saxon dominance reinforced, much as it had in post-Risorgimento Italy, the

manner in which Italians would later assimilate to the American standard, being judged

consistently as inferior and incompatible with the American, Protestant standard. Here I will

begin an analysis of Pietro Di Donato's *Christ in Concrete* (1936)*, one of the first novels written

by an Italian American that explains to American society the experiences of one Italian

immigrant family in the New York City of the early twentieth century. Here I will contend that in

the act of physically reshaping the landscape of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century

America, Italian immigrants underwent the same process of marginalization and alienation at the

hands of the dominant culture that had occurred in Italy in the post-Risorgimento period. What was required of these new Americans was physical labor and adherence to a cultural and political standard that had no place for those it deemed inferior. We have seen previously in Lampedusa's *Il Gattopardo* that the incorporation of southern Italians was viewed as an almost insurmountable task, only effectuated by a total assimilation to a foreign standard and as a consequence, encouraged the emigration of hundreds of thousands of Italians from the south of Italy. As I will demonstrate, Di Donato's narrative, much like Lampedusa's text, reflects the history of a nation developing a deeper sense of self and explores how peoples who appear to differ from the cultural standard find a place for themselves within the greater society.

Di Donato's narrative begins with the introduction of Geremio, the protagonist of the first part of the novel. He is a mason, a builder, who is introduced to the reader on Good Friday while at work. From the very outset of the novel, there is a tangible sense of foreboding that will foreshadow the events that follow but also underscore the experience of many Italian, immigrant laborers during the settlement period of the early twentieth-century, for whom the necessity to work is paramount:

> … Yes, the day is cold, cold…but who am I to complain when the good Christ Himself was crucified? Pushing the job is all right (when has it been otherwise in my life?), but this job frightens me. I feel the building wants to tell me something; just as one Christian to another…I don't like this. Mr. Murdin tells me, Push it up! That's all he knows. I keep telling him that the underpinning should be doubled and the old material removed from the floors, but he keeps the inspector drunk and… 'Hey, Ashes-ass! Get away from under that pilaster! Don't pull the old work. Push it away from you or you'll have a nice present for Easter if the wall falls on you!'…Well, with the help of God I'll see this job through. It's not my first, nor the… (13)

Geremio demonstrates that although he has warned the foreman, Mr. Murdin, of the safety hazards involved in this building project, his status as an immigrant totally discredits any of the suggestions he may offer; that even though he himself can see the danger, the popular conception of Italians as mentally inferior has firmly rooted itself in the American psyche.

Continuing with the premise of the necessity of work, Geremio's monologues are often characterized by an overwhelming spirituality, a thankfulness to be a provider for his family: "Blessings to Thee, O Jesus. I have fought winds and cold. Hand to hand I have locked dumb stones in place and the great building rises. I have earned a bit of bread for me and mine" (14-15). Geremio is depicted as one who dreams of a better life for his children through his own sacrifice; that while he may not be able to enjoy the benefits of the America to which he immigrated, surely his children will not have to suffer the pains of manual labor like him (13-16). Geremio is also understood according to his interactions with Mr. Murdin who here stands as a standard for many an early twentieth-century attitude regarding the Italian immigrants. Condescending and hostile, Mr. Murdin's response to Geremio's pleadings that the construction be halted to fix structural errors that may cause the building to collapse, is one that is typical: "Don't give me that! And bear in mind that there are plenty of good barefoot men in the streets who'll jump for a day's pay!...Lissenyawopbastard! if you don't like it, you know what you can do!" (18). Knowing that continued entreaties would only lead to his dismissal (19), Geremio silences himself and continues to work on "Job". Geremio's warnings soon prove to be correct as, in the final hours of the work day, "Job" collapses on itself, flinging men off the scaffolding to their ultimate demise. The last thoughts of Geremio and the men who perished at "Job" were those of their family: "Brothers, what have we done? Ahhh-h, children of ours!"(25). Geremio's own last thought as he lay paralyzed and covered in hardening concrete was: who would provide for his own? Begging Heaven for help and thinking of his responsibility to his family, Geremio pleads: "There can be no other way! He is responsible for his family! He cannot leave them like this!"(28). With these last thoughts, Geremio's physical sacrifice to the modernizing America represents the thousands of immigrant workers who through their own labor and pain built the

new America. Thus ends the short narrative of Geremio, but it is with the death of Geremio that Di Donato's work reacts to the social history of Italian settlement in North America and offers the reader a glimpse into a world that was unknown by the vast majority of Americans in the early twentieth century.

With the death of Geremio, his wife Annunziata and her eight children must now learn to fend for themselves. Paul, the eldest of their children, goes out in search of help for their soon to be starving family. The first to whom Paul turns is a fellow Italian, namely the grocer. As Paul explains the family's desperate situation, the same indifference towards the poor as had existed in Italy, once again rears its head: "Paul waited. When he and the grocer were alone he spoke '…we have always bought here and right now we have no money-'[Paul] I have my own family. I sympathize. What would happen to my children if I undertook to feed the widow and her eight?...No [Grocer]"(73). Paul next seeks out help from the government, believing that the sign upon the building had some truth to it where it read "Justice" and "Equality:" "Room 302 Overseer of the Poor. Yes, he had a right to go in. 'What building collapse? Never heard about it. Was he an American citizen?' 'He had taken out his first papers.' 'But he's dead.' 'Yes…' 'Well, then he wasn't a citizen'"(75). Even in passing before the police station Paul is made plainly aware of how little his father's untimely demise meant to anyone outside his family: "On the way home, Paul passed in front of the police station. He went up the steps, opened the door, and as he went in he heard a live loud voice laughing. He stopped. He had heard that voice before…the wop the wop…" (77).[26] It becomes clear, therefore, that the family of Geremio and Annunziata would not be able to receive help from the government of their new home. As was

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[26] The voice to which Di Donato makes reference is the police officer who investigated the collapse of "Job" and made an insensitive remark when asked by Paul as to where his father was: "What?- oh yeah- the wop is under the wrappin' paper out in the courtyard"(40).

the case in Italy, the government's attitude towards these new arrivals was most decidedly hostile and unwilling to see these individuals as anything other than "dagos."

Paul, therefore, receives the mantle of patriarchal authority through his decision to provide for his family in his father's stead. One of the most inspiring dialogues of Di Donato's narrative comes as Paul dons his father's work clothes and posts himself outside of the new "Job" where his father's surviving workers have found work. The content of their conversation with Paul offers a significant insight into the immigrant mentality and also may be read as a reaction to the manner in which these men had to work and survive in this new country:

> 'What do you here, Paulie?' 'Do you go to school?' asked Four-Eyes. 'Yes…but-' But I can go no more. I must become a bricklayer!' 'Who brings food to your home?' asked Nazone. '…No one…' 'How could there be anyone, when he is the first-born- and so young?' said Hunt-Hunt…. 'Would you wish to become a master-builder of walls like the good spirit your father?' 'I…have his trowel with me.' 'Bless God,' said Nazone to the men, 'and why shouldn't the son of a bricklayer learn the art and bring food to his family? Is the school going to satisfy their needs? The Police? The Army? Or Navy? The Church? Or the City Hall stinking with thieves?'… 'For pleasure, do not laugh,' said Nazone. 'The boy is man-child of master mason and born in the mortar tub. I beg you, this is not a moment for comedy: the little one is son of Italian and paesano who left his blood under Job.' (92-93)

The workmen understand that their position in the new country would only be bettered through their own work, their own will to survive. The work that was expected of them was to build the new America but in no way did that America include those who did the building. Rather, alienation and marginalization were the rewards for those new Americans whose ways seemed too foreign. Paul now has the survival of his family resting squarely on his shoulders (160) and stands upright in his knowledge that he has saved his family from death (112-13). Through Paul's continued work, much like many Italian immigrants, the family of Geremio and Annunziata was preserved from death. Life goes on with the marriage of Ci' Luigi to Cola (Annunziata's brother to a widowed neighbor) (240-70), and Paul continues to be the sole supporter of the family. One of the last commentaries made by Di Donato on the sacrifice of his

father and immigrant laborers, comes at the end of the narrative. Paul, while sleeping, dreams of working by the side of his father, knowing that he has done right by his family. But what Paul's dream ultimately suggests is of greater use to our discourse with regard to the Italian immigrant experience in early-twentieth-century America. What America desired was not another diverse ethnic group which would add cultural richness to the American landscape. It had desired workers and nothing more so that what was impressed upon the immigrant labor force, and as evidenced by Paul's dream, was the disposability of the Italian worker and the futility in thinking that he would be considered anything more than a stranger in America: "Let me kiss my father…His father's man-face bristles strongly against his own and his father whispers quickly, I was cheated, my children also will be crushed, cheated. His father begins to absolve and sighs faintly, Ahhh, not even Death can free us, for we are…Christ in concrete" (298). Paul's work experience began with the promise of money and salvation for his family. Ultimately the dream of work in North America for the immigrant was based solely on the immigrant's willingness to sacrifice his body and life to the cause of work. The belief that through work and determination one could ameliorate one's life infuses Geremio's earlier monologues that he now, in spirit and in dream form, turns away from; he is now the end result of the American dream for the immigrant generation of Italian Americans, the memory of a man lost to the cost of building the American dream. Paul is now awakened to the fact that though he has worked hard and has sacrificed to support his family, he will ultimately end like his father, a victim of exploitative work and a hostile homeland: "'I am Paul, Paul, Paul, I am Paul.' His blood drained and left him trembling. 'I too, will die…and disappear…' And a quiet prisoning terror came into him…'Who nails us to the cross? Mother…why are we living!'"(298). Paul is now divested of any illusion of his ability to carry the weight of such responsibility and understands that his continued existence

and that of his family's will be won at the cost of constant struggle and sacrifice. The southern

Italian's arrival in North America had, much like his reception not twenty years earlier in Italy,

been anticipated and misinformed by those who had no interest in cultural and historical

accuracy. Through the same modes of repression, the North America to which Geremio and

Annunziata immigrated was rife with anti-Italian sentiment, made so through continued

publication of erroneous accounts of southern Italian violence and barbarism. In the attempt to

maintain his family, Paul sheds his youth and dons the mantle of a man believing that he would

one day have a better life for his own. What he ultimately realizes in life, Geremio only

comprehends in death: both fall victim to that hostile, foreign force that has for centuries

misunderstood a man from the southern regions of Italy.

We have visited the historical, Bourbon Kingdom of the Two Sicilies; we have

experienced the aftermath of the Italian Risorgimento. As these events unfolded, the developing

"southern question" emerged as a topic of national concern, centering around conceptions of

northern superiority and southern "Orientalism" and barbarism. Lampedusa's *Il Gattopardo* gave

insight into the Bourbon experience during the Unification process and the socio-political

climate that was created that ultimately enabled the south to be joined to the new Italian nation.

The emigration that stemmed from the Italian Risorgimento emptied vast parts of southern Italy

and swelled the tenements of the industrializing New World, leading to similar cultural biases

prevalent during the post-Unification process, those of inferiority and dangerousness. There has

been a clear agenda of anti-southern Italian sentiment promoted both in the nascent Italian state

of the nineteenth century and in the North America of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-

centuries. We have witnessed a systematic attempt to diminish the culture of peoples from the

Italian south by branding it "Oriental" and barbarous, an enterprise that found its way across the

Atlantic and settled, along with the immigrants, in the minds of the dominant culture. It is clear that one of the most misunderstood immigrant histories is that of the Italian American, representing a fundamental disconnect between the historical reality of the former Bourbon kingdom and its citizens that would later become the Italian Americans of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Here I have attempted to fill in some of the missing pieces from the Italian American experience, focusing primarily on who controlled and influenced the conceptions of what it meant to be Italian; how these notions were categorically ahistorical with respect to southern Italian peoples and cultures and how this led to open hostility towards the southern regions in terms of the manner in which the southern regions were treated as an entity within the new Italian state of the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s and beyond. I have also highlighted that these historically inaccurate evaluations of southern Italians followed the southern Italian emigrant to their new home in the Americas, as well as how the post-Risorgimento views concerni the south greatly informed the American public and shaped the manner in which the southern Italian immigrants were received in North America. Lastly, I have asserted that in the post-Risorgimento period, the southern Italian was expected to submit to a foreign conception of what it now meant to be Italian and to submit ideologically to the interests of the new nation. I have also shown how this was translated into the American context, seeing in the Italian immigrant the immediate need to divest himself of any traces of his Mediterranean past in favor of the Anglo-Saxon standard; how this element of Anglo superiority spilled over into the treatment of Italian immigrant workers and how, through physical work and sublimation to the belief that through hard work comes a better life, the Italian immigrant's physical life was ultimately consumed by the building of the American dream.

CHAPTER III

LA RIVOLUZIONE PASSIVA: 19TH-CENTURY SICILY AND THE RISE OF THE
VIOLENT MIDDLE-CLASS

"La rivoluzione passiva" (*Risorgimento* 133), is how Antonio Gramsci described the

Italian Risorgimento in 1900 and, as one of many analyses of Italian Unification, this concept

will frame the discussion contained in the following chapter. A passive revolution is an obvious

oxymoron: How can a revolution be passive? How can a social meltdown be imagined as an inert

activity? But, for the sake of argument, let us keep this idea in mind as we examine briefly the

period before unity, roughly from 1812-1860, and, more closely and at greater length, the post-

Risorgimento period of 1860 and 1876. The primary points of discussion that will be treated in

the following pages will be the socio-economic climate of Sicily prior to Italian Unification and

the effects of economic unity with the new nation of Italy in the years following the

Risorgimento. We will first begin our analysis by looking at the economic structure of

nineteenth-century Sicily: In what ways was the Sicilian economy distinct from other

European/world markets? Were there similarities amongst these economies and how are these

similarities reflected within these respective societies' political and social mores?

Much has been said with regard to the Italian south's economic and social well-being

prior to the Risorgimento and these analyses have impacted the way we look at the Italian south

after Unification, namely as an impoverished, agrarian, and economically unsound region of the

industrialized nation of Italy. It has been accepted wisdom that the Italian south, and Sicily in

particular, was economically weak, but the reality is clearly not that simple. Our analysis will

begin with an examination of the Sicilian economy of the pre-Risorgimento period and we will look at one of the major contributions to conceptions of southern Italian economic inferiority, the *latifondo*. As a concept, this particular southern Italian agrarian, social construct was much maligned in the years prior to unity. It was offered as evidence of Bourbon backwardness: a weak economic system unable to stimulate the type of middle-class growth necessary to compete with other European states. The middle class, viewed as a nineteenth-century marker of economic prosperity, is often cited as one of the more influential elements of nineteenth-century Italian history: a new class of entrepreneurs, merchants, bureaucrats, and intellectuals who, after the restrictions of feudalism were abolished in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in 1805 (on the continent) and 1812 (in Sicily), began to seek new economic opportunities. As we will see, the economic life of the Italian south was a productive and economically competitive European zone in the nineteenth century, whose agricultural and industrial products were exported internationally. During the nineteenth century, there was a clear demand for southern Italian agricultural crops, especially the citrus the British employed to fight off scurvy. The base of the Bourbon economy was decidedly agrarian and as such, the political climate of the agricultural south has been a contrast between the rural areas of the kingdom and the urban areas like Naples, Palermo, and Bari. A power struggle had existed for centuries in the Italian south between the local aristocracy and the court, a struggle marked by the feudal rights enjoyed by the landed aristocracy. This push to maintain baronial rights associated with the landed nobility continued well after the abolition of feudalism and would succeed in influencing the course of events from 1812 to 1876.

The rise of a new middle class which would seek greater political and socio-economic standing and a landed aristocracy concerned only with protecting its assets would find common

ground in the form of the Italian Risorgimento. These two forces would provide both inspiration and support for the House of Savoy, seeing in its arrival an opportunity to gain for the new middle class political and economic access to greater markets of money and power, and the preservation of the agrarian aristocracy's social position and its property. The confluence of these two ambitions enabled Sicily to be annexed by Savoy and with it, a new chapter in Sicilian history was born: organized crime. As a byproduct of several toxic elements, a new economy was created that was interwoven into the fabric of Sicilian socio-political life, blending market capitalism with social control; a melding of local interests with new regional representation and governmental connivance. In the pages that follow, we will examine the development of Sicilian organized crime from 1860 to 1876, that is from the arrival of Garibaldi in Sicily to the defeat of the Liberal Left in 1876. During this period, the Turin-led government came face to face with the social, political, and economic ramifications of total unity which, here condensed to their most salient points, included the following: a conservative aristocracy which sought to preserve its rights as landowners, a newer middle class hungry for available land and position in regional politics, and the rural poor with even less access to land and economic stability due to Unification. At the base of all this is the underlying element uniting these diverse elements of nineteenth-century Sicilian society: land. Considered the primary source of wealth and status during this period and beyond, land was the commodity of choice in an agricultural society wherein for centuries land ownership was the determining factor in class distinctions and property was perceived to be a material manifestation of the owner's honor.

What this chapter will initially treat are these simmering social tensions in nineteenth-century Sicily and how the availability of land was at the heart of social discontent. We will trace how property, political power, and passivity affected the establishment of the nation of Italy in

Sicily and with it, a social upheaval that brought into question the new government's ability to maintain order. To that end we will investigate the new government's inefficient and inadequate response to the rise in unemployment and crime that came shortly after Unification was declared complete in 1861. Partly because of strained resources, the new government became increasingly dependent on local anti-Bourbonists and political agitators to form the body of new police companies and federal agents. The new Italian government desired order and in that sense it was relatively successful; however, what the new government solidified was the increasing power of a middle class whose rapid ascension into regional economic and political markets centered on the violent acquisition and defense of private property. The highly profitable agricultural exports of Sicily proved to be a major source of capital for these individuals. As will be discussed further on, these individuals were able to manipulate social unrest to their advantage, leveraging a reputation for violence with new economic ventures, creating new markets for economic growth. Proving itself capable of enforcing social control, regional power was reconsolidated into the hands of Sicilian middle class and elites whose socio-economic control over the island was exacted at the hands of an enterprising class of businessmen whose stock in trade was violence. As we move past 1860 and towards the 1870s we will begin to see an expansion of this network of businessmen into all manner of regional, economic, and political life.

This network of businessmen has carried many names: Mafia, Cosa Nostra, the Black Hand, the Mob, etc.. What we can say with any degree of accuracy is that these terms are a nineteenth-century phenomenon and seem to have appeared towards the 1870s with the growing prominence of the landed southern bourgeoisie. In 1876 and with the election of the Right, these terms were applied to the south and it is at this moment that we see the first mention of the

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"Southern Question."[27] All of this is to say that organized crime, which had been crucial for the establishment of the new government and served as the instrument of government-sponsored control, was now totally and wholly associated with Sicily. Studies and parliamentary inquiries were made focusing on the origins of Sicilian (southern Italian) criminality. Why were those from the south, and Sicily in particular, prone to violence? What is it about their character that makes them disregard the law and favor arcane notions of justice and honor? These stereotypes had an enormous impact for many decades on how the Italian south and Sicily were viewed or approached by economists, historians, and sociologists alike. Notions of difference were the starting point, as was clearly demonstrated in Franchetti's and Sonnino's inquiries.[28] Criminality quickly became associated with southern Italy. It is here that this chapter will turn and look across the Atlantic to the America of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. We will furthermore address the immigrant experience and the evolution from immigrant to American.

Upon arrival on American soil, the Italian immigrant faced a very serious problem: stereotypes of southern Italians as criminal and dangerous had followed them from Italy. Depictions of violent and simian Italian immigrants graced the pages of major New York publications, the *New York Times* among the more prominent. As Italians settled into urban surroundings, they encountered systematic discrimination at the hands of their hostile new neighbors. Italians, for their part, responded to physical acts of violence and institutionalized xenophobia with surprising restraint, considering their supposed violent tendencies. As we will see, Italian immigrants were amongst the most law abiding and the most fearful of an encounter with American law, preferring silence for fear of deportation, an anomaly considering their

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[27] See Petraccone, 122-23; Moe, 224-49.

[28] Here we are referring to Leopoldo Franchetti's 1876 study, *Condizioni politiche e amministrative della Sicilia*, and Sidney Sonnino's *I contadini in Sicilia*, also of the same year, in which the two intellectuals searched for the sociological influences that retarded Sicily's economic and social development (Moe, 237-40; Petraccone, 107-08; Astarita, 300).

purported innate barbarism. From the late nineteenth century to 1924, southern Italians constituted the largest group of immigrants annually to the United States, totaling four million during this period alone.

With such a large number of southern Europeans coming to America, the WASP establishment, fed on inflated accounts of southern European criminality and obsessed with racial politics endemic of nineteenth-century culture, began to fear for the moral composition of America. What kind of America will we become if we continue to naturalize so many ethnically and racially diverse people? Why are their customs so different from ours and how can we force them to conform to our idea of American identity? These xenophobic musings bespeak the shock that mainstream America experienced upon beholding the immigrant masses "invading" its cities. As with Italy before, southern Italian immigrants to this country soon discovered that their economic misery was far from over; that America viewed them as a disposable source of labor and that their social status as "new Americans" was tenuous at best. If the Italian immigrant was a marginalized member of American society prior to 1920, he would soon become the physical embodiment of American criminality with the arrival of Prohibition.

It is clear that with the enactment of the Volstead Act of 1920, the federal government–in overextending its own authority to the private sector of American life– laid the foundation for a massive groundswell of organized criminal activity in response to America's need for alcohol. Prohibition created the opportunity for enterprising individuals of all ethnic and social backgrounds to amass small fortunes supplying bootlegged alcohol to a thirsty American public. It will be discussed further in this chapter that during the decades-long attempt at enforcing Prohibition, local and regional politics and law enforcement became saturated with corruption. On every level, collusion between organized crime and local law enforcement was widely

practiced. As with the socio-political climate of post-Unification Italy, the national upheaval created with Prohibition provided ample opportunity for profits to be made from illicit activities, namely gambling and alcohol. During Prohibition the American public was introduced to characters like Al Capone and others who would become the ethnic face of American crime. As public dissatisfaction with Prohibition grew, so did the number of persons willing to supply alcohol for economic gain. The "democratization of crime" is a uniquely American phenomenon, born in a period of rapid industrialization, followed by years of economic depression and governmental moralizing. It follows the trajectory of historical events of the twentieth century beginning with the rise in xenophobia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the task of incorporating the immigrants into the greater American society. The fear that this provoked led to the ultimate cessation of Italian immigration in 1924. The Great Depression and its rampant unemployment, coupled with Prohibition, was a situation rife with illicit opportunities for enterprising criminals to make massive profits; the ecumenical offenders who knowingly chose to break the Prohibition laws and what their actions say about American attitudes towards organized crime. These pages will contend that as Prohibition was phased out and America inched towards World War II, an image within the popular culture emerged that would have a sweeping impact on how Italians in America would be perceived. As popular culture reflected social realities of the day, more and more Americans began to equate organized crime with Italian Americans so much so that, by the 1950s and 1960s, we have government inquiries –much like in 1870s Italy– whereby elected officials sought to expose the roots of the American crime subculture. The Kefauver and McClellan commissions ultimately solidified the image, at least in the American psyche, of organized crime as a distinctly Italian profession; that American criminal markets are manipulated or controlled by Italian gangsters; a rationale that,

despite any evidence, somehow a singular syndicate comprised of ethnic, Italian criminals ran a shadow government based on extortion and protection rackets whose reach knew no bounds. In the face of such underwhelming evidence, American society has never been able to disassociate fully Italian Americans from American criminality; that rather than recognizing organized crime as a response to certain socio-economic variables and government vulnerability, American society chooses to see organized crime as strictly the pursuit of Italian gentlemen.

With our historical background firmly rooted, this chapter will examine two narratives from the same decade (1960s), one from Sicily and the other the product of the American, immigrant experience: Leonardo Sciascia's *Il giorno della civetta* (1961) and Mario Puzo's *The Godfather* (1969). The thrust of our examination of these two texts is to underline the unique historical phenomena of the Italian Unification and American Prohibition and how these historical events enabled and nurtured certain forms of organized crimes, oftentimes in response to political and social instability. Our analyses will take into consideration the complex social history described in this chapter and derive from these narratives a construction of criminality that appears not to be criminal at all. In fact, we will demonstrate that the pervasive image of the Italianized criminal is as much the product of his circumstances as he is a victim of his own reputation.

Why Italian Americans have long held a monopoly on the criminal imagination of America is tied in part to America's attitudes towards crime and punishment but it is also due to the mythologized character of the Sicilian "mafioso" or the Italian American "mobster" drawn from the dubious testimony of government cooperators and old stereotypes. Ideas of honor, respect, and family have been woven into the popular, American conception of organized crime. These elements are often perceived as socially good, further blurring the lines between the

paternalistic capitalist and the criminal. As these factors have left the realm of the ethnic enclave

to be embraced by the greater public, it has become increasingly difficult to examine the Italian

experience in America without mentioning Italian American criminality's impact on American

society. So, within these pages, we will attempt to define and engage nineteenth-century social

history so as to offer a more historically accurate depiction of the causes and the effects of Italian

organized crime and why it has been such a crucial component of southern Italian and Italian

American history.

The Origins: Sicily, Unification, and 19th-Century Economic Development

It will be useful for us first to recall what has been said previously with regard to the socio-economic climate of the Bourbon Kingdom of the Two Sicilies prior to the Risorgimento. Promulgated by a minority of southern exiles living at the Savoy court in Turin, anti-Bourbon rhetoric would greatly inform the national opinion of and attitudes towards the Italian south. Economic and political union would, according to some, disrupt the national economic well-being.[29] Sicily was singled out as a particular impediment to Unification because of the island's assumed economic and social stagnation. The popularly-held conception of repressive and authoritarian Bourbon rule pre-conditioned the new Italian state to expect an economic system totally inconsistent with the economic practices of the Italian nation. The years between 1848 and 1860 are marked by increased anti-Bourbon hostility fomented by southern exiles; a stereotyping of the southern realm as socially, culturally, and economically backward. If Unification were to happen, it was going to have to be imposed from without. As Nelson Moe states: "…anti-Bourbon discourse had finally helped to crystallize the idea that the south would have to be liberated, regenerated, and civilized from the outside" (153). But was the economy of the Italian south as weak and as unproductive as the Risorgimento fervor would have us believe? Or is there something else at play? In the following section we will discuss the socio-economic structure of nineteenth-century Sicily and contextualize this analysis within the greater framework of peripheral, southern world economies. Let us consider the parallels between agrarian-dominated economies of the nineteenth century and the effects that this economy had on both its socio-political thought and the external perceptions of these areas.

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[29] On the eve of Italian Unification in 1860, Massimo d'Azeglio said rather infamously: "in every way fusion with the Neapolitans frightens me; it's like going to bed with someone who has smallpox" (qtd. in Moe 168). See also Astarita, 291; Lepre, 3-9; Alianello, 113).

Lucy Riall, in her history of the Italian Risorgimento, examines the historicity of the claims to southern economic inferiority prior to Unification: "From the eighteenth century onwards, writers argued that the 'immobility' of southern agriculture was the source of the country's backwardness, and that economic development in the South was hampered by the archaic attitudes and traditional practices associated with a rural, feudal past" (110). Connecting economic stagnation to feudalism evokes thoughts of an economic system that is antiquated and is seemingly incapable of incorporating industrial and economic industrialization into a rigid socio-economic structure. It will be important first to remember that feudalism in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies had been abolished in 1805 (for continental Italy) and in 1812 (Sicily). We have a forty-eight-year period in which, if we are to believe popular wisdom regarding the Italian south, nothing happened. Lucy Riall offers a more nuanced analysis:

> Underlying all the analyses of Italy's economic backwardness and its position as an industrial latecomer is a sense of the 'peculiarities' of the Italian experience…Thus, analyses of Italy's late, uneven or distorted economic development after 1815 are implicitly comparative, at least in the negative sense. They involve an assessment of the Italian economy in terms of what it lacked when compared to the economies of Britain, France and/or Germany. (103)

Agricultural societies were, by comparison, found wanting. As agriculture provided the basis of the southern Italian economy and much of the economies of northern Italy in the early nineteenth century (107-09), and with the added complication of a feudal past, Sicily and the Italian south were conceivably devoid of the modernizing forces that were demonstrably sweeping nineteenth-century Europe: a growing middle class, economic investment in new industries, and access to new world markets. Here we will remove Sicily from its European context and contrast Sicily's socio-economic structure with that of another southern agricultural zone: The American South.

Enrico Dal Lago, in his 2005 study *Agrarian Elites: American Slaveholders and Southern Italian Landowners 1815-1861*, underlines a fundamental characteristic of these southern, peripheral societies of the nineteenth century:

> In Civil War America, the idea of a backward South related to the economic and social characteristics of the slave system –specifically the existence of a planter elite that exploited the work of African American bondsmen and the consequent preeminence of plantation agriculture and scarcity of industrialization and urban development. Comparably, in Risorgimento Italy, the idea of a backward *Mezzogiorno* derived from the established perception of a corrupt, inefficient, and cruel Bourbon absolutist monarchy, which prevented the development of indigenous economic enterprises and kept the majority of southern Italian peasants at the mercy of their landowners. (2)

With this socio-economic evaluation in mind, Dal Lago demonstrates that in both the American and Italian south, a more complex, agriculturally-dominated regional economy flourished, consisting of more diversified markets than previously thought. As it pertains to nineteenth-century Sicily, Dal Lago's study reflects the link between agriculture and industrialization during this period: "Similar to the American South…historians of the *Mezzogiorno* are now moving toward supporting the idea of coexistence of modern and pre-modern features both in the economy of the region and the ideology of its landed elite" (13). The characteristic features of these southern societies are the presence of large estates that produce cash crops (tobacco, sugar, cotton in the American South; citrus in Sicily), a peculiar conception of "freedom" typical of peripheral areas of the world, and a landed elite who wielded great social and political influence. Here we will look at the agrarian society of western Sicily and the large *latifondo* which formed the base of agricultural production during the nineteenth century.

One of the characteristics of southern, peripheral zones is their particular interpretation of individual freedom and the economic predominance of exploitative labor practices, ranging from newly liberated feudal peasants to enslaved African Americans in the American South.[30] Coerced

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[30] See Dal Lago, 17-19.

labor was commonplace in the agrarian zones at the periphery of world markets and as such, it

provided a reliable workforce which enabled the rise of a middle class. Where agriculture

dominates the economy, a middle class would soon present itself to reap economic benefit. Lucy

Riall, in summarizing Marta Petrusewicz's study of the *latifondo*, states:

> …specifically, they (the new middle class) were a response to, and in part the creation of,
> the abolition of feudalism at the end of the eighteenth century and the development of
> capitalism in the countryside…a consolidation of landed estates took place in the first
> half of the nineteenth century, as middle class landowners took advantage of government
> reforms… (111)

Riall points to the economic diversity of southern Italy and Sicily and re-engages the notion that

the *latifondo* and the agrarian society that created it was the source of southern Italian economic

backwardness. Here we will clarify, examining the center-periphery dichotomy of the nineteenth

century and the dichotomy between urban and rural zones of production. Let us first look at the

latifondo or the large agricultural estates of western Sicily and examine both its structure and its

economic potency.

Feudalism formally ending for Sicily in 1812, Sicily's agricultural economy was dealt a

theoretical blow: How can this regional economy survive without the social structure that

supported it? One of the first effects of abolition was the availability of land and the

opportunities that land ownership brings: a steady source of income and newfound social clout.

Due in large part to international demand for Sicilian agricultural products, especially citrus,

arable land was as good as gold. As John Dickie states:

> Sicilian oranges and lemons were shipped to New York and London when they were still
> virtually unknown in the mountains of the Sicilian interior. In 1834, over 400,000 cases
> of lemons were exported. By 1850, it was 750,000…In 1860, the year of Garibaldi's
> expedition, it was calculated that Sicily's lemon groves were the most profitable land in
> Europe, out-earning even the fruit orchards around Paris. (26)

Lucy Riall underlines the fact that while agriculture was indeed the overwhelming economic

preoccupation, Sicily and the Italian south were economically and industrially diverse zones

whose agricultural production stirred new commercial sectors for investment, creating dynamic

export-led areas such as Palermo and Naples (110). Diversified zones of economic production

characterized the Bourbon kingdom of pre-Unification nineteenth-century Sicily and southern

Italy. The Terra di Lavoro of the Campania and the Conca d'Oro of Sicily generated much of the

area's agricultural output while the cities of Naples and Palermo developed into urban zones of

regional capitalism, responding to the rise in demand for southern Italian exports. As regional

capitalism expanded within urbanized centers like Palermo, Sicily followed a pattern of socio-

economic development that was not atypical of the period. Dal Lago, in contrasting regional

variations of economic growth in pre-Civil War America, notes a similar center-periphery

dynamic at play whereby the agrarian south would center itself in smaller, regional centers close

to zones of production (184). Dal Lago, by underscoring the regional nature of the working

economic system of both Sicily and the American south, points out that the landowning class

was a small minority of landed elites who owned property in several states (190). Absenteeism,

typical of agrarian societies wherein property ownership resided in the hands of an elite few,

marked southern, peripheral socio-economic systems of the nineteenth century. This would also

become the case for Sicily and much of the Italian south in that as Palermo and Naples grew as

centers of export and trade, it became necessary for the elite to center themselves where their

economic and political interests intersected. Raimondo Catanzaro illustrates this history in his

study, *Men of Respect: A Social History of the Sicilian Mafia* (1988): "Even before the

Unification of Italy, Palermo was traditionally the decisive center of life in all of central-western

Sicily, because it was the seat of the Parliament that constituted the chief center of the political

power of the landed aristocracy, …it was the main place of commerce in central-western Sicily"

(78). Into this simple juxtaposition of rural zones of production and urban areas of commerce we

must now insert the nineteenth-century phenomenon, within the context of Sicily, of the middle class. The abolition of feudalism and the growth of urban areas like Palermo conspired to create almost a "perfect storm" capable of creating a new socio-economic class of property owning individuals of non-aristocratic lineage; individuals whose own financial gains and social status were based in property ownership.

In abolishing feudalism, central-western Sicily's aristocratic estates, in particular those whose baron's debts were excessive, were broken up and sold. As land was understood to be the sole source of wealth and status in agrarian Sicily, those in a position to acquire former feudal estates did so at a rapid pace.[31] With the expansion of private property and the nobility's fleeing of their country estates to reside in Palermo, we see an increased level of absenteeism at the center of agricultural production; while the commercial center grew in prominence, the necessity to reside at the center of agricultural production decreased. The responsibility of maintaining the economic productivity of the *latifondo*, outside of the oversight of the owner, was the outsourced duty of persons employed by the baron/owner to run the estate. Salvatore Lupo, in his masterful *History of the Mafia* (1996), avers:

> It was from among the members of the small-town elites that *gabellotti* (renters and sublessors of parcels of farmland) were recruited, along with administrators to oversee the sulphur mines, the large landholdings, and the orchards and olive groves. During the course of the nineteenth century, both before and after Italian Unification, these new elites attempted to take the place of the former feudal aristocracy, which was slowly but surely loosening its grip on the Sicilian countryside, breaking up and redistributing their social power along with their own possessions. (35)

Where once the feudal rights of baronial, landed elite reigned, a new class of individuals was growing in prominence. A middle class whose interests were based in private property and whose profits derived therefrom. What is also of note is the reliance of one social class on

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[31] Donna Gabaccia's study on the western-Sicilian agrotown, entitled *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street: Housing and Social Change Among Italian Immigrants, 1880-1930* (1984), illustrates that nineteenth-century Sicilian social hierarchy and status was determined through property ownership (5-6).

another, a social and economic interdependence whereby the overseer is granted culturally understood rights of property ownership at the hands of the ruling class whose property he runs.[32] This dynamic of interdependence was clearly a result of the socio-economic changes of the early nineteenth century. As demand for Sicilian products increased, so did the profits of landed elites and the need to protect private property, considered an extremely precious commodity.

We have heretofore discussed the socio-economic realignment of Sicily in pre-Unification Italy and have seen that regional agricultural production was the backbone of the Sicilian economy. Increased availability of land, coupled with the aristocratic flight from the countryside and the increased presence of estate managers, are elements that will, as we will see, inform the political, economic, and social agendas of the pre- and post-Risorgimento period in Sicily. What we will first consider is the matter/question of private property and how access to and protection of said property will dominate Sicilian social history of the mid-nineteenth century and will come to color the geopolitical annexation of the island to the nation of Italy in 1860.

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[32] See Manlio Graziano's 2010 study, *The Failure of Italian Nationhood: The Geopolitics of a Troubled Identity*, 51-52.

Private Property and the Italian Risorgimento

One of the most significant and influential changes that occurred in Sicily prior to the

Risorgimento was without question the abolition of feudalism. Beginning in 1812, a gradual

restructuring of Sicilian socio-economic life led to the development of a new and politically

potent commercial class. As former feudal estates were broken up and sold off, land availability

increased, thus enabling a segment of the population to purchase portions of liberated feudal

land. Prior to 1812, access to property was based on feudal title, almost entirely untraceable

making acquiring land virtually impossible, especially for the rural poor.[33] Aside from its

political potentiality, this new bourgeois class would have a significant social impact as well.

Private property, long associated in Sicily with wealth and status, is a crucial element to our

analysis here. The economic and social understanding of land ownership in nineteenth-century

Sicily factors in much of the geopolitical history of the Risorgimento: Private property and

property ownership in general was viewed as conferring honor and respect upon the owner; land

ownership was a means of both economic enrichment and social mobility. Feudal society and the

later *latifondo* based their economies around large agrarian estates and as such, a social

conception of land developed that emphasized the aforementioned benefits of familial honor and

respect. The following section will address the role private property played in the development

of a new, landed middle class. It will also treat the political and social ramifications of the

growth of this class in pre-Risorgimento Sicily.

Enrico Dal Lago, in his comparative history of the Bourbon south pre-Unification, states

the following:

> …the southern Italian landed elite of important peripheral cities…often included lawyers
> or merchants who had tight family and business relations with the most prominent
> individuals among both the recent and established landed proprietors. In general, the

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[33] See Catanzaro, 60-61.

rising elite in the Bourbon provinces included different, but equally influential, social groups, among which the most important –but by no means the only one- was the landowning class. (204)

Dal Lago goes on to say that this new class of "landed proprietors" could both exist in opposition to or in tandem with the provincial elites (204). The imagery that we are further confronted with is a concerted effort on the part of the newly formed landed middle class and the rural aristocracy to preserve for themselves, as much as possible, access to land and the privileges that are associated with landownership. Donna Gabaccia holds: "The end of feudalism, the emergence of new landowning classes and the extension of new forms of cultivation led to a century of intense competition for land, for material goods, and for social status in Sicily"(8). Here we can see a nineteenth-century Sicily wherein the socio-economic structure favored the landed classes (bourgeois and provincial elite) to the exclusion of the rural poor. The competition amongst the landowning class for arable land was, in a way of speaking, a "private fight" in that it excluded almost totally the peasant class. As property and social status were quickly consolidated by this new middle class, the regional power structure, no longer centered around the feudal order, began to change; now a new class of individuals accrued the duties of regional power by virtue of their newly acquired land holdings.[34]

Wherever there was economic development and commercial investment, the new middle class was also present. Whenever a profit could be made, the landed bourgeois would make its presence felt. Investment in and the commercialization of agricultural products began to flourish in the mid-nineteenth century and private estates began to feel the constraints of nineteenth-century Sicilian social hierarchy: On the one hand we have a nascent free-market economy emerging from centuries of feudalism, rife with economic opportunities. On the other hand, we see a social order that favored a minority of landed elites over the peasantry (Riall 111). Though

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[34] See also Lane, 39-40.

feudalism had ended, the baronial rights associated with it never fully disappeared. Here again

the dichotomy between the center and the periphery comes into focus. As the Neapolitan

government attempted to apply uniformly socio-economic change throughout the mid-nineteenth

century, it was often opposed by local elites in an attempt to preserve their regional power.[35] The

regional power enjoyed by provincial elites and the landed bourgeois of mid-nineteenth-century

Sicily based its influence in two distinct, local sources: honor and respect, accrued through

property ownership and the indefatigable defense, often through violence, thereof. As Raimondo

Catnazaro highlights:

> A sort of moral authority of violence therefore took root as a regulating criterion of social
> relationships. Not only because traditionally it was the legitimate consequence of land
> ownership, but also because the emerging social class was composed of individuals who
> had an interest in the continuation of violence as an instrument for the acquisition of
> power and wealth. (68)

Social control and protection of private property were rights long associated with the baron

whose noble lineage entitled him to land and the sole claim to the exercise of jurisprudence, or

more importantly, the monopoly on violence.[36] When the dominant social order (feudalism) was

dismantled, those with the ability to exercise social order were those persons who based their

regional influence in their land holdings; persons who had a reputation of staunchly defending

private property either for their own part or in defense of their employer's property. As John

Dickie has noted, the *gabellotti* (overseers) "…were also adept at using violence to defend their

interests" (52). Viewed as a social force capable of influencing social and economic status, the

private use of violence, in its myriad of forms, wove itself into the socio-economic life of pre-

Unification Sicily. Salvatore Lupo summarizes nineteenth-century socio-political developments

in Sicily:

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[35] See Dal Lago, 186.

[36] See Catanzaro, 68-69.

> From 1815 until 1860, the periods of peace were just brief intervals, punctuated by the uprisings of 1821 and 1848…Of course, there was no open war between Sicily and the 'Neapolitans'; rather, a substantial part of the ruling class, especially in Palermo, had an anti-Bourbon preference, which in thousands of local contexts amounted to a smoldering civil war. Here, as in so many similar situations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, individuals used history at large for how it would best help them deal with the history writ small of their villages, their families, their lives. Violence served as a midwife to new equilibriums, if not a new civilization. The revolutionary process defined political conflicts, and implemented private vendettas, factional infighting, and grabs for wealth and power. (37-38)

As John Dickie underscores: "Capitalism runs on investment, and lawlessness puts investment at risk. No one wants to buy machinery or more land to plant with commercial crops when there is a strong risk that those machines or crops will be stolen or vandalized by competitors" (51). Political and social upheaval associated with liberal nationalism would intersect with economic growth at a critical point in the history of the Italian Risorgimento. As discussed in the previous chapter, bourgeois political aspirations expanded during the revolutionary period of 1799 to 1815 through constitutional and social reform. This period also unleashed a wave of political repression which would have far-reaching political implications. The segment of society most affected was undoubtedly the new middle class whose tenuous socio-economic position was imperiled by the restoration of the Bourbon monarch Ferdinand I in 1815. With simmering regional and social tensions, the new landed bourgeois would incrementally begin to insert itself into the provincial power vacuum effected by Ferdinand I's reactionary consolidation of the central authority of the Bourbon regime at Naples.[37] This resulted in increased revolutionary activity and turned into open rebellion in 1848 when middle-class economic and political aspirations came to a head in a short-lived revolution, seeing many of its intellectual contributors exiled to Turin.

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[37] See Astarita, 265; Spagnoletti, 44-53.

In conclusion, what we have here is a confluence of regional, economic, and political interests with a push for Italian Unification. Originating in the Piedmont, the forces of Unification would successfully unite the Italian peninsula under the House of Savoy beginning in 1860 with the invasion of Sicily and ending with the proclamation of Italian Unification in 1861. The support derived from the bourgeoisie in Sicily and the Italian south was vital to the success of the Piedmontese campaign. In identifying a powerful agent for socio-economic change, the landed elite and the commercial middle class of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies would quickly abandon the Bourbon crown in favor of the House of Savoy. The rapid pace at which annexation was achieved and the support that Garibaldi and his troops received during the wars of Unification is testament not so much to the great desire on the part of Sicily and the south to become part of the new Italy; rather, it bespeaks the interests of the regional elite and the landed bourgeoisie whose social and political advantage would be preserved through allegiance to the forces of national unity. What we have seen so far is that the socio-economic climate of Sicily and the south in general was more diverse than previously asserted; that the abolition of feudalism gave rise to a new, landed middle class whose acquisition and defense of private property was paramount; and, finally, how revolutionary activity during the mid-nineteenth century contributed to the breakdown of the Bourbon regime and Unification with the House of Savoy. These forces, when fused together in 1860, laid the groundwork for the Piedmontese invasion of Sicily and the establishment of the nation-state of Italy. The House of Savoy, in spearheading the national cause, would have to assume the responsibilities of the central government; duties such as law enforcement, economic and social unification with the rest of the peninsula, and the formation of the new political structure, to name a few. We are now in 1860 with the arrival of Garibaldi in Sicily. As we will see, the manner in which the new state would

establish its authority and the socio-economic Unification that would follow are the pivotal moments in our analysis of Italian Unification in Sicily. In the next section we will examine the success of Italian Unification in Sicily by considering how unity was achieved and who stood to gain from Italian Unification. Within this framework, we will also look at the relationship between the new government and the provincial power structure; how a synchronistic chain of social changes inspired a wave of public disorder in the form of rural banditry; and the government's response to social disarray in Sicily and beyond. It will be our contention that regional socio-political aspirations and national interest made for strange bedfellows: a potent blend of self-interest and political gerrymandering that would give rise to the phenomenon of the so-called mafia.

<u>Italy: Garibaldi, Rural Banditry, and the Rise of the "Men of Order"</u>

May of 1860 saw the beginning of the unified nation of Italy and the end of the perceived political, social, and economic stagnation of the Bourbon regime. As a direct result of the propagandistic writings of southern intelligentsia living in exile in northern Italy and the desertion of the southern elite and middle class from the Bourbon cause, Sicily and the continental south would bear witness to the Piedmontese invasion and annexation of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. We have, in the previous chapter, discussed the history of the Bourbon kingdom in southern Italy during the period preceding Unification and how public opinion, manipulated and distorted for a political end, effected the manner in which the new state imposed itself on the Italian south. This section will treat Sicily in particular and how the new state manifested itself after 1860. We will begin with an evaluation of three distinct elements of the annexation of Sicily in 1860: The House of Savoy, Giuseppe Garibaldi, and the landed bourgeois. To begin, we will first look at who was directing the Unification effort and why, aside from patriotic rhetoric, it was advantageous for the Piedmontese to annex the Italian south. The movement towards Italian Unification will be one that, unfortunately, appears to have been driven more out of self-preservation and economic gain than out of nationalistic ideologies.

Garibaldi's arrival in Sicily in 1860 is the culmination of political planning begun well outside of the island. Piedmont's leadership role has been described in the previous chapter, as have the opinions on the economic well-being of the Bourbon kingdom. What we have not looked at as closely is the economic well-being of the Piedmontese crown and possible secondary reasons for annexing other Italian regions. Let us first look at how Stefano Preite, in his 2009 study *Il Risorgimento: ovvero un passato che pesa sul presente. Rivolte contadine e*

brigantaggio nel Sud, describes as the economic health of both the Neapolitan and Piedmontese

kingdoms in the pre-1861 period:

> Può essere interessante un confronto tra Torino e Napoli sull'incremento del loro debito pubblico dal 1847 al 1859: Napoli +29,61%; Torino +565,42 con un debito pro capite di 59,03 lire per Napoli e 261,86 lire per Torino…Fissando i dati al 1859, il governo piemontese del Cavour ebbe un debito pubblico totale di 1.121.430.000 lire, mentre quello del regno di Napoli era 411.475.000 lire. (66-67)[38]

Preite cites one example of a deputy in the Piedmontese government who, referencing the

national debt of the Savoy kingdom, said: "…O la guerra o la bancarotta" (67). The financial

indebtedness of the House of Savoy would greatly influence the political and economic

aspirations of the Piedmontese. When juxtaposed with the previous chapter's analysis of claims

of economic and social backwardness, it will be useful to consider in what condition the House

of Savoy found itself on the eve of the Risorgimento; how economic necessity informed the

manner in which the Piedmontese state would establish itself as *the* state; and who this new

entity co-opted into its service.

From 1859 to 1861 we know that the government of Cavour was actively pursuing a

campaign of national unity. While the narrative associated with these events has most often been

one of patriotism and a sincere desire to unify Italy, it will also be interesting to examine the

Risorgimento period in Sicily and consider, if the government of Cavour was in such dire

straights, the socio-political and economic policies that were put in place by the Piedmontese

provisional government from 1860-1861 as a result rather than a cause. Carlo Alianello, in his

history of the Risorgimento, *La conquista del Sud* (1972), cites the Neapolitan Pietro Ulloa who,

in letters to foreign governments and journalists describing the economic conditions of pre-

Unification Italy, says: "La rivoluzione aveva sorpreso i principati italiani in piena prosperità.

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[38] See also Lepre, 34.

Solo in Piemonte non c'era equilibrio nelle finanze, giacché in quel paese s'erano dovuti far dei

debiti" (145). This assessment is confirmed by Preite:

> Sin dalla partecipazione alla guerra di Crimea del 1854-56, a fianco degli eserciti di Francia e Inghilterra…il Piemonte ebbe bisogno per le spese di guerra sia dello stanziamento interno sia del prestito di ben cinquanta milioni di lire dell'epoca…Anche per la seconda guerra d'Independenza tra gli eserciti franco-piemontesi contro quelli austriaci nel 1859, furono necessari al Piemonte cospicui finanziamenti interni (cinquanta milioni di lire seguiti da altri quaranta), ma ancora una volta essendo insufficienti dovette ricorrere a nuovi prestiti dalle banche straniere: i Rothschild di Parigi e la banca inglese Hambro. (65)

Looking at the enormous debt accrued by Piedmont prior to Unification it is reasonable to

assume – when confronted with the financial figures of pre-Unification southern Italy – that

something of financial import awaited the arrival of Cavour's government. Why else would

Piedmont assume the risk of leading the movement towards national unity? Figures alone

demonstrate that the Neapolitan kingdom was the richest amongst the other Italian states with

nearly four-hundred and fifty million lire in the Neapolitan treasury.[39] This particular dimension

will be highlighted further along as we look at the provisional government in 1860-1861, but for

now we will briefly turn to Giuseppe Garibaldi's campaign in Sicily.

What we have in 1860 Sicily is a rapid military conquest of stunning success. Within

weeks of Garibaldi's arrival at Marsala in May of 1860, he took Palermo and routed the

Neapolitan troops. The key to understanding Garibaldi's success is in considering his rhetoric

which, incorporating nationalist themes with promises of land reform, allowed Garibaldi to

solidify quickly his position on the island through popular – read here peasant – support. Land,

as a patriotic theme, was what inspired popular support for the Piedmontese cause.[40] Giuseppe

Pandolfo, in his study, *Una rivoluzione tradita: i Siciliani e Garibaldi* (1986), visits Garibaldi's

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[39] See Preite, 68.

[40] It would also be of interest to note that Carlo Alianello has underlined the significance of British naval support during Garibaldi's 1860 campaign, 7-15.

shrewd appreciation of peasant cries for land: "Per ottenere tutto questo, i contadini iniziarono la lotta e poi seguirono Garibaldi…Poca ideologia in loro, ma tanta passione, per rendersi liberi, padroni di un po' di terra da lavorare" (127). In June of 1860, Garibaldi issued a proclamation that effectively "liberated" seven-hundred million hectares of land from both the Church and the Bourbon crown and made it seemingly available to the poor but, as Stefano Preite points out, the persons who largely benefited from this reform were the landed bourgeois:

> …i beneficiari furono sostanzialmente gli stessi, perché con il sistema della vendita all'asta, erano i soli ed i pochi a poter disporre delle risorse finanziarie necessarie all'acquisto. Perciò questa opportunità per i contadini di diventare proprietari di terra si risolse in un rafforzamento della grande proprietà e nella perdita anche degli usi civici. (115-16)

Preite goes on to say that as Garibaldi moved through the island and the continental south, his land reforms were overturned or unenforced (116). The patriotic narrative based largely on the desire to ameliorate the living conditions of the rural poor under the Bourbons morphed into a reinterpretation of the social status quo. The period that we will examine now looks at the Sicily of the post-Unification period from 1860 onward to 1876.

We will begin by underlining three components vital to the socio-economic and geopolitical history of post-Unification Sicily: The plebiscite vote of 1860, the economic policies of Piedmont regarding Sicily, and the rise of peasant banditry. The first of these, the plebiscite vote in 1860 whereby Sicily voted in favor of joining the nation of Italy, has significant political and economic implications. What we must consider is how, in the absence of political parties and representational government, a democratic process could occur so quickly. It may be viewed as evidence of Sicily and the south's desire to unite with Italy, but this may also be considered as an example of catastrophic governmental overreach: In its haste to unite Italy quickly and prevent the outbreak of a protracted war, the provisional Piedmontese government tapped into a regional

power source comprised primarily of anti-Bourbon agitators and convicted enemies of the crown.

Carlo Alianello gives us a clear description of the manner in which the referendum for union with Piedmont took place, saying: "Giorni prima che si facesse il Plebiscito, furono affissi alle mura delle città principali dei grandi cartelli, in cui si dichiarava *nemico della Patria* chi si fosse astenuto o avesse dato il voto contrario all'annessione. In ogni luogo dei comizi si posero due urne palesi, acciò si fosse veduto chi aveva dato il voto affermativo o negativo" (142). Alianello also contends that intimidation also led to voter gerrymandering: "Nel resto del Regno si fece il plebiscito al pari di quello di Napoli; ai villici si diceva che mettere il *sì* nell'urna voleva dire che tornasse Francesco II" (143). Martin Clark, in his history *The Italian Risorgimento* (2009), describes the plebiscite vote in both northern and southern Italy: "Voting was, of course, in public, under the watchful eye of the National Guard. As most voters were illiterate, the ballot papers were sometimes distributed with 'yes' (*sì*) already printed on them; elsewhere local landowners helpfully offered the necessary help to their tenants" (79). Both Alianello and Clark demonstrate that either through intimidation or subterfuge, the south overwhelmingly voted in favor of annexation (143-44; 82-83 respectively). So who enabled this farce to take place? Manlio Graziano points to the nature of pre-Risorgimento politics, focusing on the centrality of Turin:

> The notion of a 'center' involves several characteristics, including the geographic, cultural, and economic senses; the Italy of 1861 lacked all three at once. The principal reason, as we have seen, lay in the very conditions of the process of Unification, which resulted not so much from the work of politicians emerging from the struggles of the *Risorgimento* as from a fortuitous mixture of several exceptional circumstances. It was thus necessary to create from scratch a new ruling class, and to do so with men lacking in both experience and in national vocation. (75)

The financial disparity between Turin and the Neapolitan kingdom was enormous, as were the social histories of these respective regions of Italy. What Graziano implies here is that

Piedmont's leadership role would manifest itself as the political and economic head of the new nation. With that advantage came the responsibility of structuring a new state. Piedmont's financial disorder played a role in the decision to unify Italy. With the plebiscite vote confirming Piedmont's authority, the work of uniting both politically and economically the newly annexed south began. This could not have been achieved without the active support of the landed elite and the middle class.[41]. Now we will look at the social and economic policies of the provisional government and how, with regard to Sicily, the landed middle class would soon prove itself an indispensable tool of the new government and lead to the rise of the cultural phenomenon of the mafia.

One of Garibaldi's decrees that caused widespread discontent with the new government was the introduction of compulsory military service. As Pandolfo describes after the conquest of Sicily: "Ora le squadre rivoluzionarie non servivano più; bisognava adottare il sistema piemontese della leva obbligatoria e formare un 'esercito meridionale', un doppione di quella regione, sperando che presto si sarebbero fusi" (125). Along with Piedmontese military service came a new government bureaucracy which would soon supplant the Bourbon administration in Sicily. The arrival of the provisional government resulted in rampant unemployment, as Piedmontese administrators were imported to the island from Turin. As Graziano states:

> The 'Piedmontization' of public life extended into the administration of the state from its summit to its periphery, from the formalization of juridical continuity between the Piedmontese and Italian kingdoms to the holding of plebiscites,…,of the fifteen governments in the period 1861 through 1876, the men of Piedmont occupied 28.8 percent of the posts… (79)[42]

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[41] See Pandolfo, 133-34; Izzo, 25-27.

[42] Martin Clark also highlights this point: "Indeed, all the formal institutions of the new state were those of Piedmont. The other regions were forced to adopt Piedmontese laws, to pay Piedmontese taxes and to be ruled by (mainly) Piedmontese officials" (87).

This had the effect of creating general chaos and disorder. In a citation from Pasquale Villari,

Alianello describes the post-Unification in the south: "'Io non saprei abbastanza deplorare questo

stato di cose, e non potrei mai dipingervi che confusione e che disordine d'idee produce vedere

in pochi giorni favorire e sfavorire le medesime cose, il vedere questo continuo mutare di uffici,

dicasteri, d'istituzioni'" (qtd. in Alianello 154).[43]

Finally, we have the most devastating events as the Neapolitan kingdom's finances were

united with those of Piedmont. As Stefano Preite observes:

> Comunque l'economia del sud andò in crisi ed ebbe il colpo di grazia, quando il debito
> pubblico piemontese (lo stato più indebitato d'Europa nel 1859) fu sommato a quello
> delle Due Sicilie molto basso con il risultato che le popolazioni e le imprese del sud
> dovettero sopportare una pressione fiscale enorme per pagare i debiti del governo
> piemontese...Nell'agricoltura ad esempio il sud pagò un'imposta fondiaria di 70 milioni
> nel 1866 contro i 52 del nord… (108)

The establishment of the new government with its heavy emphasis on Piedmontese control

would come face to face with the final component of our analysis, banditry. Stemming from

peasant discontent (a result of the non-implementation and manipulation of Garibaldi's land

reform declaration of 1860), a rise in urban unemployment, and mandatory conscription, a class

war erupted in Sicily and the continental south. Rural warfare, which lasted for almost fifteen

years, raged across the continental south, eventually seeing almost a hundred thousand soldiers

sent by the national government to quell the rebellion.[44]

Brigantaggio or rural banditry would be painted as an anti-government, pro-Bourbon

campaign, at least with regard to Sicily. With the arrival of Garibaldi and through 1863, it was

the Piedmontese practice of utilizing convicts and anti-Bourbon political dissidents in furthering

the Risorgimento cause in Sicily. Citing the example of the Triolo brothers, barons of Sant'Anna

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[43] See Lepre, 31.

[44] See Preite, 131-35; Alianello, 133; Molfese, 177-84.

near Trapani who were known political agitators and were wanted by the Bourbon crown,

Pandolfo shows that Garibaldi employed hostile elements of Sicilian society to solidify the

Piedmontese position (24-25). This encounter first underlines the landed elite's hostility towards

the Bourbons. John Dickie gives us a further analysis outside of Garibaldi's military campaign:

> The King's ministers, mostly men from the north of Italy, had hoped to find partners in
> government from among the upper echelons of the Sicilian population, people who
> looked like themselves: conservative landowners with a sense of good government and a
> desire for ordered economic progress. What they found instead –they would often
> protest- looked like the face of anarchy: republican revolutionaries with strong links to
> semi-criminal gangs; aristocrats and churchmen with a nostalgia for the old Bourbon
> regime or a hankering for Sicilian autonomy; local politicians who were killing and
> kidnapping in a struggle for power with equally unscrupulous opponents. There was
> massive and enraged popular resistance to the introduction of conscription…Unwilling or
> unable to find the support to pacify Sicily politically, the government repeatedly tried the
> military solution… (22-23)

Why was the island of Sicily such an impediment to national cohesion? Dickie illuminates this

point by focusing his analysis on the socio-economic environment that developed in agrarian

Sicily after the abolishment of feudalism: "When modern local government institutions were set

up in the towns of the Sicilian provinces, groups that were part armed criminal gang, part

commercial enterprise, and part political clique, quickly organized themselves to get their hands

on the spoils" (52). Part of the problem rests in the previously discussed center-periphery

dichotomy. Where there was an absence of a central administration, political and economic

power increasingly fell into the hands of the landed elite whose reliance on blood relations

sustained their hegemony over local authority.[45] The other facet to this dilemma is the newer

middle class, oftentimes the overseers and employees of the local elite who ran the agricultural

estates for the absentee landlord, who sought greater social and political influence. As

competition increased for land and political advancement, a group of individuals would emerge

whose sole industry was the manipulation of social forces to their economic gain. Our analysis

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[45] See Dal Lago, 204.

will center on the socio-economic conditions that allowed organized crime to flourish during this period in Sicily from 1860 to1876.

Raimondo Catanzaro notes that in the 1860s, Sicily underwent severe social change associated with the arrival of the new government: "First of all, after the elimination of a large number of political offices, there was an increase in unemployment…A good part of the population became available to be hired by the violence industry whose principal organizational and management corps were located in Palermo" (80-81). Let us examine this "industry of violence" and what forms it took during the decade following Unification.

The Dr. Galati incident, as recounted by John Dickie, will be useful in framing the following discourse. Dickie begins by first contextualizing this affair within the historical, post-Unification period between 1860-1874:

> With nearly 200,000 inhabitants in 1861, Palermo was the political, legal, and banking centre of western Sicily. More money circulated in the property and rental sectors than anywhere else on the island. Palermo was the centre for wholesale and consumer markets, and it was the major port. It was here that much of the farmland in the surrounding province and beyond was bought, sold, and rented. Palermo also set the political agenda. (27)

Palermo and the surrounding hinterland were the epicenter of western Sicily's agricultural markets. As a result, a great deal of political influence and financial gain were now easily accessible thanks to the arrival of the new government of Piedmont. The landed elite was successfully able to maneuver itself through the socio-political pitfalls that the Risorgimento and the new Italy might have presented, such as the enactment of Garibaldi's land reform proclamations in the name of Italy, and retained their privileged position in the social and political hierarchy.[46] In siding with the Piedmontese and supporting Unification, the provincial elites and the bourgeoisie preserved the de facto status quo: almost exclusive rights to arable

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[46] See Pandolfo, 128-30.

land, the right to defend their property, and the sanctioned use of violence in pursuit thereof.

From 1861 through 1876, a tenuous relationship developed between the regional, landed elites of Sicily and the new government of Italy, one that bespeaks a certain degree of reciprocity. After 1812 as the landed elites and the growing middle class vied with one another for land and status, defense of one's property increasingly resulted in acts of strategic violence directed against those whose interests contradicted one's own. Anton Blok, in his masterful study of nineteenth-century Sicilian society and the emergence of a violent class, *Honour and Violence* (2001), details the social dimension to blood:

> Moreover, as a symbolic device, blood mediates between individuals and between groups, between insiders, and between insiders and outsiders, shoring up relationships that are inherently unstable, flexible and subject to change. In the context of retaliation, shedding blood is a powerful way to 'wash the stains of dishonour' and thus, to supersede the state of pollution and social exclusion. (97)

We must consider that, in Sicily, property rights and land ownership were often tied to one's honor: the more land one possessed, the more honor his name/family accrued. As more individuals sought to improve their socio-economic position, competition naturally arose. We must also consider, as Blok explains, that in the absence of a strong, central government – as Sicily had experienced for most of its history – blood ties would be used as the basis for financial and social networks: "In the absence of effective central control over the means of violence or by simply evading the law, people could for trust, loyalty and protection only turn to kin and quasi-kinsmen, however culturally constructed" (101). Now, in the post-Unification period of 1860 and beyond, civil disorder would threaten the new socio-economic structure of the nation-state of Italy. The banditry and disorder that intermittently reigned in the Conca d'Oro (the Palermo hinterlands) threatened primarily the large citrus *latifondo*. It is here that we will take up the Dr. Galati incident of 1872. As John Dickie relates:

In 1872, Dr. Galati came to manage an inheritance on behalf of his daughters and their maternal aunt. The centrepiece of the inheritance was the Fondo Riella, a four-hectare lemon and tangerine fruit farm... in Malaspina which was only a fifteen-minute walk from the edge of Palermo…The previous owner of the Fondo Riella, Dr Galati's brother-in-law, had died of a heart attack following a series of threatening letters. Two months before his death, he learned from the steam-pump operator that the sender of the letters was the warden of the *fondo*, Benedetto Carollo, who had dictated them to someone who knew how to read and write. Carollo may have been uneducated, but he had attitude: Galati describes him swaggering about as if he owned the farm, and it was widespread knowledge that he creamed 20-25 per cent off the sale price of its produce; he even stole the coal intended for the steam engine. But it was the way Carollo stole that had caused most worry for Dr. Galati's brother-in-law; it showed that he understood the citrus fruit business well, and was intent on running the Fondo Riella into the ground. (27-28)

Here we should highlight two things, the first of which is that an illiterate individual was, however unscrupulously, able to gain an understanding of the citrus business and use it to his benefit. Due to the lack of authority or too much of it being invested in Carollo, the property owner is now at the mercy of an individual willing to use violence in defense of his "capitalist" pursuits.[47] Dr. Galati's first order was to fire Carollo and hire a new warden, leading Carollo to protest that "'the bread [had been] taken out of his mouth'" (qtd. in Dickie 29). As a result, the new warden was found shot to death on the road between the lemon groves of the *fondo* (29). Soon after, Dr. Galati would engage in a dangerous tug-of-war with Carollo and the power structure that would eventually show itself as his protector. Upon discovering the body of his overseer, Galati sent his son to the police station to lodge their strong suspicions that it was Carollo who had perpetrated the murder. This resulted in the police arresting two individuals who would later be found to have had nothing to do with the affair and summarily freed (29). As threats continued against Galati and his family, he consistently encountered an indifferent local police force who, on closer inspection, would appear to be abetting the individuals in question

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[47] Dickie demonstrates that the citrus trade was ripe for manipulation and exploitation by certain enterprising individuals: "Between the Sicilian groves…, and the shops in northern Europe and America where consumers bought them, a host of agents, wholesale merchants, packagers, and transporters plied their trade. Financial speculation lubricated every stage of the process, beginning while the lemons were still on the trees…" (28).

(30). One of the conspicuous elements to this story is that, contained in one of the threatening

letters sent Dr. Galati, he was told that it was wrong to fire a "man of honor" (29).

These encounters with localized violence and commercial intimidation, while ignored or

covered up by the local police, did not go unnoticed by Dr. Galati and he began to compile a

regional history of western Sicily vis-à-vis this emergent power structure. The proof of the

existence of a sort of organized conspiracy lay in the police's inactivity. Dr. Galati would

become convinced, according to Dickie, that the police inspector was "in league with the

criminals" (30). Dr. Galati noted that a certain individual, one Antonino Giammona, figured

prominently in the local power structure. Salvatore Lupo states:

> Giammona was born in the *borgata*, or outlying suburb, of Passo di Rigano, around 1819
> and matured in a revolutionary climate. He was 'extremely poor' until 1848, but,
> 'dabbling in brigandage…under the banner of the revolution,' over time he became the
> leaseholder of *giardini*, or citrus groves, the owner of land and buildings purchased in the
> sales of state-owned property in the period following Unification, as well the proprietor
> of a sheep-farming operation. Around 1875, his worth was estimated to be on the order of
> 150,000 lire. In a time when suffrage was quite limited, he controlled a bloc of about fifty
> votes. (43)

Lupo goes on to say that Giammona "…enjoyed a turning point in 1860 when, as a captain in the

Guardia nazionale, he distinguished himself as one of the protagonists of the 'return to order'

(*ritorno dell'ordine*) in the hinterland" (43). Giammona's political and revolutionary activity is

also cited by Dr. Galati, as Dickie states: "His rise to wealth and influence coincided with the

revolutions that accompanied Sicily's integration into the Italian nation. The revolts of 1848 and

1860 gave him the chance he needed to show his mettle and win important friends" (30). What

Dickie and Lupo both describe is a social phenomenon whose rise was intrinsically connected to

that of the agricultural industry:

> The Uditore mafia based their power on running protection rackets in the lemon groves.
> They could force landowners to accept their men as stewards, wardens, and brokers.
> Their network of contacts with cart drivers, wholesalers, and dockers could either

threaten a farm's produce, or ensure its safe arrival at the market; when astutely applied, violence allowed the mafia to set up miniature cartels and monopolies. (Dickie 31)

Here we have the term mafia applied to a socio-economic power system that was locally based and that had regional influence. It will become a very complicated term whose origins as a term have been much debated.[48] But here we are not generally concerned with the etymology of the term; rather, our focus is directed towards the social, political, and economic origins of nineteenth-century organized crime in Sicily. Salvatore Lupo elucidates this approach: "From Giammona, three threads are seen to extend: downward –criminals; toward his peers –the other leaders of the Mafia; and upward –the prominent citizens who protect him and whom he protects" (43). The period in which men of Giammona's ilk would arise is complex when we consider that the agricultural base of the Sicilian economy quite often required armed protection due to lack of protection in the countryside and that a practice under the Bourbons called the *componende* (negotiated settlement) would develop after 1812: "These were negotiations between the victims of theft and the thieves themselves for the return of stolen goods and livestock, and they were conducted under the supervision of powerful criminals, respected professionals or prominent citizens" (Lupo 37). With land forming the basis of one's social status, wealth, and influence, it would not be unreasonable to state that the composition of the so-called "mafia" was heavily middle class and staunch defenders of private property. The 1860s saw a rise in the threat of banditry in Sicily but it proved to be intermittent, at best.[49] Raimondo Catanzaro expands on this further, citing a link between political radicals, bandits, and so-called mafiosi:

This was especially true during 1860-1875, when the Mafia, bandits, and political groups commingled in opposition to the Italian state…It is certainly not out of character for

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[48] See Lupo, 2; Robb, 56-57.

[49] Salvatore Lupo demonstrates that while brigandage was a more dispersed phenomenon in the Italian south, Sicily's own experience with brigandage was sporadic and operated in and around western Sicily, 56-57.

bandits and outlaws to organize rebellions against established power or to become part of political liberation movements. And this occurred frequently in the Sicily of the 1860s, when Mafiosi and bandit chiefs became followers of Garibaldi …It is therefore undeniable that the Mafia, banditry, and republican political opposition during the years 1860-75 were allied…, the relationship between the Mafia and banditry followed the pattern traced by Blok. Once the Mafia differentiated itself from banditry, bandits were used by both the Mafia and the governmental authorities –sometimes competing, sometimes allied, to repress and exploit the peasants. (25-26)[50]

Catanzaro further distinguishes between the activities of the bandits and the mafia by clarifying

what he terms the mafia's deployment of "controlled extortion" with regard to their protection

racket: "It was controlled in the sense that it could not be pushed to extremes –that is, it had to

allow its victim the possibility of continuing the productive activities…But control also meant

that no competition could be tolerated or that competitors were to be silenced either by

agreement or by violence" (22-23). This operation was able to grow simply because, in the

context of the 1860s, there was no entity in absolute control. Traditionally, the state maintains a

monopoly over many aspects of civil life, chief amongst them law and order. In the pursuit of

these ends in Sicily, the new Italian government only superficially seized the monopoly on

juridical and political authority, as partners in furthering the cause of unity from 1861 onward

became increasingly compromised. Catanzaro posits:

> In Palermo…power and authority relationships were in much greater disrepair than they were in the provinces. With the demise of the traditional subordination-solidarity relationship that bound the feudal lords to the urban populace and that manifested itself in the obligation of assistance; with the increase in the deterioration of the population's living conditions; and, finally, with the creation of a new class of speculators and intermediaries who did not feel a moral obligation to respond to any demand of solidarity toward the lower classes, a social situation was created in which no class was in a position to maintain a monopoly of power and authority relationships…Nor could it be conquered by the new emerging middle class, which traditionally did not have an autonomous power base since it performed a role of mediation between barons and plebs, and which was gradually linking up with the new organs of the state and the functions performed by it. (83)

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[50] See also Blok, 89-94, for an interesting tangential thought on distrust of central authority.

Post-Unification, Sicilian political and social history can therefore be understood as an attempt to reconcile diverse local interests and that patronage would come to play an ever increasing role in the socio-political life of the island.[51] As John Dickie maintains: "For a decade and a half after the Unification of Italy, the authorities repeatedly lurched towards a blindly repressive response to the unruly island, only to stagger back towards decent principles that they were unable to uphold, or to sink into complicity with shady local enforcers" (59). This will become clearer as we examine the final section of our analysis, the declaration of martial law in Sicily in 1863 and the rise of the "law and order" movement of the 1860s.

> Salvatore Lupo avers:
>
> The fact that Sicily never experienced a large-scale outbreak of pro-Bourbon brigandage did nothing to prevent the government from extending the Pica Law of 1863 to Sicily, establishing martial law on the island as well. The measures General Giuseppe Govone and the prefect-general Giacomo Medici took to round up the numerous men avoiding the draft called for general sweeps of whole provinces in western Sicily. (31)[52]

During this period of extreme government intervention in Sicily, dubious police practices began to shape the campaign to rid the island of banditry. Lupo states that the functionaries and representatives of the central government utilized local power brokers to root out those suspected of being outlaws or draft-dodgers:

> Transactions, then, were between landowners and Mafiosi, and also between Mafiosi, outlaws, and the authorities. Chief among these latter transactions was that of providing the brigands with safe-conduct passes so that they could eliminate other brigands in whatever way necessary. This system was frequently used during Medici's tenure, and often with disastrous results…The involvement of the police force in criminal activities was common practice, especially in the case of the *militi a cavallo* –militiamen or soldiers on horseback. Like the *guardie rurali* (rural guards) of the townships, the *militi a cavallo* were obliged to reimburse, up to a certain sum, any losses incurred by landowners through thefts in their jurisdiction… (59)

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[51] See Catanzaro, 87-88.

[52] The Pica Law, enacted in 1863, established military tribunals and martial law during the new Italian government's campaign to rid the south of the phenomenon of *brigantaggio* (Preite 139-45).

As the lines between licit and illicit forces for social change blurred, fundamentally challenging the credibility of the new government, the specter of the mafia would distinguish itself from other incarnations of "urban banditry" (Catanzaro 16).[53] Through social and economic control of certain regional markets, ranging from intimidation for hire to agricultural speculation, the "proto-mafia" would come to play an increasingly important role on the national political scene, as the Italian parliament held inquiries as to the nature of the mafia in 1875.[54] As John Dickie recounts, the nature of the debates of 1875 centered around the rise in political influence of the Right; how the Left categorized the Right's ascendency as a result of mafia intervention through their ability to campaign for the Right (68). Diego Tajani, an MP from southern Italy and a lawyer who had served at the Palermo Court of Appeals from 1868-1872, would recall what he had witnessed while serving the government in Sicily. He began by relating the case of Giuseppe Albanese, Palermo's Chief of Police. Tajani describes Albanese's approach to crime: "It involved making friends with the mafiosi, using them as vote-gatherers and unofficial police agents, and in return helping them to keep their rivals in check" (Dickie 71). Dickie, in summarizing Tajani's speech, further sheds light on the collusion between local and national authorities, mediated through so-called mafiosi:

> Chief of Police Albanese, Tajani asserted to parliament, was more than an isolated corrupt policeman. In 1869, in the course of his duties as chief prosecutor, Tajani had learned that crimes in Monreale near Palermo were committed with the approval of the commander of the National Guard. Soon after the story emerged, two criminals who seemed prepared to give evidence about the case were ambushed and murdered. Albanese himself, despite being Chief of Police, not only discouraged an investigation into why and how the two men had died, he even told the magistrate responsible that 'reasons of public order had induced the authorities to order their deaths'. In 1871, on Tajani's orders, Albanese was charged with the murder of the informants in the Monreale case. It

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[53] For interesting corollaries treating the Neapolitan history of urban banditry, see Tom Behan's *The Camorra* (1996) and Roberto Saviano's *Gomorrah* (2006).

[54] The term proto-mafia comes from Salvatore Lupo's analysis of the mafia during the 1860s and 1870s (33; 37).

was when the Chief of Police was released for lack of evidence that Tajani resigned in disgust… (71)

As Lupo points out with regard to police involvement in abetting mafia activity from the 1860s to the mid-1870s: "The police admitted that they had founded a *Mafia d'ordine* (order-keeping Mafia), that they had applied the principle of *'similia similibus'…*" (87).[55] Through a desire to solidify the new government's position and to garner support of the new political and social power structure they sought to establish, the organs of the state – particularly the local police – employed known criminals whose revolutionary activities prior to the Risorgimento had differentiated them from other social agitators. The new Italian government co-opted individuals whose interests and loyalties were completely compromised, probably as a means to minimize the effects that Unification would have on the social, political, and economic life of the island. It is this relationship of reciprocity that looms large over the history of Sicily from 1860-1876. The successive governments of the Piedmontese-dominated Left demonstrated that, in the name of national and economic efficacy, their regional partners did not have to be as well-intended and above influence as they themselves were. The preceding historiographical analysis is intended to frame our subsequent analysis of Leonardo Sciascia's *Il giorno della civetta* (1961) and the historical parallels we may be able to draw between the novel and the history of Sicily after Unification.

The narrative begins in the early morning in Piazza Cavour in the town of S.[56] The early morning piazza is quiet, with bus passengers and a food vendor as the only signs of activity.

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[55] The Latin phrase is roughly translated in this context as the employment of local power brokers to solve localized problems.

[56] Sciscia does not give a specific name to the town. The reader is to infer from social markers that the novel probably takes place somewhere in western Sicily, as Sciascia includes sulfur mining and the "piccola cooperitiva"(14), both of which are heavily represented in the western part of the island.

Immediately following the innocuous first two lines of the novel, our attention is drawn to

murder:

> Il bigliettaio chiuse lo sportello, l'autobus si mosse con un rumore di sfasciume. L'ultima occhiata che il bigliettaio girò sulla piazza, colse l'uomo vestito di scuro che veniva correndo; il bigliettaio disse all'autista –un momento- e aprí lo sportello mentre l'autobus ancora si muoveva. Si sentirono due colpi squarciati: l'uomo vestito di scuro, che stava per saltare sul predellino, restò per un attimo sospeso, come tirato su per i capelli da una mano invisibile; gli cadde la cartella di mano e sulla cartella si afflosciò. (Sciascia 9)

As the totality of the event that just transpired sinks in, the decision is made to call the police

(10) and, upon their arrival, the authorities discover that the only "witnesses" left in the piazza

are the bus driver and the *bigliettaio* (ticket agent); none of the passengers could be found (11).

The bus driver, under questioning about the passengers and their whereabouts, admits: "Io non

guardo mai la gente che c'è: mi infilo al mio posto e via…Solo la strada guardo, mi pagano per

guardare la strada" (11). Even the *bigliettaio* states he could not remember a single passenger

(12). There remains another possible witness, the *panellaro* (vendor) who, after the murder,

scurried away from the scene (9) and whose recollection of the morning's events is hazy. When

brought before the *maresciallo* and questioned about what he saw this morning, the *panellaro*

says: "Perché –domandò il panellaro, meravigliato e curioso- hanno sparato?" (13). What the

reader is exposed to from the very beginning of the novel is an assassination-style murder and a

pool of witnesses who either fled or didn't really recall what happened. The fact that this murder

takes place in a public sphere with several eyewitnesses none of whom seem cooperative, will

frame the narrative discourse from this point onward. We are presented with an ostensibly

suspicious, local population whose silence bespeaks a social control that is reminiscent of

organized crime in western Sicily. What we will demonstrate herein is a comparative study of

Sciascia's narrative with the historical mafia we have discussed previously. This exploration will

focus on the intersections of Sciascia's fiction and the expansion of certain socio-economic

developments of the nineteenth century, namely the violent middle class or mafia.

We discover, shortly after the *panellaro* recovers part of his memory, the identity of the

victim: Salvatore Colasberna. His description is decidedly middle class: "…Salvatore

Colasberna, Co-la-sbe-rna: faceva il muratore, dieci anni addietro ha messo su la cooperativa

insieme a due fratelli suoi e a quattro o cinque altri muratori del paese; dirigeva i lavori,…, e

teneva l'amministrazione" (14). With the arrival of his brothers to the police station and their

subsequent conversations, we learn that because of a high incidence of vandalism of private

property, certain business owners have had recourse to individuals who offer protection:

> …ogni ditta ha le sue macchine, i suoi materiali: cose di notte restano lungo le strade o
> vicino ai cantieri di costruzione; e le macchine son cose delicate, basta tirar fuori un
> pezzo…e ci vogliono ore o giorni per remetterle in funzione,…, ci vuole poco a farle
> sparire o a bruciarli sul posto…Non è naturale rivolgersi a questa gente che non dorme
> per avere protezione? Tanto piú che la protezione vi è stata offerta; e se voi avete
> commesso l'imprudenza di rifiutarla, qualche fatto è accaduto che vi ha persuaso ad
> accettarla… (18)

Much as we have seen previously, the possibility of vandalism and loss of property figure again

into the financial sector of the regional economy. The fact that the Colasberna's cooperative is

successful and has, seemingly, never had occasion to avail itself of protectionist services appears

to be of import to the police captain (19) and it is intimated that Salvatore Colasberna's demise

may be a result of his stubbornness in the face of an offer of protection for pay (19). The reader

is then taken from Sicily to Rome where two Sicilian politicians are discussing events taking

place in the sulfur mines and their political overtones (23-24).[57] This is significant for two

reasons: One, the fact that they are discussing sulfur, workers, and political ideologies implies

that these two politicians either represent western Sicily or have a vested interest there. Secondly,

this discussion leads these two gentlemen to discuss the activities of a local police captain in the

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[57] See Lupo, 50-51.

town of C., one Bellodi. While we do not know precisely who these politicians are or what their particular interest might be in Captain Bellodi, we are made aware – indirectly – of what his activities in C. might be: "Bellodi, mi pare: comanda la compagnia di C., ci sta da tre mesi e ha già fatto guasto…Ora sta cacciando il naso negli appalti, anche il commendator Zarcone si raccomanda a lei, mi ha detto 'stiamo in speranza che l'onorevole lo faccia ritornare a mangiar polenta'" (25). The reader can now infer that there is something larger at work in local events in Sicily, as Captain Bellodi will now become a central figure in the course of the narrative. The commandant's comment that this particular politician should, in effect, send Bellodi back to where he came from, will also become a theme vital to both the novel and to our analysis. Let us first look at Captain Bellodi and see what about him makes him problematic.

The reader is made fully aware that Captain Bellodi is not from C. or S.; in fact, he is, at least from a Sicilian perspective, from extreme northern Italy, Parma to be exact (29). He is also a man who truly believes in the rule of law and its equal application: "…per tradizione, e per convinzione, faceva quello che in antico si diceva il mestiere delle armi, e in un corpo di polizia, con la fede di un uomo che ha partecipato a una rivoluzione e dalla rivoluzione ha visto sorgere la legge: e questa legge che assicurava libertà e giustizia" (29). Quickly thereafter we are once again taken from the island and brought back to Rome, only this time the reader finds himself in a session of Parliament where the discussion focuses not on national interests, but rather the news that Salvatore Colasberna had been killed and that Captain Bellodi is investigating the murder. Here we will see much more clearly why Bellodi is problematic, according to the comments of this shadowy politician: "Questo qui, caro amico, è uno che vede mafia da ogni parte: uno di quei settentrionali con la testa piena di pregiudizi, che appena scendono dalla nave-traghetto cominciano a veder mafia dovunque…" (32). Referring to a newspaper article wherein

the specter of the mafia was discussed and shown that it "controlla tutto" (32), the shadow

politician, after establishing the inanity of such a thing (32-33), states: "Noi due, siciliani, alla

mafia non ci crediamo:…Ma intanto, per carità, seguite attentamente le indagini di questo

Bellodi…E voi che alla mafia non ci credete, cercate di fare qualcosa, mandate qualcuno: che

sappia fare, che non pianti una grana con Bellodi, ma che…" (33). Here we know implicitly that

this political shadow has an interest in Bellodi's investigations. This scene also highlights the

distinction between organized forms of power: From the heights of national, parliamentary

influence to a localized form of social control, each form ostensibly uses the other for reciprocal

benefit. Much as was the case in 1875, organized crime or mafia in Sicily was of central, national

interest. The following section will treat briefly the character of Parrinieddu and how the

informant represents a social history consistent with the nineteenth-century history of the post-

Risorgimento period in Sicily.

Sciascia describes the *confidente* (informant) from the perspective of Captain Bellodi

who holds: "…;miserabli uomini, fango di paura e di vizio: e pure giuocavano la loro partita di

morte, sul filo della menzogna tra partigiani…" (28). One of the interesting aspects – in the same

fashion as during the post-Unification period – of Sciascia's narrative deployment of the

confidente is that he reinforces the connection between law enforcement and the state and

unsavory elements within regional society. Sciascia creates a dynamic in which, traditionally, the

local authority's role as enforcer of law and order was achieved through arbitration with other

local interests; an ambiguous blending of social forces whose interests aren't always the equal

application of the law. As we have seen, Captain Bellodi's personage is characterized by an

almost unflinching adhesion to the highest of republican ideals, in particular the supremacy of

the law (29). So here we will see Parrinieddu, the *confidente*, juxtaposed to the personification of

the law, Captain Bellodi; the idealized social order with the local reality. Accustomed to a certain

quid pro quo, Parrinieddu, under questioning regarding the Colasberna affair, encounters a

Bellodi whose respectful demeanor is taken advantage of by the *confidente*. By virtue of the

danger entailed in informing for the police, Parrinieddu's information cannot be viewed as

anything other than skewed. His only advantage is offering misleading information which is

what keeps him alive. How can he know with any certainty that the person to whom he offers

information isn't compromised himself? We have seen that it is not unusual in Sicily for the

authorities to compromise themselves through outside influence. The character of Parrinieddu is

at the same time the willing tool of the state and also its victim. Much like the brigand of 1860s

Sicily, Parrinieddu occupies the same marginalized position of social outsider; an easy target for

exploitation and manipulation. What's more, the *confidente*'s perceived character, again in

keeping with Sicilian mores of the nineteenth century and beyond, was dishonorable. We need

only look to Sciascia's text to see this elaborated further.

In a conversation between an old man and a young man, our assessment of the *confidente*

as the social outlier will be reinforced. We are not clued in to the identities of these individuals

but their conversation has resounding import here: In acknowledging the *confidente* activities of

Parrinieddu, the old man casts himself as a man set apart, a man not like Parrinieddu. By singling

out those who are undeserving of his respect (51), the old man is in a sense telling the reader

what he is: a man who sees the world for what it is, "un bosco di corna" (51), against which he

positions himself. The old man, in seeing the world as a distinction between the *cornuti* and

himself, is reminded of one *cornuto* in particular: Parrinieddu:

> …E a proposito: quel cornuto di Parrinieddu mi fa venire sospetti…Ieri, incontrandomi,
> la sua faccia ha cambiato di colore: ha finto di non vedermi ed è subito svicolato…Io
> dico: ti ho lasciato fare la spia perché lo so, devi tirare a campare; ma devi farlo con

giudizio, non è che devi gettarti contro la santa chiesa –e santa chiesa voleva dire di se stesso intoccabile, e del sacro nodo di amicizie che rappresentava e custodiva. (51)

So what we have here is at first a description of Parrinieddu as a *cornuto*, but one who has been playing both sides and with both parties' blessing. The role of the *confidente* is to mislead, sometimes in concert with the local authorities and sometimes against them. Their compromised depository of information allows for a localized interweaving of various social elements into the fabric of the offices of the state, here the police. The social outlier eventually falls victim to his own machinations, as is the case with Parrinieddu (57). What is more, the evidentiary trail begins to grow: With the death of Parrinieddu, Captain Bellodi begins to link the murder of Colasberna with the discovery of the *confidente*'s body. Bellodi's investigation, once again, is brought to the attention of a shadowy politician who, awoken from his sleep, is informed by someone to whom he refers as "eccellenza" (81) that Bellodi is becoming a risk (82) and that the investigation is turning into a national story (82-83). What is more, a person that is known locally in the town of S., one don Mariano Arena, is also a person of influence on the national level (83). The pages that follow will treat the encounter between Captain Bellodi and don Mariano, a sort of state-vs.-anti-state. Our analysis will focus on the histories and events that – during the course of Bellodi's interrogation of don Mariano – give the state's representative pause to consider his own belief that the state and its law is beyond reproach. Let us examine how the social and political forces at play within the narrative appear to be the same elements that helped establish the Italian state on the island in the 1860s; how the manner in which social order was compromised from the very onset of national unity through the intermingling of violent social fringe movements, like the *movimento dell'ordine* and brigandage, with the organs of the state continuing to inform and control the social, political, and economic order of certain areas of the island.

The investigation that followed the murder of Salvatore Colasberna led Captain Bellodi through a network of *confidenti* (informants), bereaved relatives who were unwilling to cooperate, and the discovery that Colasberna's murder may have had national implications regarding regional control of building contracts (31; 49-51; 81-82). The reader is finally, towards the end of the novel, brought before the alluded to but yet to be introduced person of don Mariano. We have an interesting juxtaposition: The man of law and order (Bellodi) encountering another type of man of order (Mariano). Discussing with other *carabinieri* the prospect of questioning don Mariano in the Colasberna affair, Bellodi learns of don Mariano's reputation and the influence that he wields:

> ...Io ho avuto tra le mani, nel ventisette, il suo fascicolo: piú grosso di questo libro – indicò un volume di Bentini- e si poteva cavarne fuori un'enciclopedia criminale: non mancava niente, dalla a, abiegato, alla zeta, zuffa…Quel fascicolo poi, fortunatamente, scomparve…No, non fare quell'occhio di sarda morta: non ci ho avuto mano io, a farlo scomparire; altri amici piú grossi di me, hanno fatto il giuoco delle tre carte, con quel fascicolo; da questo ufficio a quello, da quello a questo: e il procuratore del re, un uomo di terribile ricordo, se lo è visto sparire da sotto il naso…Poi il procuratore del re fu trasferito, e l'acquazzone passò. Perché, mio caro, la realtà è questa: che passano i procuratori del re, quelli della Repubblica, i giudici, gli ufficiali, i questori, gli appuntai…: noi stiamo parlando di don Mariano…Un dito addosso a don Mariano Arena non lo mette nessuno: uomo rispettato, uomo protetto… (90-91)

We see here the totality of the nineteenth-century Italian Unification and the new nation's relationship with the local "powers that be" personified by a man who is a protected entity by those in a position to safeguard his interests, as he safeguards theirs. It would not be unreasonable to assume that if, locally, don Mariano's authority was absolute, those protecting him must come from without, harkening back, once again, to the post-Unification period in Sicily. Into this historically-charged scenario enters the character of Captain Bellodi, the personification of republican ideologies of the nineteenth century, whose interests are strictly those of the idealized state. Captain Bellodi, after being informed of don Mariano's reputation, has an interesting moment of reflection prior to the interrogation as he considers the *delitto*

passionale (crime of passion). Looking at the matter not from a causal point of view but from a social vantage, he muses:

> Il delitto passionale, in Sicilia non scatta dalla vera e propria passione, dalla passione del cuore; ma da una specie di passione intellettuale,…, giuridica: nel senso di quella astrazione in cui le leggi vanno assottigliandosi attraverso i gradi di giudizio del nostro ordinamento, fino a raggiungere quella trasparenza formale in cui *il merito*, cioè l'umano peso dei fatti, non conta piú; e, abolita l'immagine dell'uomo, la legge nella legge si specchia. (93)

Here it is clear that within this given society, conceptions of law and jurisprudence are borne out across a spectrum of variation of opinion; the law itself is malleable and human worth is not necessarily an intrinsic value (94).[58] Now as Captain Bellodi enters the interrogation room, the republican patriotism of the Risorgimento comes face to face with the social phenomenon it helped create.

Bellodi begins by asking don Mariano if he knew Parrinieddu. Don Mariano's response is interesting, asking Bellodi what he meant by "to know": A friendship? A passing acquaintance? Don Mariano states that he knew Parrinieddu as an acquaintance and, when asked if he knew what type of work Parrinieddu did, don Mariano responds by saying: "…Forse lavorava con la testa" (95). Bellodi inquires further as to what he means but don Mariano does not wish to elaborate (95). Captain Bellodi goes on to tell don Mariano of Parrinieddu's death and hand don Mariano evidence, furnished by Parrinieddu, implicating don Mariano in Colasberna's murder (96). Further along we discover the source of don Mariano's income and, not surprisingly, his response is in keeping with our discourse here: "Non faccio affari: vivo di rendita" (96).[59] Captain Bellodi's incredulity furnishes the reader with further evidence of the financial

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[58] Bellodi holds that: "La famiglia è lo Stato del siciliano" (94). This is also underlined in Blok, 89; Gabaccia, 3-5.

[59] "-Che rendita? –Terre. –Quanti ettari ne possiede? –Ventidue salme e…:facciamo novanta ettari" (97).

development of the *mafioso* like don Mariano with the spread of capitalism, basing his fortunes

in the agricultural sector

> …Eh no, è lei che sta scherzando…Perché mi dice di non avere, oltre le terre, altre fonti di reddito; che non ha mano in affari industriali o commerciali…Ed io le credo: e perciò ritengo che quei cinquantaquattro milioni che lo scorso anno ha depositato in tre diverse banche, poiché non risultano prelevati da precedenti depositi presso altre banche, rappresentino esclusivamente il reddito delle sue terre. (97)

Captain Bellodi continues and asks don Mariano of his daughter, whose name appears on

financial transactions and who has, under don Mariano, amassed a small fortune (98). He

attempts to connect don Mariano's financial record with that of the crimes that Captain Bellodi is

investigating (99), but at a given point, we are taken outside the interrogation room and placed in

Bellodi's thoughts: What can he say to confound and elicit from don Mariano information he is

unwilling to give?: "È inutile tentare di incastrare nel penale un uomo come costui: non ci

saranno mai prove sufficienti, il silenzio degli onesti e dei disonesti lo proteggerà sempre. Ed è

inutile, oltre che pericoloso, vagheggiare una sospensione di diritti costituzionali" (99). Bellodi,

unwilling to compromise his ideals, gives don Mariano a telling description of himself: "…ma le

assicuro che mangio soltanto quello che voi siciliani chiamate il pane del governo" (101). The

response of don Mariano is to say simply: "Lo so: ma lei è un uomo" (101). This simple

statement will form the thrust of don Mariano's monologue that has analytical interest for our

study here as it furnishes an understanding of the social forces of don Mariano's world.

> Io –proseguí poi don Mariano- ho una certa pratica del mondo; e quella che diciamo l'umanità e ci riempiamo la bocca a dire umanità, bella parola piena di vento, la divido in cinque categorie: gli uomini, i mezz'uomini; i mezz'uomini pochi, ché mi contenterei l'umanità si fermasse ai mezz'uomini…E invece no, scende ancora piú giú, agli ominicchi: che sono come i bambini che si credono grandi, scimmie che fanno le stesse mosse dei grandi…E ancora piú in giú: i pigliainculo, che vanno diventando un esercito…E infine i quaquaraquà: che dovrebbero vivere come le anatre nelle pozzanghere, ché la loro vita non ha piú senso e piú espressione di quella delle anatre… (101)

Bellodi, interestingly, responds to don Mariano's speech by reciprocating the compliment

(101).[60] Bellodi's interest now piqued, he inquires as to why don Mariano considers him "un

uomo" and don Mariano responds:

> Perché –disse don Mariano- da questo posto dove lei si trova è facile mettere il piede
> sulla faccia di un uomo: e lei invece ha rispetto…Da persone che stanno dove sta lei,
> dove sta il brigadiere, molti anni addietro io ho avuto offesa peggiore della morte: un
> ufficiale come lei mi ha schiaffeggiato; e giú, nelle camere della sicurezza, un
> maresciallo mi appoggiava la brace del suo sigaro alla pianta dei piedi, e rideva… (102)

As we have seen previously, the line between criminal and law enforcement had been blurred in

the past and, as don Mariano intimates, continues to be problematic. We come to Bellodi's

pointed question: "E le pare cosa da uomo ammazzare o fare ammazzare un altro uomo?" (102).

Don Mariano's response is one that is predicated on whether or not the person in question was *un

uomo*; moreover, when asked about Parrinieddu, don Mariano responds that he was "un

quaquaraquà" (102). When told about Parrinieddu's role as a *confidente*, don Mariano responds:

"Lo sapeva tutto il paese" (103). Captain Bellodi, ironically, states the obvious: Parrinieddu was

playing both sides. At this point Bellodi places everything that he knows and has investigated on

the proverbial table: That don Mariano, in competing with Colasberna for a building contract,

enlisted two individuals – La Rosa and Pizzuco – to carry out the murder and that Bellodi was

able to have these two individuals implicate don Mariano in ordering Colasberna's death (104-

05). Finally Bellodi gets to the heart of the matter:

> L'appalto per lo stradale Monterosso-Falcone: a parte il fatto che lei è riuscito ad ottenere
> il finanziamento per una strada completamente inutile, su un tracciato impossibile, e che
> è stato lei a ottenere il finanziamento ne abbiamo la prova nell'articolo di un
> corrispondente locale che gliene dà merito; a parte ciò, l'impresa Fazello non deve a lei
> l'attribuzione dell'appalto? Cosí mi ha detto il signor Fazello: e non credo che avesse
> ragione di mentire. (107)

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[60] See also Bellodi's thoughts on how don Mariano arrived at this concept, 101-02.

We see here the nineteenth-century social and economic force that continued to develop long after Unfication, a social and economic force whose reputation and whose connections are captive to and the tool of the privileged. This is made ever clearer as, in the pages that follow, the reader is taken from Sicily and placed into a meeting of Parliament. What we know is that, much like the period following 1876 with the ascension of the southern Right and the rise in influence of the southern landed elite in the national parliament, a debate concerning "un pezzo di questione meridionale" (109) is taking place. We may also be able to infer from this dramatic scene change that what Bellodi's investigation has uncovered is indirectly affecting the parliamentary discourse (108-09). The events taking place in the town of S., having reached Parliament, are now digressing into calls for a full investigation or government involvement (110). To wit, the undersecretary states: "…il governo non vedeva, nella situazione dell'ordine pubblico in Sicilia, motivo di particolare preoccupazione" (111). The chamber breaks out into shouting and protestations from the Left and accusations from the Right (111). As in 1876, the Left – in Sciascia's narrative – uses the mafia as a tool to denigrate the political and social platform of the opposing party composed, primarily, of southerners and Sicilians. The end result of these debates is reflective of the political history of the post-Risorgimento period: "…,che membri del Parlamento o addirittura del governo, avessero il sia pur minimo rapporto con elementi della cosidetta mafia: la quale, ad opinione del governo, non esisteva…" (111).

The exchange between Captain Bellodi and don Mariano is significant on the comparative level. Here we have the outsider, Bellodi, whose almost blind trust in the incorruptibility of law now encounters a regionally specific reality whose sphere of influence straddles notions of the licit and illicit. Just as when Bellodi's forebears arrived in 1860, the state's efficacy in asserting itself hinges on the cooperation of local interests and powers that

often do not have the best interests of the state at heart. The history of the state in pre-Unification

Sicily is one of forceful application of the national law at whatever cost and has included

collusion with social fringe elements termed mafia. If the seemingly incorruptible state can

manipulate social elements to its advantage, why should it be different for the citizenry? This is

of critical importance to our study of the phenomenon of organized crime in Sicily during the

1860s and beyond, pointing to the political and social hypocrisy of certain offices of the state in

their ability to utilize the protectionist services of organized criminals to further the state agenda

and allow the continued privileging of the landed classes, all the while, decrying the presence of

organized crime and scapegoating an anomalous entity called mafia for the social and economic

ills that it itself helped create. The resulting effect is the emergent notion according to which a

singular entity known as the mafia is responsible for social and economic upheavals in Sicily

from the 1860s onwards. Rather than seeing what the organized crime actually is – a restricted

pool of participants whose interests are a melding of licit and illicit activities reacting to the

socio-economic conditions of a given society – we have a popularly held idea that a monolithic,

criminal enterprise known as the mafia controls all illegal activities in Sicily. Within the context

of Sicily, we have seen that the Risorgimento and the establishment of the new state of Italy

provided optimal conditions for a type of organized crime to form and expand throughout social

and economic spheres of the new nation. Likewise, we will see that the social history of the

Italians in America begins where the previous section ends in the 1880s. The following sections

will track the southern Italian as he immigrates to America and the socio-economic conditions

that he encounters upon arrival. What is more, we will examine the ways in which the American

government's collusion with or indifference to certain social forces molded the Italian experience

in America, to the extent that organized crime would slowly but effectively become synonymous with Italian ethnicity.

<u>The Genesis of the Italian American: Immigration and the Rise of Italian Difference</u>

To begin our examination of the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century America to which millions of Italians immigrated, we will examine the reception and the perception of the Italian immigrants and the outside influences that informed them. How and where did they live and how can this be viewed as a function of social conditioning? As we discussed in the previous chapter, Italian life in America was one of total social realignment. What we see from the very beginning of the Italian immigrant experience is the agrarian lifestyle disintegrating in the face of industrial labor opportunities. As Jerre Mangione and Ben Morreale describe in their authoritarian history, *La Storia: Five Centuries of the Italian American Experience* (1992):

> In their search for a land where they could 'live by toil', the emigrants first restricted their travel to European countries…When yellow fever epidemic in Brazil killed more than nine thousand Italians, the emigrants changed their primary destination to North America, mainly the United States, where cheap labor was greatly in demand. (33)

Donna Gabaccia in her study avers that the decision to emigrate is in direct correlation to unfulfilled social and economic aspirations: "Migration, like voluntary association, was a socially organized process. And in Sicily, people chose not one form or the other, but tended to experiment simultaneously with both responses when faced with economic difficulties" (55).[61] We know that Italians came in search of economic advancement and that they faced an incredible degree of prejudice directed against them by the American populace. We need only look to Salvatore LaGumina's study, *Wop! A Documentary History of Anti-Italian Discrimination* (1973), to see several examples of American prejudices and stereotypes of Italian immigrants that were taken from stereotypes generated during the 1850s and the years immediately preceding Italian Unification (11-13; 23). Depictions of Italian immigrants and nativists' attitudes towards them were based almost exclusively on a position of ethnic

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[61] Gabaccia is referring to migratory labor where the individual would work for a given period of time outside of his home village/region and emigration in search of steadier work.

difference, their outward appearance akin to the newly freed African American slaves. A growing percentage of the population from the 1880s to 1924 was increasingly of southern European origins, specifically Italians and eastern European Jews. At the turn of the nineteenth century, America was rapidly developing into an ethnically plural society, one in which the presence of the ethnic "other" was determined to be opposed to American conceptions of social acceptability. David Richards' study, *Italian American: The Racializing of an Ethnic Identity* (1999), highlights this point:

> These groups were a target of American racial anxiety because their growing presence raised precisely the kinds of questions about legitimate cultural difference and moral pluralism (including, in the case of Italians and Jews, religion, language, history, and lifestyle) that challenged the terms of the racist orthodoxy that had been formed and sustained… on the basis of religious and then cultural degradation of African Americans and others; Italian Americans and Jews, like African Americans before them, were scapegoats of Americans' self-doubt about their liberal nationalism. (172-73)

The marginal social position of the Italian immigrant was furthered by his perceived clannishness in that he tended to congregate around specific neighborhoods inhabited primarily by Italians from the same region or town.[62] This fact is reinforced by the dominant culture's disapproval of intermingling and dealing with other ethnic or racial groups.[63] Because of nineteenth- and twentieth-century cultural mores, the Italians' questionable ethnic and racial status – hovering just barely above that of African Americans – would serve as a rationale for continued marginalization and violence directed towards immigrants.[64] What we will see is a systematic denigration of Italian immigrants to the extent that, as a result, the stereotype of criminality which had long been associated with southern Italian ethnicity would become the institutional paradigm for American organized crime. Let us continue by briefly looking at some

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[62] See Gabaccia, 81-83; Mangione and Morreale, 130-34; Iorizzo and Mondello, 77-79.

[63] See Richards, 173.

[64] See Borsella, 52-88.

of the stereotypes and ethnic generalizations that were applied to Italian Americans, specifically

that of the mafia.

As Luciano Iorizzo and Salvatore Mondello describe in their history, *Italian Americans*

(2006), the association with criminality and the mafia began as soon as Italians began arriving en

masse in the 1880s: "As early as 1888 the *Chicago Tribune* argued somewhat startlingly that

Chicago must have a Mafia because where there are Sicilians there is also a Mafia: and since

many Italians in Chicago were Sicilians, Chicago had a Mafia" (189). Four years earlier, as

Salvatore LaGumina shows, the *New York Times* ran an article in which the Neapolitan

provinces were singled out as particularly criminal, as brigandage was still a common practice:

> The case of Italian brigandage in Second-avenue seems to have startled timid people.
> Why should we not have Italian brigands? We have in this City some thirty thousand
> Italians, nearly all of whom came from the old Neapolitan Provinces, where, until
> recently, brigandage was the national industry. It is not strange that these immigrants
> should bring with them a fondness for their native pursuits. (qtd. in LaGumina 63)

Much in the same fashion as in pre- and post-Unfication Italy, the southern Italian immigrant's

person would quickly be associated with intrinsic criminality in the American press and popular

opinion. Cristogianni Borsella in his 2005 study, *On Persecution, Identity, & Activism: Aspects*

of the Italian-American Experience From the Late 19th Century to Today, expands this point:

> Criminality was another issue used by nativists to bash immigrants. Racist cartoons
> surfaced in major newspapers, depicting boatloads of Italian 'desperadoes' eagerly
> awaiting entry into the United States so they could begin their dirty work…New exotic
> terms like 'the Mafia' and 'Black Hand' made headlines. The fact that Italian criminal
> organizations existed cannot be disputed…; however, media sensationalism has
> historically blown Italian criminality out of proportion and has found a popular scapegoat
> in Italians. (46)

In his foundational work, *From Wiseguys to Wisemen: The Gangster and Italian American*

Masculinities (2006), Fred Gardaphé elaborates on this point: "Society needs a figure that can

represent fringe behavior against which the mainstream can formulate its values and identity.

The Mafia myth has thus served an important function in American society in defining both what

is and is not American…" (9). So if the dominant culture's appraisal of the Italian immigrant is true – that organized crime began with the Italians – then crime within the immigrant enclaves would have been rampant; moreover, there would be no evidence of organized crime in America prior to the arrival of southern Italian immigrants in the 1880s. Let us consider each point separately to see if the popular opinion holds water.

Returning to pre-emigration southern Italy, we know that the peasantry was not accustomed to turning to the institutions of the state for protection or aid, as the state was often the means of social and economic oppression. The vast majority of immigrants to America during this period were characteristically insular groups, relying on bonds forged through social and familial ties. Cristogianni Borsella tells us that, with regard to the immigrant's attitude towards his new social reality: "…, they (the immigrants) were both ignorant and fearful of the law in this new land, so they did not attempt to inquire about legal options open to them to improve their situation" (42). Borsella continues by saying that as a result of this attitude, the prototype for the Italian immigrant is one who sacrifices life and limb for pay, achieving the financial goals preordained at the beginning of the immigrant journey (42-43) and that these immigrants were overwhelmingly law abiding (43). So we know that Italian immigrants were as afraid of the greater part of American society as it was of the immigrant. Because of the immigrant's reticence to involve the agencies of the state in their domestic affairs, any type of crime that occurred within a given community of Italians was directed against Italians and by Italians, as Iorizzo and Mondello have pointed out (206-08). The racializing of crime in America's urban centers follows a reactionary pattern. By looking at the growing urban populations of the rapidly industrializing northeast, Americans often saw a link between those who did not resemble themselves and cultural deficiency. If Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic races are

the exempla of civilized, well-ordered societies, then clearly those who do not fit that profile are suspect of all manner of social perversities.

It would appear that America has, since its beginning, harbored somewhat mixed feelings when it comes to criminality, and the existence of organized crime in America prior to the arrival of Italian immigrants is well-documented. American attitudes concerning crime, organized or not, are dynamic and consistently contradictory. Let us first take for an example what Iorizzo and Mondello have described in their history, citing the example of Jesse James:

> Organized crime in America was beginning to take shape before the masses of Italians came to the United States. In rural and urban America,…, crime was taking on characteristics which Americans would associate with organized crime in the twentieth century. Jesse James…proved that crime paid –specifically, crime that had the support of citizens and that could even on occasion elicit the sympathy and support of its victims…Underlying the James's saga is the American's love for the underdog and, ironically, their desire for justice. They could justify the criminal career of the Jameses by claiming that some incident in the Civil War drove them into a life of crime. Whatever gains Jesse made through criminal acts went to balance the real or imagined injustices forced upon him by society. (184)

Dennis Kenney and James Finckenauer, in their study *Organized Crime in America* (1995), demonstrate that organized crime had existed in the Americas prior to the War of Independence in the form of piracy (56-57). What is also underlined by Kenney and Finckenauer is the complicity of the colonists with the pirates. As access to luxury goods came at a steep price, colonists found pirated goods to be much more affordable (60). Turning to the nineteenth century and focusing on the mid-century influx of Irish immigrants, Kenney and Finckenauer hold that, because of its industrialization, urban New York City became a powder keg of criminal and legitimate activities: "The entrepreneurial center of the nation, New York was the gateway for immigrants in search of various freedoms…As the launching point for commerce, the city also became the center for conspiracies, and a magnet for con-men, crooks, and criminals" (72). Tracing the development of organized bands of criminals beginning in the 1830s, Kenney and

Finckenauer show that – in as much as immigrants participated in organized crime – there was

also a significant portion of the nativist, New York population that was involved:

> South of the Bowery to the waterfront lay the city's Fourth Ward. It was here that gangs, including the Daybreak Boys, the Swamp Angels, and the Slaughter Housers, systematically robbed passersby from saloons…The Daybreak Boys… were especially vicious; the police claimed each member to be a cold, professional killer. From 1850 to 1852, this gang was credited with 20 known murders and the theft of at least $100,000 in property…According to an 1850s police report, however, the end of the Daybreak Boys left at least 50 gangs roaming the Fourth Ward…By the time the chief's report was issued, the gangs had become a normal part of New York life. South from what is now Houston Street, no portion of the city was free from them. (76)

As we have briefly described, the presence of organized crime in America did not start with

Italian immigrants and we can no longer attribute organized crime strictly to one ethnic group or

race; rather, we must ascribe to organized crime the elements that allow for crime to take place,

those being the absence of a juridical authority or the corruption thereof and the demand for

services or products that are denied to the general population because of socially prescribed and

accepted mores. Going forward, we will keep this understanding of the forces that enable

organized crime to thrive and how Italian immigration coincided with a social movement

towards federally enforced temperance. Considering the history of American Prohibition and the

social ramifications of the 1919 Volstead Act, the following section will assert that the

enactment of Prohibition in 1920 and the adoption of the National Quota System in 1924 sowed

the seeds of organized crime in the American consciousness and its seemingly Italian American

accent.

Prohibition and The Rise of Organized Crime in America

Fred Gardaphé begins his study of gangsterism by recalling a theme we have previously examined in the context of post-Risorgimento Sicily, that of socio-political upheaval as the root cause of organized crime: "The gangster emerged in response to the evolution of corporate capitalism in the early twentieth century. Although criminal gangs had long occupied American cities, the Prohibition Act of 1920 and the desperate poverty brought on by the Great Depression in the 1930s provided opportunities for individual crime leaders to emerge and thrive" (3). The focus of the following pages will be primarily on the Volstead Act of 1919 and the adoption of Prohibition as the law of the land in 1920. We will examine George De Stefano's assertion that Prohibition was a means of social control, directed primarily at the immigrant. The Volstead Act, therefore, was a nativist response to the immigrant's perceived difference. This period in American history has significant parallels with post-Unification Sicily, as in both examples we see a government response to a perceived social problem that was inadequate and compromised. The socio-economic implications of the Volstead Act are numerous and the pages that follow will treat two aspects of this premise: the relationship between American temperance and the National Quota System of 1924 and the rise of organized crime during the Prohibition years. Furthermore, we will demonstrate that because of the social upheaval caused by Prohibition and America's ambiguous attitudes regarding organized crime in the early twentieth century, the gangster would come to occupy a privileged social status. The Prohibition years would show that crime did indeed pay and that it was not strictly an ethnic business.

George De Stefano, in his 2006 work *An Offer We Can't Refuse: The Mafia in the Mind of America*, holds that the Volstead Act was not solely a matter of temperance, but a coalescence of American attitudes towards alcohol consumption and low worker productivity: "Prohibition

was rooted in the emerging philosophies of Taylorism, with its emphasis on worker efficiency,

scientific management, and social engineering, all of which were intended 'to rationalize not

only work but the laborers themselves'" (75). As discussed previously, the Italian immigrant

occupied a marginalized social space; what's more, the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture of the late

nineteenth and early twentieth century was deeply troubled by the Italian's cultural mores and

physical characteristics which, when combined, linked Italians with African Americans as

socially dangerous. The temperance movement and its success had its roots in nativist attitudes

regarding the immigrant's drinking habits (Kenney and Finckenauer 141). In addition to the

immigrant's drinking habits, Kenney and Finckenauer address the issue of Prohibition from a

social perspective. As the Industrial Revolution urbanized parts of America, a shift in lifestyle

occurred, from agricultural zones to urban ones. The effect that this transition had on the worker

psyche, accordingly, was substantial:

> New York, Chicago, and most of the rest of the country experienced rapid economic development and modernization during the 19th century…Inevitably, family life too changed as work places and homelife grew increasingly separate and an economy based on wages emerged…In this more modern economy, alcohol, which had mattered little before, had the potential to become a serious problem. (145)

They go on to say that from the mid-nineteenth century until 1919, attitudes of the American

middle class – those who owned private businesses or factories – became increasingly concerned

with worker productivity and their increase in alcohol consumption due to the stresses of new

labor conditions (145-46). Italians, as George De Stefano points out, were an example of that

which temperance adherents would like most to reform: "WASP elite opinion viewed Italians as

wine drinkers who were lawless by nature, as well as clannish and uncouth" (76).[65] It is

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[65] George De Stefano quotes Jonathan Munby's *Public Enemy* saying: "If, as Jonathan Munby claims, Prohibition 'was an attempt to control the new consumer culture [generated by modern industrial capitalism] in terms of the puritan ethic,' Italian immigrants were most in need of such regulation" (76).

interesting that during the lead-up to the Volstead Act there was a corresponding rise in anti-immigrant, nativist sentiment specifically directed against Italians. Cristogianni Borsella states:

> The overall discrimination Italians were subjected to was incredible. During the thirty years their immigration was strongest (1890s to 1920s) it seemed that no Italian could advance in society and that the entire group was doomed to remain an inferior caste…Police brutality at this time was rampant, and consequently Italian deaths were all too frequent. Once again, Italian lives were cheaply valued. It was said, 'An Italian was not an Italian. He was a wop, dago, duke, gin, tally, ghini…' (50)

These attitudes are also reflected throughout LaGumina's documentary.[66] As the temperance movement gained ground, the pressure to create sweeping social policy rose.[67] In January of 1920, the Volstead Act officially became the Eighteenth Amendment, prohibiting alcohol and criminalizing its consumption. Anglo-Saxon hegemonic social dominance would now turn its attention to the question of immigrants and the adoption of the National Quota System in 1924, effectively ending Italian immigration to the United States.[68] As a result, the Prohibition period was one in which institutionalized prejudice and social policy attempted to reform a society which, to the American nativist, no longer bore a resemblance to the Anglo-Saxon cultural and racial purity of yore. In associating alcohol consumption with anti-American behavior, the Protestant majority of the early twentieth century enforced a social construct that either totally ignored the immigrant or viewed him as a problem to be solved. In the section that follows, we will examine the rise of organized crime during Prohibition, paying specific attention to the ethnic and social background of well-known criminals during this period.

Returning to Gardaphé's thoughts on the rise of the gangster in the popular American consciousness, we are to understand that socio-economic conditions of the 1920s and 1930s played a determining role in America's perception of gangsters: "As corporate capitalism

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[66] See LaGumina, 139-62.

[67] See Kenney and Finckenauer, 147-49.

[68] See Mangione and Morreale, 33.

promoted consumerism and widened the gap between rich and poor, Americans became

infatuated with the gangster, a man of humble origins who affected stylish dress and fancy cars,

defying the boundaries separating social classes" (4). He goes on to say, referring to the Volstead

Act: "This created a ripe opportunity for smart street thugs to thrive in the resulting black

market" (4). The Eighteenth Amendment, though outlawing the sale of alcohol, did not curtail

American demand; moreover, Prohibition's federally imposed temperance was seen as a

government overreach, confronting conceptions of American liberty and individualism. Kenney

and Finckenauer elaborate further:

> Hostility toward statism and a commitment to limited government were equally felt.
> Inevitably, these two forces collided as government expanded its powers to enforce its
> new constitutional mandate. Many Americans, including some who had initially favored
> eliminating alcohol, came to resent the law as applied, reasoning that it was at once
> ineffectual as well as an excessive intrusion into private matters. (158)

Into this scenario, as Iorizzo and Mondello attest, entered the gangster, the "organized" criminal:

> …Prohibition provided a golden opportunity for organized crime. Building on the
> traditional profits from gambling and vice, criminals amassed enormous surpluses from
> liquor and expanded into legal as well as other illegal activities. Moving alcohol around
> the country, they also seized the opportunity to expand their geographic territories and
> form a loose confederation on a national basis. Friendship, a foundation of the local
> interrelationship between criminals and the straight community, gave way to cash and
> more formal, businesslike relations. (195)

The following section will respond to the questions as to how organized crime was able to

expand across social strata and in what ways local and regional arms of the federal government

were complicit in abetting known criminals whose stock in trade was crimes of vice, primarily

gambling and bootlegging.

As Iorizzo and Mondello aver: "With the encouragement of the public and with the

frequent cooperation of local officials, gangs in the 1920s attained power and wealth never

reached by their counterparts in the nineteenth century. Their leaders in the 1920s mirror the

dominant immigrant groups in the nation: Dutch Shultz, Big Bill Dwyer,…" (190). Kenney and

Finckenauer also demonstrate this point:

> Four national commissioners of the Prohibition Bureau were hired during the first five years, while the New York City office was administered by four different men in the first 13 months. During the first three years, both New York and Pennsylvania had their state directors indicted for conspiracy. In the Pennsylvania case, T. Henry Walnut, the Assistant U.S. Attorney for Philadelphia, attempted to act as early as 1921 on evidence that the state's first prohibition director was conspiring to illegally withdraw 700,000 gallons of stored whiskey. (153)

On the local and regional level it was the police that often turned a blind eye to bootlegging,

receiving in return handsome payments. Referring to agents of the Prohibition bureau, Kenney

and Finckenauer state: "Ten days after the 18th Amendment's enactment, three Chicago agents

were indicted for accepting bribes and selling seized liquor back to bootleggers. Two weeks

later, two others were arrested in Baltimore on similar grounds. By the end of 1921, more than a

hundred agents were dismissed in New York…" (153). A collaborative effort that reached the

highest levels of government and society, those opposed to Prohibition and the organized

criminal syndicates that supplied the alcohol were a mixed composition of ethnic Americans and

native, Anglo-Saxon elements.[69] In the same vein as the rise of Sicilian organized crime,

American organized crime was a reaction to a federal misstep; that the unsuccessful enforcement

of Prohibition's laws of social control allowed a fringe element to emerge. Organized crime,

therefore, is the end result of the intermarriage of popular public sentiment and financial

opportunity; a capitalist venture that received political and public support. We will now turn our

attention towards the persistent stereotype of the Italian as the consummate criminal. As we will

see, this association will be crystallized during the 1950s and 1960s when criminality becomes

an identifiable cultural marker of Italian ethnicity.

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[69] See De Stafano, 55-56.

Let us begin with George De Stefano, who gives us a concise historical frame for our analysis:

> At the end of 1950 and early in 1951, some 20 to 30 million Americans interrupted their normal routines to watch a real-life police lineup on television. The Special Committee to Investigate Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce,…,was in business, and during its televised hearings at Foley Square in Manhattan, organized crime figures, hit men, and corrupt politicians appeared before the committee to testify about a nationwide criminal conspiracy called the mafia…The Kefauver committee produced a report with numerous alarming claims about Italian American organized crime…The committee was convinced that there existed a 'phantom government' of the underworld which 'enforces its own law, carries out its own executions and not only ignores but abhors the democratic process of justice which are [*sic*] held to be the safeguards of the American citizen'. (40-41)

Gardaphé has noted that it is during this period that the systematic linking of organized criminality with Italian-ness found its most receptive audience (xiii). We have seen in the previous chapter and within this chapter that southern Italian identity both within the nation of Italy and in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America has largely been understood as an archaic culture with a penchant for violence.[70] This had been the narrative prior to and after Unification and it was taken up again when southern Italians began immigrating to America en masse in the 1880s. Because of this experience it was an efficacious way of killing two birds with one stone: On the one hand, you completely stereotype and scapegoat an entire ethnic group for American organized crime, distancing even further the Italian American from the American mainstream. On the other, the American public is able to identify the shadowy criminals who control organized crime in the United States, in a sense absolving the greater society from its complicity with known criminals during the Prohibition years. Kenney and Finckenauer underline this point:

> The existence of the Mafia helps resolve the 'unwelcome contradiction' between our straight-laced conventional morality on the one hand and our desire for the 'forbidden fruits' on the other,…These forbidden fruits include drugs, gambling, and sex. In other words, we are not hypocrites but are instead the victims of an alien, sinister force…We

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[70] For an interesting parallel, see Thomas Ferraro's, *Feeling Italian: The Art of Ethnicity in America* (2005), and his chapter on the case of Maria Barbella, the first woman ever to receive the death penalty in America in 1890, 9-27.

> prefer to believe that organized crime is being imposed upon American society by a group of immoral men engaged in an alien conspiracy rather than that it is simply an indigenous product of the way American society operates –and the result of our own human weaknesses. (235)

The findings attributed to the Kefauver and the McClellan committees of the 1950s and 1960s are misleading at best. While these committees did find that organized crime existed and that Italians were indeed involved, they failed to get past the presence of Italians. The use of terms like *mafia* and *cosa nostra* peppered the committees' inquiries, which stands as a seeming attempt to exclude other ethnicities from the underworld of organized crime.[71] It is the Italian American who is understood to be the inspiration and the power behind organized crime in America. But as Iorizzo and Mondello point out, the structure of organized crime is clearly more complex and politically potent:

> The trouble with the conspiratorial view expressed by Kefauver is that it turns organized crime on its head. It leads Americans to believe that these criminals get away with things because they are tough, ruthless, murdering thugs who control the police, politicians, etc. This is at odds with the reality of organized crime. Criminals and straight citizens band together for mutual enrichment under the ever-watchful and usually protective eye of officialdom. (200)

George De Stefano's thoughts end our exposition here. Examining the evidence and findings of the Kefauver committee, De Stefano holds: "The committee had different evidentiary standards than that of a trial…and was allowed to accept hearsay evidence…The committee failed to produce irrefutable evidence that there indeed existed an organization called the mafia…" (41).[72]

So, in conclusion, if organized crime in America is a social response to market demand, then it cannot simply be an Italian American enterprise. The fact that the federal government chose to investigate strictly Italian criminals is a matter of debate. What is not in question is that there has been and there will continue to be organized crime in America: Where there is the

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[71] This is in reference to Joe Valachi's famous testimony during the McClellan inquiry (De Stefano 43-46).

[72] See also Kenney and Finckenauer, 234-36.

prospect of money to be made, enterprising individuals will always be there to cash in on an opportunity. What we cannot say is that Italian Americans have a monopoly on organized crime. In keeping with our previous analyses, organized crime developed in tandem with socio-economic change in both Sicily and the United States. In both instances we are exposed to a collaboration on the part of compromised representatives of the dominant social force to subvert the aims of the very government they epitomize. We have seen that organized crime is predominantly a capitalist enterprise, seeking new financial ventures, investing in legal and illegal activities. We know how, through our reading of *Il giorno della civetta*, Sciascia's narrative reflected the social history of Italian Unification in Sicily. Now, as we have looked at Prohibition-era America, we will examine Mario Puzo's 1969 *The Godfather* and draw historical comparisons and also reflections on life as an immigrant. As we will see, *The Godfather* is more than a simple narrative treating a criminal family; it is an idealized vision, based largely on the reputation and mythology of Italian organized crime in the 1950s and 1960s. Puzo's work gives one of the most lasting archetypes of American criminality that is somewhere between a paternal guardian and social pariah. The Corleone family and Don Corleone in particular have come to represent for most Americans the face of organized crime; the perception of a criminal family bound together by the highest ideals of honor, respect, and loyalty. It is precisely because of these culturally emphasized elements that Puzo's novel resonates that much louder with his reader. The end result of Italian immigration, criminal ascendancy during Prohibition, and control of vice operations, Don Corleone is the personification of twentieth-century American social history.

Puzo's *The Godfather* centers on the Corleone family and its patriarch, Vito Corleone. Due to the success of the novel and the subsequent film franchise, Don Corleone, otherwise

known as the *Godfather*, has become an American icon. Following in the footsteps of Jesse

James, Bonnie and Clyde, and Al Capone, Don Corleone gives us an image of American

criminality removed from conventions regarding lawlessness. How can this be so? What is it

about these individuals – Don Corleone specifically – that elicits such admiration and conflicting

views on crime? We assert that it is Don Corleone's multifaceted appeal as a uniquely American

character that makes him an enduring representation of twentieth-century capitalism and the

immigrant's drive to succeed. In basing his criminal enterprise on values common to the

immigrant experience and incorporating American business practices, Don Corleone and the

Corleone family typify western Sicilian social mores concerning their views on kinship and

family. Don Corleone accrued influence by rewarding a network of *compari* (kinsmen). This

system is obviously reminiscent of the history we have previously discussed concerning Sicily in

the nineteenth century. What makes Don Corleone uniquely American is that he personifies the

ambiguous attitude of the American public vis-à-vis organized crime: Why wouldn't you want a

Don Corleone operating in America? Puzo begins his description of Don Corleone thusly:

> Don Corleone was a man to whom everybody came for help, and never were they
> disappointed. He made no empty promises…It was not necessary that he be your friend,
> it was not even important that you had no means to repay him. Only one thing was
> required. That you, *you yourself*, proclaim your friendship. And then, no matter how poor
> or powerless the supplicant, Don Corleone would take that man's troubles to his heart.
> And he would let nothing stand in the way to a solution of that man's woe. (11)

From the beginning of the novel, we know that Don Corleone's sphere of influence is broad;

from the courtroom and Amerigo Buonasera (7-8), the baker Nazorine (10-11), and the crooner

Johnny Fontane (8-10), we can infer that Don Corleone's business is somewhere between

Hollywood agent and getting even. And yet these separate scenes culminate in a description of

what is seemingly a kindly, older gentleman who ostensibly places a great deal of importance on

interpersonal relationships.[73] Here we have an innocuous person like Don Corleone who will, throughout the novel, call into question American attitudes toward organized crime. Time and again, we will see the historical discourse we have engaged previously regarding Sicilian organized crime and its relationship with the state reappear within Puzo's text. What sets the gangster or *mafioso* apart in both the American and Sicilian context is that he is not necessarily viewed as a criminal, though his activities may be illicit; that the real criminals are the other guys, the murderers, rapists, etc.. For the American reader, we can almost sense that Don Corleone employed the Protestant work ethic and, melding this with his own culturally informed ethos, formed a particularly American archetype for a gangster. The characteristics of Don Corleone and his beliefs in family, as we will see, are easily accessible to most readers and to an American audience that much more so. Cultural mores that have often been interlaced with American patriotism, things like honor, loyalty, duty, etc., have long been associated not only with organized crime but with the Italian American population in general. These factors, placed in the crucible of comparative American and Sicilian social history, have produced characters that continue to elicit fascination and admiration on the part of American public. To this end, let us begin by examining what type of man Don Corleone is, who his friends are, and how he got to this point.

Puzo's novel begins at the wedding of Costanzia Corleone, the daughter of Don Corleone. We know that this is set in the post-war period, just after the Japanese surrendered and Don Corleone sees the need for a "momentous occasion" (11). Puzo goes on to say that every person, from waiter to honored guest, was an acquaintance of either Don Corleone or his children (12). Don Corleone "…received everyone –rich and poor, powerful and humble- with

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[73] George De Stefano's book has an interesting chapter in which he compares his own grandfather with Don Corleone, drawing on comparative Italian American theories of masculinity and asserting that ‒ much like a father figure ‒ Don Corleone is somebody that any American would like to have in his family (95-135).

an equal show of love. He slighted no one. That was his character" (12). We quickly learn of his

children: Sonny, the hothead primogenitor whose fiery temper is a visible roadblock to his future

success in the "family business" (12-13); Fredo, the weak-minded, ever dutiful son (13); and

finally Michael, described as being the only son to "refuse the great man's direction" (12) and

the only son to go to an American college, enlist, and fight in WWII (13-14). Don Corleone's

description is rounded out by an interesting final thought: "He had long ago learned that society

imposes insults that must be borne, comforted by the knowledge that in this world there comes a

time when the most humble of men, if he keeps his eyes open, can take his revenge on the most

powerful" (15). At this point, the reader does not know in what line of work is Don Corleone. All

we have are separate pieces that are interconnected by their relationship to Don Corleone. The

Corleone family business will become much clearer as we look at the exchange between Don

Corleone and Amerigo Buonasera.

One of Don Corleone's main activities is the cultivation of personal relationships;

moreover, Don Corleone is not a man who is easily dissuaded from securing that which has been

asked of him. Considering the tenor of the day, one in which many of the wedding's attendees

are there to ask favors of Don Corleone (22), we are to understand that by going to Don

Corleone, Amerigo Buonasera obviously has something to ask of Vito Corleone and it may have

something to do with his presence, at the beginning of the novel, in court.[74] Laying the

framework of the conversation that is to come, Puzo gives his reader yet another glance into the

person of Don Corleone and the extent of his influence. Nazorine, the baker and lifelong friend

of Don Corleone, comes to request that Don Corleone, for a price, aid him in his effort to have an

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[74] The scene in question is the sentencing phase of an as-yet unknown trial. Amerigo Buonasera sits in court listening to the judge pronounce sentence on two young men who are understood to be American: "The two young men, glossy crew cut, scrubbed clean-cut faces…" (7) and who have committed sexual assault against Buonasera's daughter. The suspended sentenced issued by the judge (7) prompts Buonasera to say: "For justice we must go on our knees to Don Corleone" (8).

Italian prisoner of war naturalized so that he may marry his daughter (18-19). Don Corleone

explains to Nazorine that such thing would require a special act of Congress and that it would

cost money but, says Don Corleone: "My dear friend, put all your worries aside" (18). For a

mere two-thousand dollars, Nazorine is able to achieve what is seemingly an extraordinary task.

Not so for Don Corleone: "He, Don Corleone, would guarantee performance and accept

payment" (19). It is noted that Don Corleone has several congressional options, both Italians and

Jews (19). From this point forward, we know that Don Corleone is both a humble and quite

influential man. Now, as Amerigo Buonasera comes to call on Don Corleone, we will see the

fullness of Vito Corleone's authority and how Don Corleone exercises that power. Very much in

keeping with a nineteenth-century Sicilian example, Vito Corleone personifies an idealized and

hyper-moralized *man of honor*.[75]

Puzo describes the reception of Buonasera in the coolest of terms; it was the only time

that day that Don Corleone did not embrace or shake hands with his guest (25). We discover that

Mrs. Corleone is godmother to Buonasera's daughter but that Buonasera never elected to call

Don Corleone *Godfather*, a sign of disrespect (25). So we can already tell that there is palpable

tension between the two men, one a legitimate businessman (an undertaker) and the other, still

undefined. Buonasera begins his monologue by underlining something that both men would

agree to: "I believe in America. America has made my fortune" (25). Whether or not this is a sly

comment made to distinguish himself from someone like Don Corleone remains to be seen, but

what becomes clear is that Buonasera believed that American jurisprudence applied to all,

immigrant and native alike. Describing his daughter's brutal assault (25), his filing charges with

the police (26), and the suspended sentence that his daughter's attackers received (26),

Buonasera reveals that he came today to ask for justice (26). We can only infer what his meaning

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[75] See Dickie, 12.

is at this point, but we can plainly see that the man asking for said justice is currently

disillusioned with the justice he received from the American judicial process. Underlining what

Sciascia had termed the juridical character of the Sicilian psyche, Buonasera typifies an

understanding of law and justice that is characteristic of the nineteenth-century Sicilian social

order. Don Corleone asks Buonasera: "Why did you go to the police? Why didn't you come to

me at the beginning of this affair?" (26). Buonasera implores Don Corleone: "What do you want

of me? Tell me what you wish. But do what I beg you to do" (26). Again, we can only infer what

Buonasera came to ask of Don Corleone but it was probably homicide, as Don Corleone

responds: "That I cannot do. You are being carried away" (26). Based on everything that we

know so far of Vito Corleone, Buonasera's words must have cut like a knife: "I will pay you

anything you ask" (26). The following monologue of Don Corleone's gives us another glimpse

into the man who is known as *Godfather*:

> We have known each other many years you and I…but until this day you never came to
> me for counsel or help. I can't remember the last time you invited me to your house for
> coffee though my wife is godmother to your only child. Let us be frank. You spurred my
> friendship. You feared to be in my debt…You found America a paradise. You had a good
> trade, you made a good living, you thought the world a harmless place where you could
> take your pleasure as you willed. You never armed yourself with true friends. After all,
> the police guarded you, there were courts of law, you and yours could come to no harm.
> You did not need Don Corleone…Now you come to me and say 'Don Corleone give me
> justice.' And you do not ask with respect. You do not offer me your friendship. You
> come into my home on the bridal day of my daughter and you ask me to do murder and
> you say –'I will pay you anything.' No, no, I am not offended, but what have I ever done
> to make you treat me disrespectfully? (26-27)

Buonasera continues pleading with Don Corleone, saying: "America has been good to me. I

wanted to be a good citizen. I wanted my child to be American" (27). Don Corleone responds:

"Well spoken. Very fine. Then you have nothing to complain about. The judge has ruled.

America has ruled" (27). Buonasera continues, begging for justice (27) and Don Corleone asks

what type of justice he is seeking: "An eye for an eye," responds Buonasera (27). Don

Corleone's answer is striking: "You asked for more…Your daughter is alive" (27). Don

Corleone lectures Buonasera, saying that he has made his choice and he is to deal with a state

that is as criminal as Don Corleone is, seemingly: "You accept judgment from a judge who sells

himself like the worst whore in the streets" (27). In the end, Don Corleone only asks for

friendship and payment in the form of a future service for him at an unspecified date, one that

may never even come (28). Buonasera relents and asks for Don Corleone's friendship,

succumbing to his own desires for a culturally understood justice (28). In this interaction, what

makes Don Corleone's character enduring, is that he is not like other "criminals;" he is decidedly

paternalistic, harkening back to various forms of feudal and *latifondo*-style social patterns. Vito

Corleone is not simply a man of considerable influence whose intervention can effectuate any

outcome desired, not a feared man with a violent reputation, but a steadfastly loyal friend and

benefactor whose unbounded generosity has accrued widespread admiration and respect. This is

the character of the man himself. We will see further examples later in this section. For now, let

us turn to Don Corleone's friends and what the true nature of the Corleone family business is.

Vito Corleone bridges for our study here the great Atlantic divide, a man of nineteenth-

century Sicily within the post-war America of the 1940s. The reader is not brought into the

personal history of Don Corleone until almost two-hundred pages into the novel. Up until this

point, we only know that Don Corleone, as a businessman, has interests in real estate, olive oil

importing, and a construction company (60). Until now, we have only seen Don Corleone in his

paternal capacity, listening to and resolving certain problems for the members of his extended

family network. Now, towards the mid-point of the narrative and in taking up the storyline of

Johnny Fontane, we see the full force of the man Vito Corleone. In a scene that was made

memorable by the Francis Ford Coppola film version of *The Godfather*, Jack Woltz, acclaimed

Hollywood producer, discovers that he is not beyond the reach of Don Corleone. Awakening in his majestic bedroom, Woltz finds the severed head of his six-hundred thousand dollar horse (61-62). This particular scene and the Sallozzo meeting combined give us a glimpse into what type of family business Don Corleone runs. Let us put this aside for the moment and turn back to Vito Corleone's life before emigrating to America and how he came to accrue such influence.

Puzo begins his retelling of Vito Corleone's childhood by saying that he was born Vito Andolini but, upon immigrating, changed his name to Corleone after the town of his birth (183). An interesting choice, as the town itself is in the traditional heartland outside of the Conca d'Oro around Palermo where organized crime in Sicily had its strongest roots in the nineteenth century.[76] We learn that Vito Andolini was forced to flee to America when his father ran afoul of the local mafia chieftain. The young Vito, whose own life was wanted by the mafia chieftain in retaliation for Vito's father's slight, left his birthplace never to return (183). Immigrating to Hell's Kitchen, Vito Corleone begins his life in America working in a local grocery of the Abbandando family. Vito then marries, has children of his own (183-84), a typical immigrant scenario: urban New York teeming with new Italian immigrants. Into this background Puzo adds the specter of Fanucci, a man "reputed to be of the 'Black Hand,' an offshoot of the Mafia which extorted money from families and storekeepers by threat of physical violence" (184). Fanucci's trade reflects a nineteenth-century tendency in organized crime as he "was also a scavenger on fellow criminals, people who illegally sold Italian lottery or ran gambling games in their homes" (184). This should remind us of the post-Unification period in Sicily where organized criminals both created and exploited social conditions in a time of general uncertainty. Here too, whether it bears the name "Black Hand" or "mafia," organized crime in the immigrant enclave described by

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[76] Puzo avers: "In Sicily at the turn of the century the Mafia was the second government, far more powerful than the official one in Rome" (183).

Puzo is a typical reaction to an economic and social reality. Puzo tells us that during World War I this Fanucci acquired part of Abbandando's grocery and had his nephew hired to work there. As Abbandando had room for only two employees and one of those positions was already filled by his son, Genco, Vito was let go (184). Because of this, Vito began to work in railroad construction and witnessed first-hand the cruelty of American labor of the early twentieth century: "He worked in the railroad for a few months…Also, most of the foremen were Irish and American and abused the workmen in the foulest language…" (185). Here again we have a situation reminiscent of nineteenth-century Sicily in that there is social disorder brought on by WWI, unemployment and competition amongst immigrants for work, and the specter of a criminal operation that works against the immigrant and is seemingly interwoven into the fabric of the legal and social order of the immigrant's new home (189). Vito Corleone begins his new American life under conditions almost identical to those that he would have endured had he stayed in Sicily.

Vito Corleone, at the end of the war, continues to struggle to find work and support his family: "Time went on, things did not improve…Very well, there was no work, his wife and children must starve" (186). Recognizing in Vito something quite distinct, two toughs named Clemenza and Tessio – who will later form the upper-echelons of his network of "friends" – approach Vito: "They were men who thought well of him, the way he carried himself, and they knew he was desperate" (187). The proposition was that Vito join them in hijacking silk dresses where the risk was minimal: "The truck drivers were sensible workingmen who at the sight of a gun flopped on the sidewalk like angels while the merchandise would be sold to an Italian wholesaler, part of the loot would be sold door-to-door in the Italian neighborhoods …-all to poor Italian families looking for a bargain…" (187). Not only does this operation remind us of

historical American crime when bootlegged merchandise was commonly sought after by both

people of means and those less fortunate, but it also gives us an idea as to how Vito Corleone

gained his reputation. Here we have Vito Corleone going door-to-door selling women's clothing

at reasonable prices to immigrants of little means. Vito Corleone's participation had a two-

pronged effect, as he was able to develop a network of personal relationships within the Italian

community based on the sale of black market goods, making both parties complicit in the crime.

Secondly, Vito Corleone was able to build a reputation off of the perceived violence he would

have needed to deploy in order to carry out the highjacking. We read that they needed only show

their guns for the driver to comply (187) and that Clemenza and Tessio even offered the driver a

couple of dresses for his own wife (187). From this point onward, Vito Corleone would reap

substantial financial rewards and become more well-known, eventually attracting the attention of

Fanucci, who would demand a percentage (187-88). Vito Corleone discusses the matter with

Clemenza and Tessio, questioning why it should be that they have to pay Fanucci. Clemenza

responds: "Fanucci has friends, real brutes. He has connections with the police. He'd like us to

tell him our plans because he could set us up for the cops and earn their gratitude" (189).

Emblematic of organized crime both in Sicily and in America, we see that organized crime with

whatever name it bears, be it "Black Hand" or "mafia," works within the structure of lawful

society to an illegal end. Vito Corleone iterates a belief that has great resonance with an

American audience, that of personal destiny:

> It was from this experience came his oft-repeated belief that every man has but one
> destiny. On that night he could have paid Fanucci the tribute and have become again a
> grocery clerk with perhaps his own grocery store in the years to come. But destiny had
> decided that he was to become a Don and had brought Fanucci to him to set him on his
> destined path. (190)[77]

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[77] An interesting consideration, Iorizzo and Mondello state: "The reaction of Americans to criminals like the
Jameses…encouraged the glorification of criminals. It leads individuals to decide for themselves which laws are

Vito Corleone, once placed on this path, demonstrates himself to be a masterful strategist relying on reasoned thought and calm action. Vito Corleone isn't easily driven to commit murder and he considers his position from several vantage points: Fanucci alive (191), Fanucci injured (192), and Fanucci dead (192). Vito Corleone's exterior demeanor bespeaks a man who is in total control of the situation at hand; all he asks of his partners Clemenza and Tessio is to "remember that I have done you a service" (190). Fanucci's death (194) signals the transformation of Vito into Don Corleone: "They knew he had killed Fanucci and though they never spoke about it to anyone the whole neighborhood, within a few weeks, also knew. Vito Corleone was treated as a 'man of respect' by everyone" (196). Much in the same fashion as in Sicily, perpetrated violence accrues respect and honor to the perpetrator: "Even as a young man, Vito Corleone became known as a 'man of reasonableness.' He never uttered a threat. He always used logic that proved to be irresistible" (200). Puzo describes the first business venture of the "Corleone Family:" "Finally he decided to go into the olive oil importing business…Vito of course would be the head of the firm since he was supplying most of the capital" (200), yet another example of the small-business, venture capitalism suggestive of nascent organized crime syndicates. Vito Corleone's budding enterprise is described as "dynamic" (200) and Puzo lauds Vito for being a perceptive businessman (200). The localized nature of Vito Corleone's operation should be underlined here: Vito Corleone was content to run a semi-legitimate small business (200), whose products and influence were bought within the Italian enclaves of New York (200-01). All of this will change with the enactment of Prohibition, as Puzo describes:

> But great men are not born great, they grow great, and so it was with Vito Corleone. When Prohibition came to pass and alcohol forbidden to be sold, Vito Corleone made the

good and which are not good…It has conditioned Americans to expect and accept certain crimes. Inspired by this way of thinking, individuals choose careers in organized crime, a field where, according to their calculations, the risks of being caught and punished are minimal when compared to the enormous financial and social gains that can be made" (185-86).

final step from a quite ordinary, somewhat ruthless businessman to a great Don in the world of criminal enterprise…Through Clemenza, Vito Corleone was approached by a group of Italian bootleggers who smuggled alcohol and whiskey from Canada. They needed trucks and deliverymen to distribute their produce over New York City. They needed deliverymen who were reliable, discreet and of a certain determination and force. They were willing to pay Vito Corleone for his trucks and for his men…He made himself the protector of the Italian families who set themselves up as small speakeasies in their homes, selling whiskey at fifteen cents a glass to bachelor laborers…Meanwhile, since it was inevitable that some of his trucks be stopped by the police, Genco Abbandando hired a fine lawyer with many contacts in the Police Department and the judiciary. A system of payoffs was set up and soon the Corleone organization had a sizable 'sheet,' the list of officials entitled to a monthly sum. When the lawyer tried to keep the list of officials down, apologizing for the expense, Vito Corleone reassured him. 'No, no,' he said. 'Get everyone on it even if they can't help us right now. I believe in friendship and I am willing to show my friendship first.' (201-02)

Vito Corleone's organization continues to expand, even in the face of the Great Depression: "Everywhere in the city, honest men begged for honest work in vain…But the men of Don Corleone walked the streets with their heads held high, their pockets stuffed with silver and paper… He had not failed those who depended on him and gave him the sweat of their brows, risked their freedom and lives in his service" (202-03). We are given the ulterior motive for taking such care of his employees: "There was some self-interest in this generosity. An employee sent to prison knew he had only to keep his mouth shut and his wife and children would be cared for. He knew if he did not inform to the police a warm welcome would be his when he left prison" (203). How can we confidently ascribe the moniker of gangster or criminal to such a man? While this is not an attempt to make a rationalization for organized crime, it does touch upon already cloudy American attitudes towards crime. This fact only makes the character of Vito Corleone that much more endearing and that much more American; a man who supports his community, is munificent towards those who are in his employ, and, even on the criminal level, is an equitable and reasonable man (200). It is therefore not that difficult to conclude that the longevity of the perception of Italian hegemonic control of organized crime is intertwined with fictionalized renderings of idealized personae like Vito Corleone; that because of characters like

Don Corleone who embody the highest ideals of criminal respectability and their adoption into the popular American consciousness, Italian organized crime occupies a privileged social sphere. The American public can objectively recognize the inherent illegality of the organized criminal's enterprise, but in large part because of both government-sponsored sensationalism and the popularity of Puzo's *The Godfather*, the public's attitudes towards Italian organized crime are mixed. The paternalistic and protective Don Corleone is an excellent example of the mythologized, uniquely American criminal. He inspires admiration, the exact opposite reaction one should have when confronted with such a formidable criminal. We should, as law-abiding, respectable Americans, recoil from such social forces and yet, we tend not to. We draw closer to a criminal like Don Corleone simply because he is self-made, he is first and foremost a capitalist, he is the American dream of success. This will finally come to bear on the final pages of this section. In them we will examine Don Corleone's monologue towards the end of the novel and how this scene may serve as a narrative contrast to twentieth-century American organized crime. Here we will see why in many ways Italian organized crime has served as America's preeminent archetype for all subsequent incarnations of systematized criminal activities.

The events preceding the meeting of the "Five Families" (263) should be noted here: Don Corleone and the Corleone organization is approached by Virgil Sollozzo in order to arrange for a protection and distribution racket for his heroin operation (65-67). Don Corleone's refusal to proffer such assistance leads to Sollozzo arranging Don Corleone's assassination (72-73). Don Corleone survives and his son, Santino or "Sonny," believing the murder attempt to have been directed by one of the other "families," decides to go after those he holds responsible (88). Because of this, an all-out war between organized crime families ignites, leading to the discovery that not only was Sollozzo protected by the Tattaglia crime syndicate or "family," he was also

receiving support from a high-ranking police officer, one Captain McCluskey (123). The

decision is made to kill both Sollozzo and Captain McCluskey. Michael Corleone, Don

Corleone's youngest son, in an extremely famous scene, shoots both of them dead.[78] Because of

this Michael is forced to flee to Sicily (309-33) and, during this five-month period, Santino is

killed by a rival faction, set up by his brother-in-law Carlo Rizzi (252-55). It is at this point that

Don Corleone, barely recovered, reassumes the mantle of "family" leadership and convenes the

famous meeting of the "Five Families."

Puzo describes the scene as replete with heads of "families" from all over the country

(268-70) and it is here that Don Corleone will secure his position as a beloved character of

Italian American fiction. Puzo's descriptions of the various heads of these criminal organizations

attest to their far-reaching influence in both legal and illegal activities (270-71), but none could

match the influence and power of Don Corleone (271). In the monologue that follows, parts of

which we will examine here, it will become exceedingly clear that respectable, reasonable Don

Corleone was destined to become a cherished part of twentieth-century American culture. Puzo

contrasts the persona of Don Corleone against Sollozzo, so that the reader may draw his own

conclusions as to who is the criminal. One cannot help but view Sollozzo's enterprise and his

business approach negatively when compared to Don Corleone, so much in the same fashion as

the mafia of nineteenth-century Sicily and its differentiation from other forms of crime like

banditry, admiration for Don Corleone is elicited by juxtaposing him to what he clearly is not: he

is not a man to use violence lightly and he has a strict morality that informs every part of his life.

Don Corleone's words evoke the struggle to provide for one's family (273). The reader cannot

help but interpret that which follows as the words of one who has given unsparingly of himself to

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[78] As an interesting side note, the conversation between Michael Corleone and Virgil Sollozzo resonates with topical themes of honor and respect in the face of economic opportunity. The exchange draws a stark contrast between the "upstart" Sollozzo and the man he attempted to eliminate, Don Corleone, 138-42.

his family and friends. Therefore, as we are to understand, Don Corleone's refusal to aid

Sollozzo – the match that lit the proverbial powder keg – was an act of friendship in

consideration of future business ventures:

> My friends…I didn't refuse out of spite. You all know me. When have I ever refused an accommodation? That's simply not in my nature. But I had to refuse this time. Why? Because I think this drug business will destroy us in the years to come. There is too much strong feeling about such traffic in this country. It's not like whiskey or gambling or even women which most people want and are forbidden them by the *pezzanovante* of the church or the government. But drugs are dangerous for everyone connected with them…Even policemen who help us in gambling and other things would refuse to help us in drugs. (275)

Drawing this distinction between acceptable enterprises and unacceptable ones is yet another

way for Don Corleone to work his way into the memory of the American public. His financial

operation is based in vice enterprises, matters of personal choice. When instances arise when

government-sponsored prohibition of whatever form (gambling, liquor, etc.) becomes socially

intolerable, there will necessarily be individuals to respond to that demand. But Don Corleone

sees the greater picture: drugs and their distribution carry dangerous social implications and

effects, one of the most prominent would be the distancing of these organizations from the

institutional organs that had previously supported them, namely law enforcement and the legal

system. Don Corleone's dissenting opinion forms the minority as, much like all forms of

organized crime, the recognition of possibly substantial returns on their investment in drug

trafficking proves to be irresistible (275). Again an interesting development transpires as the

head of the Detroit faction limits the scope of the future drug distribution operation: "There's no

way to stop it so we have to control the business and keep it respectable. I don't want any of it

near schools, I don't want any of it sold to children…But something has to be done, we just can't

let people do as they please and make trouble for everyone" (276). It is at this point that Don

Corleone delivers his revelatory speech. Addressing the loss of his son and promising to forego

any reprisal against those who killed him, here Don Corleone becomes a cultural icon:

> What manner of men are we then, if we do not have our reason…We are all no better than beasts in a jungle if that were the case. But we have reason, we can reason with each other and we can reason with ourselves…Let me say that we must always look to our interests. We are all men who have refused to be fools, who have refused to be puppets dancing on a string pulled by the men on high. We have been fortunate here in this country. Already most of our children have found a better life. Some of you have sons who are professors, scientists, musicians, and you are fortunate…None of us here want to see our children follow in our footsteps…I have grandchildren now and I hope their children may someday, who knows, be a governor, a President, nothing is impossible here in America. The time is past for guns and killings and massacres. We have to be cunning like the business people, there's more money in it and it's better for our children and our grandchildren. (278)

These are more the words of a devoted father than those of a criminal mastermind. One cannot

help but relate to the person of Don Corleone, as it would almost seem like betrayal if we didn't.

It is this dichotomy that reinforces the mythologized and idealized gangster like Don Corleone,

much as it has for other incarnations of nineteenth- and twentieth-century criminals. Don

Corleone's speech echoes the fundamental distrust of any form of state-sponsored authority and

the reliance on bonds forged through common cultural attitudes concerning kinship and family:

"As for our own deeds, we are not responsible to the *pezzonovanti* who take it upon themselves

to decide what we shall do with our lives,…Who is to say we should obey the laws they make for

their own interest and to our hurt? And who are they then to meddle when we look after our own

interests?" (278). Once again, this type of American individualism coupled with free-market

capitalism denotes further the ability of a criminal like Don Corleone to complicate conceptions

of criminality. Placing this scene firmly in the post-war years of the 1940s and 1950s, it is not

surprising that Puzo's Don Corleone has sociohistorical resonance with the American audience.

Published in 1969, *The Godfather* is only twenty years removed from the Kefauver committee

and only a decade removed from the McClellan committee which, especially with regard to the

Kefauver committee, introduced ideas of Italian dominance of underworld organized crime and words like *mafia* and *cosa nostra* into the American lexicon. This is to say that the American public had already had suspicions regarding Italian criminality preceding and following their arrival in this country from the 1880s onward. This suspicion was piqued during Prohibition and the public trials of Al Capone for tax evasion, events that gave an ethnic face to the body of the American underworld of the 1920s and 1930s. This suspicion was confirmed during the 1950s and 1960s with the federal inquiries into the unlawful activities of American organized crime, which found that indeed there existed organized crime in this country and that it was most likely controlled by Italian criminals. But the fictionalized representation of Italian organized crime as found in Puzo's Don Corleone has problematized this history by providing a character that is accessible to the reading audience, not strictly a criminal but certainly not entirely a legitimate businessman. Because of the easy association of Don Corleone with other fictional characters of equal munificence like Robin Hood, and the individualism so typical of the American experience of the early twentieth century, Don Corleone should not be seen as anything other than an American success story whose response to social and economic conditions throughout his life only enabled him to further exploit the American capitalist system and in so doing, become a true American character.

In summary, this chapter has attempted to demonstrate that the nineteenth century was a pivotal moment in the development of organized crime and that Italian Unification and the years that followed have done more to inspire, promote, and further notions of southern Italian ethnic and social difference. As we have seen, the agrarian economic structure of the pre-Unification Italian south, when united to the nation of Italy, provided ample opportunities for venture capitalism to flourish on a regional scale. Socially understood concepts regarding private

property and the proper defense thereof proved to be toxic elements within the post-Risorgimento national equation. The post-Unification period from the 1860s to about the 1880s saw the solidification of regional interests and the validation of local forms of social control to protect these regional interests. As a result, Sicily bore witness to the rise of an organized criminal network whose operations ranged from protection rackets to investments in new regional building projects. This network of individuals spanned social classes, with most of its most active participants hailing primarily from the newly formed landed middle class whose competition with the landed elites for available land often led to conflict. It is here that we have seen the manipulation of social disorder by organized criminals to effect a desired outcome, most frequently protection money from landowners fearful of bandits. In the disorder caused by Italian Unification and the ability of this network of interests to insert itself into the strata of the new government, organized crime in the Sicilian context would be the weapon of the local authority. Having discussed the interplay between the new government and local power structures, we turned our attention to Leonardo Sciascia's narrative depiction of this relationship in *Il giorno della civetta*. This led into a discussion of the cultural understanding of a person's worth and themes of honor and respect; how someone who is seemingly so criminal can be so moral and respectable. We then turned to the Italian American immigrant experience and the difficulties experienced during the years of 1880 to 1924; how, in 1924, American xenophobia reached a fever pitch with the adoption of the National Quota System, severely restricting Italian immigration to the United States. We have seen that since arriving in America, Italians have borne the stigma of innate criminality and a predisposition to violence. This would develop even further during and after the Prohibition years when government inquiries into American organized criminal activity produced evidence that organized crime in America was primarily the

domain of Italian Americans; that a national network of criminal families stretched across the country and was controlled by persons of Italian descent. The ambiguous attitudes of the American populace towards ostensibly justifiable crime, coupled with exotic terms like *mafia*, problematized for the American public from that point to this day our relationship with American organized crime. We have seen several examples of this and we have finally examined Mario Puzo's fictional mafia chieftain Don Corleone in *The Godfather*, a work of lasting import for Italian American and American attitudes towards organized crime.

Throughout this chapter we have attempted to demonstrate that organized crime within the Italian and Italian American contexts is a reaction to socio-economic conditions; organized crime arose, in both instances, in the absence of or with the assistance of a regional power. Finally, organized crime is an entity that recognizes in its existence the ability to manipulate and exploit social and economic trends through monopoly, a monopoly that is most often achieved through intimidation, persuasion, and, in some cases, violence. Because of socially informed attitudes in both Sicily and America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we continue to feel the effects of organized crime on the Italian American community and American society at large. No other incarnation of organized crime has held a tighter grip on the American imagination and Italian organized crime continues to be the measure by which all other forms of illicit, organized enterprises are appraised. Because of this, Italian Americans have had a conflicted relationship with organized crime and the *mafia*, as we both condemn it and glorify certain aspects of it. What we will address in the final chapter of our analysis is the conflicted nature of Italian American ethnic identity and how nineteenth- and twentieth-century social history has played a role in shaping how Italian Americans understand their ethnic self and their ethnic history.

CHAPTER IV

I'M NOT ITALIAN BUT MY LAST NAME IS: IDENTITY AND MEMORY IN ITALIAN
AMERICA

The previous chapters have treated the nineteenth-century phenomenon of Italian

Unification and the socio-economic philosophies that influenced and shaped the Unification

process. We have examined at length the social, political, and economic ramifications of the

annexation of the Italian south to the Kingdom of Italy and how, when combined, these elements

wreaked havoc on the southern regions: social and political upheaval, unemployment, and the

creation of "the southern question". As we have seen, with Unification came an increased

awareness of economic and social disparities that would quickly be reduced to questions of

ethnic and racial inferiority. This cultural generalization would in turn spur emigration from

southern Italy to ports in North and South America in search of the social and economic

opportunities denied to them in the new Kingdom of Italy. Underscoring the immigration and

naturalization period of Italian settlement are the stereotypes and phobias that were generated

during the years preceding Unification. We have witnessed that the vast majority of Italian

immigrants to North America at the turn of the nineteenth century were exposed to a hostile and

suspicious society that was saturated with claims of Italian barbarism and proclivity for violence.

As a result, social and political policies were created as a direct response to the terrifying specter

of Italians living in America, some of the more prominent of these policies being the National

Quota of 1924 and Prohibition in 1920. These policies underline a fundamental characteristic of

the Italian experience in North America during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries:

Italian people(s) were an alien element, incapable of being fully integrated into the fabric of traditional American society and, as such, should be kept at a distance. To what extent has this history impacted the ethnic identity and material culture of Italian America? In the pages that follow, our investigation will concentrate on the intergenerational conceptions of ethnicity and the external influences that helped shape current renderings of the hyphenated American.

Cultural identification and ethnic identity are aspects of the Italian American experience that have long been plagued by misinformation and intergenerational discrepancies. What we can say with any degree of certainty is that, within the North American context, assimilation into the new society resulted in a cultural decline, predicated on the need to survive. If the greater society believed that persons of Italian heritage were incapable of being considered fully American, then the response was to shed the trappings of Italian cultural identity. From traditions and customs, to language and familial obligations, Italians in America discarded their ethnic past in favor of a new, American identity. The "Americanization" of Italian peoples has had an adverse effect on self-perception, creating a cultural disconnect between the different generations of Italian Americans; a dichotomy between those who chose to buck the trend of cultural homogenization and those who succumbed to it. Especially with regard to the external markers of material culture, Italian American history is peppered with examples of generational shifts in favor of greater assimilation into American society. This has often been attributed to external as well as internal forces: public education and parental impulses nudging second generation Italian American children to conform to social demands for cultural homogeneity. While at the time immigrant parents believed that through Americanization their children would have greater opportunities than those afforded to them, they could not have foreseen the impact that this decision would have on second- and third-generation Italian Americans. The consequences of

Americanization are many and within this chapter we will consider in what ways the immigrant's desire for a better life led to the decay of southern Italian culture in North America.

To begin, this chapter will address two examples of southern Italian culture, one within the Italian context and the other within the American context, that of southern Italian tarantism and Italian American religious feasts, more specifically the feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel in East Harlem. We will highlight specific aspects of both phenomena and attempt to underline characteristics common to both expressions of traditional culture. This chapter, initially, will look at Ernesto De Martino's study of southern Italian tarantism, *The Land of Remorse* (1961), and Robert Orsi's study of the Italian community of East Harlem, *The Madonna of 115th Street* (1985), in order to delineate what can be considered aspects of southern Italian culture and their influence on conceptions of cultural and ethnic identity. What influences are present in both the southern Italian and the Italian American tradition? What can be inferred from these traditional practices and beliefs? How do they inform one's self-perception and sense of place? The analyses of these themes will be carried over into the narrative realm with an examination of several literary exempla of southern Italian ethnicity and cultural mores present in Italian American literature of the twentieth century. One of the primary points of investigation will be the immigrant family unit and the cultural roots of Italian America, especially with regard to the maternal dimension within the family hierarchy. It is the mother, the sister, the aunt, or the grandmother who is most often the conduit through which an ethnic and cultural identity are transmitted to the younger generations. This is obviously not to say that the paternal, masculine aspect is devoid of any influence, as we have noted in the previous two chapters. Our focus will be primarily on the literary production of second-, third-, and fourth-generation Italian

Americans and the common thread of a vivid collective memory of the maternal role within the Italian American experience.

This chapter will look at Italian American writers and several examples of narrative fiction, essays, and personal reflections treating the relationship with and memory of female progenitors. First, we will look at Mario Puzo's *The Fortunate Pilgrim* (1964) and Helen Barolini's *Umbertina* (1979), and consider the immigrant woman and mother. We will also look at Maria Laurino's *Were You Always an Italian* (2000) and *Old World Mother, New World Daughter* (2009) and Helen Barolini's *Chiaroscuro: Essays of Identity* (1997), whose personal essays tell of a third-generation Italian American woman's journey of self-discovery and ethnic recovery. These explorations take place within the defined sphere of North American society and situate the immigrant woman in an alien environment, forced either to sink or swim. This chapter will also connect this unique phenomenon with its southern Italian parallel. To this end we will consider Elio Vittorini's *Conversazione in Sicilia* (1941) and the personal voyage of reconnection with a forgotten past and an abandoned identity. In total, we are given an image of a maternal force whose life's triumphs and tragedies color the Italian American collective memory and ethnography.

As assimilation slowly claimed the second, third, and fourth generations of Italian Americans, the social structure that had generated the sense of an ethnic self, the family unit, began to disintegrate. No longer would there be a well-defined and commonly understood institution in which traditional culture would find expression; rather, by virtue of the immigrants' aspirations for their children, the family unit would come to represent an oppressive force within the second generation of Italian Americans seeking to become fully American. Rebelling against the mores of their immigrant parents, the second generation's distance from their ethnic past

created a cultural dichotomy that continues to influence Italian American self-perception and appreciation of their ethnic past. The inconsistencies with regard to Italian American identity will lead to a consideration of Italian American critical theory addressing the phenomenon of the hyphenated American. Anthony Tamburri's *To Hyphenate Or Not to Hyphenate the Italian/American Writer: An Other American* (1991) will frame subsequent discussions on theories concerning Italian American identity. We will also look at Fred Gardaphé's *Leaving Little Italy: Essaying Italian American Culture* (2004), a study examining the Italian-ness of the Italian American experience. Finally, Robert Viscusi's *Buried Caesars and Other Secrets of Italian American Writing* (2006) will underline the fundamental misunderstandings that have hindered the construction of a culturally and historically sensitive sense of ethnic identity.

In total, the objectives of this chapter will be to identify the sources of an ethnic past, the cultural markers that define the boundaries of Italian ethnicity in America. It will be our contention, as stated previously, that the Italian American woman had a profound impact on the culture of modern Italian America and demonstrates that southern Italian culture is distinctly maternal. From the tarantism of southern Italy to the religious feasts of Italian immigrant communities; from autobiographical reflections to narrative fiction, immigrant women and mothers have undeniably shaped how subsequent generations understand their past and approach their present. The underlying characteristic of Italian American ethnicity is the remembrance of those progenitors who represent the fullness of an ethnic self; that current conceptions of Italian American ethnicity are based in large part on memories of female ancestors. In remembering them, so do we recall customs, traditions, and languages that are no longer present in third and fourth generation Italian America. In examining southern Italian parallels and points of comparison, we recover a past and sense of place denied to third- and fourth-generation Italian

Americans; uncovering answers to questions of identity left unanswered by our immigrant

forebears.

<u>"La Signora Taranta e A' Marònna: Southern Italian Tarantism and New World Religious Devotion"</u>

Our exploration of southern Italian ethnic identity and cultural patrimony begins with outlining what can be considered the markers of said patrimony. This study will consider two distinct cultural phenomena unique to southern Italian and Italian American material cultures: tarantism and the Italian American devotion to Our Lady of Mt. Carmel in East Harlem. These two traditions have been selected as practices that implicitly demonstrate culturally constructed and socially diffused values. The customs and belief system associated with southern Italian tarantism will be our first point of analysis. To begin, we will look at Ernesto De Martino's 1961 study, *The Land of Remorse: A Study of Southern Italian Tarantism*, to underline distinctive characteristics of southern Italian folklore and the belief system connected to the bite of the mythical southern Italian tarantula. The large number of female participants, the annual repetition of the so-called "first bite," the female aspect of the spider itself, and other dimensions of southern Italian religious history, will amplify our future discourse on Italian American ethnic identity and community practices. Our foray into the folk history and the phenomenology of southern Italian tarantism originates with an arachnid, more specifically *Lycosa tarantula*, the tarantula.

The mythology surrounding the tarantula in southern Italy is one that transcends time and space. On a metaphysical level, the tarantula personifies religious practices reflecting pre-Christian naturalism. On a physical level, southern Italian tarantism allows the participant to express and resolve psychic aberrations through a culturally understood form, that of the famous dance of the *taranta*, the tarantella. De Martino begins by underscoring the parameters of his study and its contribution to the field of southern Italian cultural history:

> In the narrowest sense, *The Land of Remorse* is Apulia, inasmuch as this is the elective area of tarantism – a historical-religious phenomenon which developed in the Middle

Ages and continued to the eighteenth century and beyond,…, a 'minor,' predominantly peasant religious formation, although at one time it involved the upper classes, too; it is characterized by the symbolism of the *taranta* which bites and poisons, as well as the symbolism of music, dance and colors which deliver its victim from the poisoned bite…*The Land of Remorse* aspires to be a molecular contribution to a religious and cultural history of our South, in the prospect of a new dimension of the Southern Question. (xxi)

Within this context of cultural history, we will highlight certain salient components present in both southern Italian folk religion and Italian American religious devotions. First, De Martino's research in the Salento of June 1959 demonstrated that tarantism, the religious phenomenon, and the effects of the poison of the tarantula (lactrodectism) are mutually exclusive. As De Martino points out, confirmed cases of lactrodectism are extraordinarily rare in the Salento and elsewhere in the Italian south (22). Furthermore, De Martino's fieldwork showed that it was not specifics that really figured in the religious tenets, as there were several types of bites capable of producing effects common in tarantism.[79] De Martino's work begins by removing tarantism from the sphere of medical analysis and reconsiders the phenomenon not as a clinical disorder but rather a psychic, existential response to culturally informed stimuli. De Martino's research will demonstrate that within the agrarian society of the Pugliese Salento, the phenomenon of tarantism may in fact have antecedents in Greek religious practices and myths of the ancient world.

Tarantism will be defined here as the culturally constructed and publicly preformed rites associated with the bite of the spider. The bite itself most often occurs during adolescence (De Martino 27) and there is a higher degree of female victims (25). The phenomenon had its home in the Pugliese Salento (22) and had been well-documented in medical sources dating back to the sixteenth century (12), as well as figuring in the accounts of travelers to Puglia during that period

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[79] De Martino states that a smaller spider, *Lactrodectus tredecimguttatus* was also believed to induce *tarantism* in its victim (34). De Martino's research also found that the bites of serpents and scorpions were believed to produce the same effects in the victim as those of the more prevalent spider (35).

(92). In total, the accounts regarding tarantism agree on certain elements, the first of which is the

age at which the victim is infected. Concerning the accounts of those known to engage in

tarantism, De Martino asserts that if the data are looked at with an eye toward the age of the

victim at the time of infection, "an indication takes shape in favor of the hypothesis that the 'first

bite' falls with greater frequency between the beginning of puberty and the end of the period of

development" (26-27), and that the generative power of women will find its metaphorical

counterpart in the natural world.

The second important component to a definition of tarantism is its association with the

high summer and the harvest. De Martino holds: "The historical documentation from the

sixteenth century to the present testifies unanimously to the summer season as the period of

tarantism from the beginning of May to the end of August" (110). During this critical period of

time, as De Martino points out, an uneasy anxiety is ushered into Puglia and the Salento with the

blazing hot winds of the summer; a psychic malaise common in a heavily, if not exclusively,

agricultural society. The unease is elicited by the looming harvest and the hopes associated with

its success and the disastrous prospects of failure. De Martino explains why the season of the

harvest would be best suited to tarantism:

> But above all, it is the season of the harvest, when the laborious epilogue to the
> agricultural year took place in the wheat fields of the Tavoliere and the Terra di Bari, in
> the gardens and orchards of Brindisi, in the vineyards of Taranto – and the anxious
> expectation of 'bread' and 'wine' received a favorable or unfavorable response. It was in
> this season that the destiny of the year was decided, granaries and wine cellars filled,
> debts paid off. People's hearts entered into a period of dramatic suspension… (113)[80]

The overwhelming majority of cases of tarantism seem to indicate that it was a peasant practice;

therefore, it is not surprising that tarantism would occur most frequently during the harvest, the

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[80] Joseph Inguanti's article, "Landscapes of Order, Landscapes of Memory: Italian-American Residential
Landscapes of the New York Metropolitan Area," relates how Italian immigrants and subsequent generations
continue to be influenced by their agrarian past, manipulating urban environments to produce fruits and vegetables,
83-106.

period in which most of the peasantry was in open fields, often sleeping in the very same fields they were harvesting. The belief arose that due to the proximity of where the laborers slept in the fields to the nest of the tarantula, spider bites would naturally occur (111). But De Martino's research demonstrates a different approach, one that can truly be categorized as a study in southern Italian religious history; that tarantism is more than lactrodectism and the clinical maladies pertaining thereto. In De Martino's analysis, there is a metaphysical dimension, one that understands tarantism to be an autonomous practice of psychic and social catharsis; a rite grounded in pre-Christian naturalism that is a complex belief system, replete with imagery, sounds, and myths. A description of how tarantism manifests itself in its victims will be of import and the following section will outline certain cases cited by De Martino in his 1959 fieldwork.

As we have underlined, the elective age of tarantism is somewhere between the onset or the end of puberty. Apart from lactrodectism is De Martino's observation that tarantati (those who are afflicted by tarantism) are forced to endure an annual "re-bite" of the spider: "The *taranta* instills a poison in the veins which lasts as long as the *taranta* lives or until its offspring dies; it bites in the summer season, but it is possible that the bite endured in one summer 're-bites' in the next…" (36). The *taranta* does not exist solely on the physical plane. De Martino's research ascribes supernatural characteristics to the *taranta* and demonstrates that the metaphorical spider bite is the conduit through which psychic and social disorders are addressed, mitigated, and resolved. In summarizing the case of a known *tarantata* (a woman affected by tarantism), De Martino concludes that her case had, "highlighted how tarantism constituted a symbolic apparatus for evoking and configuring on the mythical-ritual level those psychic conflicts which had not found a resolution on the level of consciousness and which operated in

the darkness of the unconscious, with the risk of appearing as neurotic symptoms" (46). De

Martino noted that the *taranta*'s poison resulted in observably diverse habits, each responding in

part to the psychic condition of the victim at the time of infection. De Martino's observations

will elucidate this synopsis:

> *Taranta*, bite and poison thus have a symbolic meaning in tarantism: they give a horizon to the unconscious drives and reactions they provoke in an individual consciousness…Above all, to perform its function as a symbol, the *taranta* must evoke, configure, revive and release the obscure stimuli of the unconscious which risk submerging consciousness with their ciphered indomitability. For this reason, the *taranta* has various sizes and different colors in the myth that narrates it…; its bite - strictly linked to its size, color, choreutic dynamism and melody – communicates corresponding choreutic, melodic and chromatic inclinations to its victim. The *taranta* has a person's name: Rosina, Peppina, Maria Antonietta, etc. It has a particular affective tone reflected in the person bitten: thus the *taranta* may be a 'dancer' or 'singer,' sensitive to music, song and dance; there are also 'sad and silent' ones who request 'funeral dirges' and other melancholy songs; then there are 'tempestuous' ones which induce their victims to 'go on a rampage' and 'libertines' who urge them to mimic lascivious behavior… (35-36)

We have thus far addressed who is most affected by tarantism and when tarantism traditionally

emerges during the calendar year. We know that most often women in the adolescent years are

traditionally the victims most often cited as suffering from tarantism and that tarantism acts as a

cathartic practice to alleviate psycho-social tensions associated with an existential melancholy

most often experienced at or around the time of harvest. If we are not dealing with cases of

clinical lactrodectism, then how, outside of medical science, are the supposed bites of the *taranta*

treated? How is one cured of tarantism?

Choreutic treatment is described in De Martino's study as a musical component, vital to

the treatment of afflicted *tarantati*. The treatment is administered in a sense by a group of

musicians, obtained by the family of the infected individual, to perform in the home and in the

presence of said family members. One particular case that De Martino witnessed personally was

that of Maria da Nardò in June of 1959. In the following passage from De Martino, he describes

the traditional setting for the rites of the *tarantata*, the musical exorcism of the metaphorical

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venom of the *taranta*. Within the reserved space of the family home and delineated by colored

textiles, sacred images, and seemingly quotidian objects, the therapy of what De Martino terms a

"choreutic exorcism": A treatment of the symptoms exhibited by the afflicted person through

music; a symbiotic performance wherein rhythms and tunes change, responding to the reaction of

the *tarantata*.[81] De Martino writes:

> The room was cleared of what little furniture normally belonged to it, and chairs were
> placed all around for the musicians and audience. A large red cloth screened the fireplace,
> on whose mantle a crucifix had been placed…To delimit the scenario of the ritual or
> ceremonial perimeter of the dance, the floor of the room was covered by a wide sheet laid
> over some blankets, and in a corner of the sheet there was a basket for the collection of
> offerings and strikingly-colored images of Saints Peter and Paul. Here, within the limits
> marked by the white canvas, the *tarantata* performed, dressed in white like the canvas
> upon which she danced, her waist tied with a sash…In the meantime, the guitarist, the
> accordionist, the tambourinist and our barber-violinist performed in turn in this vibrant
> event of sound-therapy…The young *tarantata*, a twenty-nine year old bride, regularly
> repeated a definite choreutic cycle, articulated partly on the floor and partly on her feet,
> and always finishing with a fall to the ground which marked a brief interval of rest.
> Beginning with this interval, during which the band remained quiet, the figures took
> place in the following manner: the band struck up the tarantella and the *tarantata*, lying
> supine on the ground, immediately began to comply with the sounds, moving her head to
> the left and right to the tempo. Then, as if the sonorous wave had propagated itself
> throughout her body, she began to crawl on her back, pushing herself with the movement
> of flexed legs and alternately planting her heels on the floor. Her head continued to strike
> the tempo violently, and the movement of her legs itself strictly obeyed the rhythm of the
> tarantella...These figures visibly mimed a creature incapable of standing erect and which
> walks by keeping itself practically stuck to the ground – that is, the *taranta*. (39)[82]

De Martino cites Alessandro D'Alessandro, a Neapolitan scholar who in the sixteenth century

stated that those afflicted by the bite of the *taranta* were most often cured through music: "'the

bagpiper or zitherist plays different motives for them according to the nature of the poison, in

such a way that with the victims entranced by the harmony and fascinated by what they hear, the

poison either dissolves inside the body or dissipates…'" (qtd. in De Martino 92). We can glean

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[81] See De Martino, 91-92, for a more detailed discussion concerning the role of music in the choreutic exorcism and
the different tonalities employed to determine the type of *taranta* venom afflicting the *taranata.*

[82] For an interesting corollary, see Regina Barreca's "My Aunts Taught Me to Dance" in which the author recounts
how she discovered an ethnic identity through memories of her aunts teaching her how to dance the tarantella (19-
28).

from these descriptions certain elements for consideration, the first of which is the dance itself.

The origins of the tarantella are bound to the bite of the *taranta*, seen as the causal link in any

case of tarantism; a dance induced by the bite of a particular *taranta* whose essence -libertine,

aggressive, or indifferent- dictates the types of music to which it will most readily respond. The

musicians themselves, as De Martino notes, play various strands of the tarantella to ascertain

which type of *taranta* has infected the victim: certain *taranta*'s venom requires particular

melodies or rhythms (36-37). The musical treatment involves members of the greater

community, therefore making tarantism and the practices associated with it a public

phenomenon.

Further aspects germane to our discussion here are Maria herself and her history of

tarantism, and the fusion of the pre-Christian origins of tarantism with Christian iconography and

hagiography. Maria da Nardò represents a quintessential *tarantata* in that she was annually re-

bitten and her biography unquestionably conforms to De Martino's findings that psychosomatic

disturbances were the root cause of tarantism. The subconscious, unresolved issues that

prefigured Maria's first bite are outlined by De Martino:

> …Maria of Nardò – was a tobacco harvester and gleaner, and had been married to a
> peasant for nine years. At age eighteen she lost her father, to whom she had been
> particularly attached…After this tragedy, she was taken in together with her mother into
> an uncle's home and subsequently that of an aunt. Always badly tolerated by whoever
> hosted her and not getting along well with her mother, she passed her adolescent years in
> all sorts of trouble. At age eighteen she fell in love with a young man, but for economic
> reasons his family opposed the marriage, and the youth left her. Maria suffered a great
> deal for this abandonment, since it was her first love; and suddenly, 'one Sunday at
> noon,' she was bitten by a *taranta* while at a window and was compelled to dance. (44)

As borne out in De Martino's study, the high percentage of female *tarantate*, like Maria, are

hallmarks of a society in which mores and social roles were clearly defined. The result was the

inability on the part of *tarantati* to conform in some way to the strictures of the society in

question.[83] This cognitive disconnect between social and psychic tensions manifested itself in the bite patterns of the *taranta*, most often striking when the heat of the summer fatigues the body and the impending harvest preoccupies the mind. According to De Martino, it was cathartic in the sense that it enabled a release of psychic tension through the culturally constructed and socially accepted form of tarantism. Depending on the type of trauma experienced by the *tarantata*, the resulting dance expresses said trauma through imitation, reaction to certain melodies and objects connected with the emotional state of victim at the time of the first bite.[84] The case of Maria of Nardò is a reflection of the larger practice of tarantism in which the metaphysical world is accessed through abandonment to rhythmic music at prescribed times of the agricultural year, specifically the harvest. In a certain sense, De Martino's work highlights that if the harvest was well-suited to produce the financial resources to pay off debts, then it stands to reason that it would also be an optimal time to pay off metaphysical debts, those felt on the existential level (113). De Martino's research will demonstrate that in its current form, tarantism may be the end result of thousands of years of religious history, more specifically practices that have antecedents in the Greco-Roman rites of the pre-Christian era.

De Martino states: "The symbolism of the bite, the ritual arboreal and aquatic setting, the swing, the mirror, the sword and the choreutic-musical catharsis are all found in the Greek religious world according to essentially analogous mythical-ritual structures and functions which recall those of tarantism and form its historical antecedents" (187).[85] De Martino begins his investigation of the classical antecedents with a caveat against reducing tarantism to type or

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[83] See Chiavola Birnbaum's chapter, "Heresies, Sibyls, Fables, Lilith, and Witches: 'Un Mondo Senza Padroni e Senza Guerre,' A World Without Bosses and Without Wars," from her study *Black Madonnas*, in which she discusses the historical women who had famously fought against the socially assigned gender role of women in southern Italy during the Middle Ages and beyond (153-70).

[84] See De Martino, 96; 122-29.

[85] See De Martino, 87-90, for a brief discussion of the various objects used during the choreutic therapy.

antecedent. His assertion is that rather than looking for relics of antiquity in tarantism and therefore reducing the phenomenon to solely a holdover from the classical era, De Martino insists on an analysis that maintains tarantism's autonomy as a unique tradition (177). That being said, De Martino's study considers tarantism with other Mediterranean and African religious practices, namely ecstatic cults, possession ritual, and shamanistic-type ceremonies (177), and their ancient sources.[86] We will focus here specifically on one possible antecedent cited by De Martino: maenadism.

De Martino cites a "pseudo-Hippocratic" (191) text which spoke of an illness that "frequently afflicted maidens and women whose equilibrium had been altered by remaining childless" (191). The symptoms that resulted were characterized by "stupor, followed by fever and tremors, the *mania*, anguish, outbursts of fury, impulses to suicide by drowning or hanging" (191). In accounts from Plutarch and Aristoxenus, De Martino underlines that these historical accounts "can thus be considered precious indications of what we may call, in modern language, frequent crises of maladjustment in the Greek world that risked striking women collectively in relation to their biological and cultural destiny as wives and mothers" (192). Maenadism, therefore, provided an outlet for psychic crises to be resolved in the form of female religious cults: "The maenads, the bacchantes, the Thyiads, bassarids, the Spartan *dysmainai* and Macedonian *clodones*…all of these testify to the important part played by the female element in the most strictly orgiastic aspects of the Dionysian cult" (192). De Martino's synthesis of maenadism centers on the flight from civil society to the mountains and streams of sacred forests; ritual dance and feigned agitation; the incompatibility of the afflicted and civil order, stemming from the inability of the women themselves to accept the role assigned to them

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[86] De Martino references the practices of Voodoo, Santeria, and Condomblé and their particular similarities to southern Italian tarantism finding their roots in a shared Afro-Mediterranean culture (177-79).

(192).[87] The retreat from society, the ecstatic rites of the maenads, and their eventual

reintegration into their respective society speak to the efficacy of the ritual itself: On the

metaphysical level, the crisis is "reshaped and oriented within a mythical-ritual horizon…opened

to a meaning, released and regulated until its resolution" (193). In this sense, the religious

practice of maenadism bears a resemblance to our own tarantism as it provides the female

adherent an outlet for psychic and social tensions. De Martino goes on to reference the Greek

myth of Erigone and Apollo's anger at Icarus resulting in the mass suicide of "Attic virgins"

(195). As a result, a festival was inaugurated during the spring planting season in which

metaphysical debts were repaid and offerings made to ensure the fortunes of the harvest (196).

De Martino's analysis of the *aiôra*, the swing of the virgin, and the crisis of female puberty

resolved by means of the symbolic "oscillation of dolls suspended from tree branches" (196),

expands both the myth of Erigone itself, but also the socially perceived danger of puberty and the

need for release from the psychic tension generated during the transformative years of

adolescence. And finally De Martino's presentation of the *oistros*, the gadfly, presents a clear

antecedent of the bite of the *taranta*, as its sting is intended for those women who suffer from a

precluded love; in this case the ardent love of Zeus for Io (188), a punishment for having bucked

the divine will of Hera (189). In both cases, the bite produces a crisis specific to "virginal" (188)

women and is known to torment the afflicted (190), implying a continual effect felt beyond the

moment of infection.[88]

   Throughout De Martino's study of tarantism itself and its possible historical antecedents,

two characteristics stand out. The first is the high degree of female affliction and the decidedly

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[87] For a more contemporary analysis of female social and domestic roles in southern Italy, see Ann Cornelisen's *Women of the Shadows* (1976), in which she details the lives of the women of rural Basilicata, 13-25.

[88] De Martino cites other examples of the sting of the *oistros*, drawn from the plays of Aeschylus (189).

feminine aspect of the religious practices associated with tarantism. The second has been the cultural and social importance of women to the religious history of the Italian south. The importance of the female aspect of the supernatural world is reflected in religious practices outside of tarantism. One of the exemplary manifestations of this phenomenon is the Madonna and her place within the history of southern Italian religion. Here we will briefly examine Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum's 1993 study *Black Madonnas*, in which we will note that the underlying characteristic that typifies southern Italian religious practices concerns the feminine nature of the supernatural world; that Christian representations of the Madonna are current incarnations of a religious iconography and beliefs that stretch back to the Greek period in southern Italy, roughly between the seventh and fifth centuries B.C.E. (37).

Chiavola Birnbaum begins by informing us that archaeological evidence has shown a female predominance in religious artifacts found throughout Sicily and southern Italy:

> Trinacria, symbol of ancient Sicily, was depicted as a woman whose three legs form a circle in motion. Storytellers melded the indigenous goddess of Sicily with women divinities brought from Africa and Asia Minor, and later with popular, often black, madonnas. On the mount of Eryx/Erice on the west coast of Sicily, Phoenicians venerated Astarte, Greeks worshipped Aphrodite, Romans brought gifts to Venus…In Sicily, the black Madonna of Tindari, santa Maria Sacratissima, is a few kilometers from the Paleolithic drawing of the divinity in the Addaura cave outside Palermo. (36; 40)[89]

Interestingly, the declaration of the Council of Ephesus in 431 C.E. that proclaimed Mary to be *Theotokos*, the Mother of God, originated in a city renowned for its ancient devotion to the goddess Artemis (32), furthering Chiavola Birnbaum's findings that within the pan-Mediterranean world, devotion to female deities has metamorphosed over the millennia, responding to the socio-political climate of the time.

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[89] The cave of Addaura contains a painting dating to approximately the upper Paleolithic age (30,000 to 15,000 B.C.E.) and depicts a female deity being worshipped by sexually aroused males (6).

Chiavola Birnbaum also furnishes us with the beliefs associated with the worship of the

goddess Demeter or Ceres, whose center of worship was predominantly the island of Sicily, but

popular throughout Magna Graecia:

> Demeter, often depicted carrying a wheat sheaf, harks back to an earlier grain goddess who became the Roman goddess Ceres, and later the Christian Madonna, particularly in her black manifestation…traits of the prehistoric goddess did remain in the figures of Demeter and Hera among the Greeks and in Ceres and Juno among the Romans, merging with the worship of the Anatolian Magna Mater, Cybele, and the African goddess Isis…The Catholic Church retained the figure of the mother but reduced the Madonna to a great saint embodying virginity and obedience. (38-40)

From fertility goddess -be it in the form of Artemis, Trinacria, or Ceres- to the Christian

Madonna, female divinities figure prominently in the religious culture of southern Italy. Chiavola

Birnbaum also demonstrates that not only the Madonna, but also the female, Christian saints -

Lucy in particular- have their origins in pre-Christian devotions to agrarian, female deities (45-

46). An example worthy of consideration comes to us from Carlo Levi's 1943 *Cristo si è fermato

a Eboli* and personifies our previous analysis of the feminine divine, more specifically the black

Madonna of Viggiano:

> Questa Madonna nera è come la terra; può far tutto, distruggere e fiorire; ma non conosce nessuno, e svolge le sue stagioni secondo una sua volontà incomprensibile. La Madonna nera non è, per i contadini, né buona né cattiva; è molto di piú. Essa secca i raccolti e lascia morire, ma anche nutre e protegge;…la Madonna era, qui, la feroce, spietata, oscura dea arcaica della terra, la signora saturniana di questo mondo… (106-07)[90]

The Madonna of Viggiano personifies the natural world, the forces of nature that dictate the

rhythm of life in an agrarian community, like that of Levi's Gagliano. The Madonna of Viggiano

embodies the dualism existent in the natural world: nature as both nurturing and destructive,

often unpredictable, but capable of providing abundantly. Levi's narrative depiction of the

Madonna of Viggiano evokes the pre-Christian, agricultural goddess described by Chiavola

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[90] Levi's interesting choice of adjective, "saturniana," connects the Madonna of Viggiano with one of the earliest deities worshipped on the Italian peninsula, Saturn. See Raven Grimassi's *Italian Witchcraft: The Old Religion of Southern Europe* (1995), 29-31; 64; 66; 75; 79.

Birnbaum: the natural world personified in human form. The antiquity assigned to the Madonna of Viggiano, and underscored by Chiavola Birnbaum, testifies to a distinct religious morphology and development that appears to have subsumed both pre-Christian and Christian figurations of agrarian deities prevalent in the Italian south, descending from ancient fertility cults to the current manifestation of the Christian Madonna.

Tarantism has shown us that from those most prone to infection to the ancient antecedents in the form of maenadism, religious customs in the Italian south have had at their core female reproductive potentiality. Be it the bite of the female *taranta* or the various depictions of the female divinity throughout the centuries, there emerges for our study a point of distinction in southern Italian socio-cultural mores: The reliance on and appreciation of the generative powers of the natural world in the form of prominent female figures. Here it is clear that the metaphysical order and the natural order are enjoined by the feminine aspect of the transcendent. Carlo Levi's brief description of the Madonna of Viggiano elaborates this point: that amongst the *contadini* of Gagliano, and of the surrounding environs, the natural and the supernatural were personified in the icon of the black Madonna of Viggiano. Levi's description intertwines the Christian *Theotokos* with a divinity whose aspects mirror those of fertility deities of the pre-Christian era: Demeter in a new context. The predominance of feminine characteristics in southern Italian religious culture, the importance of the harvest and its metaphysical connotations will also be found outside of southern Italy in the religious devotions of the Italian American community in the form of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel. The pages that follow will detail the origins of the devotion itself, its predominantly female adherents, the particular customs performed during the feast, and the socio-cultural meaning of the Madonna to her devotees. We will seek to demonstrate that there is a distinctive parallel between the religious phenomena of

southern Italy and the Italian American devotion to this particular image of the Madonna. The symbolism of the female divinity, her ability to connect Italian Americans to their physical past (as emigrants), present (as immigrants), and also to a spirituality centered on a veneration of the female dimension of the transcendent, are all themes that will frame our following analysis.

Robert Orsi's 1985 study *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950*, details the history of the Italian American community in East Harlem, their devotion to the Madonna of Mt. Carmel, and the continuity of southern Italian religious practices: "The procession, we are told, recalled the great traditional religious processions of southern Italy, just as the Italian American societies consecrated to particular saints resembled those in Italy. The people were urged to relive their Italian past, to reaffirm their Italian selves during the festa" (168).[91] Our contention is that this idea of reaffirming, reconnecting with a religious and cultural past, facilitated by the icon of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, can be read from both a social and individual perspective; that on the macro level, the feast of the Madonna enabled the community as a whole to connect with the physical past of Italy and of emigration. On the micro level, the feast enabled individuals to reconnect and reaffirm cultural mores concerning one's place and role within the familial construct. To begin, let us look at how the Madonna was perceived within the Italian community of East Harlem:

> The devotion to the Madonna of 115th Street existed in the interstices between anticipation and reality, between the old and the young, between the individual and domus, between the United States and Italy, severed memories and emergent aspirations, the fear of success and the longing for it, between the old moral order and the discovery of the new. The figure of the Virgin was a symbol at the center of a ritual, and both symbol and ritual were taken up into a communal narrative mythology. The Madonna was not a stationary icon to be worshiped, but the focus of a drama to be acted out…the festa provided the context for expressing and experiencing the emotional and moral content underlying the meaning of the symbol. Symbol, ritual, and myth – the entire experience of Mount Carmel emerged from and referred back to the people's lives… (163)

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[91] For a history of religious practices in southern Italy, see Astarita, 140-41; 178-79.

Embodying the hopes, fears, and supplications of her immigrant flock, the Madonna of Mt.

Carmel can be read as having given release to the psychic tensions of the community as a whole.

On the comparative level, the tarantism of De Martino's study parallels the feminine conduits

responsible for enabling the individual resolution of psychosomatic burdens, much as in the

devotion described here. Analogous to the season of the *taranta*, that of the harvest, it is

interesting to note that the feast of Mt. Carmel would take place in July, the high summer,

alluding to the possible links to traditions associated with the harvest.[92] As the majority of

immigrants in this period of 1880 to the 1920s were from agrarian societies, it is not that unusual

that they would reenact these religious practices within the context of their new home (Orsi 22).

Here we will begin by outlining the specifics of the feast itself, its particularities and their greater

socio-cultural implications. Orsi begins his description of the feast:

> Shortly after midnight on July 16, the great bell high in the campanile of the church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel on 115th Street announced to East Harlem that the day of the festa had begun…It greeted the devout already arriving from the other boroughs and from Italian communities in Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and even California….Italian Harlem was ready and excited: 'In alto i cuori, oggi è la grande, memorabile, solemne giornata del XVI Luglio.' (1)

One of the defining characteristics of the feast was its theatricality, the drama of the great feast.

As Orsi states, the street became the slate upon which, for the days of the feast, Italians inscribed

their cultural heritage:

> There is an iconography of the streets in dense urban communities like Italian Harlem: the street is a text composed by the people…The street life of Italian Harlem was dense with symbols that adumbrated the inner structures of community life and the inner meanings of the people's lives. Women leaning out windows, young men gathered on corners, girls sitting on stoops, older men gathered around folding tables in front of social clubs – in these ways the community revealed itself to itself and to others. (33)

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[92] For further reading on Italian American street festivals and their socio-religious function, see Frances Malpezzi's and William Clements' co-authored article, "Italian American Feste," in the anthology *The Italian American Heritage* (1999), 115-18.

It is fitting that the community that generated the feast, distilling regional influences into the cohesive ritual described by Orsi, would use the streets of Harlem to stage their private devotions. The streets sizzling from the heat of the July sun would bear witness to the public display of southern Italian religious and cultural traditions; those distinguishing markers of nascent Italian American ethnicity. The Italian American experience in Harlem and for a great number of Italian Americans of the Northeast began by immigrants defining what is the culture and history of which they were all a part. Orsi compares the annual feast with the idea that there "is a way in which the entire festa recapitulated the experience of immigration. The annual celebration also involved a journey: for one day every year, the Madonna's throne became a wandering shrine, as the immigrants and their protectress took an extended trip through the neighborhoods" (165).[93] The immigrants would, in a way, commemorate their own journey, reliving the pain and suffering many endured en route to North America and the discontent many felt in this new land (165-66).[94] The fact that this feast would recollect annually the cultural rift sparked by emigration speaks again to De Martino's findings with regard to tarantism's annual repetition, recalling the existential crisis suffered at the moment of infection. Orsi, in his description of the statue of the Madonna used during the procession, also paints a familiar portrait of a female divinity who aids in the moment of crisis: "The Madonna's first gown…was decorated with rings, watches, earrings, and chains, all given to her by men and women who believed she had helped them in a moment of terrible difficulty or pain" (12). The female conduit of psychic release is analogous to De Martino's findings that in the moment of crisis, the

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[93] Robert Viscusi's article, "Making Italy Little," in Francesco Loriggio's edited, *Social Pluralism and Literary History: The Literature of the Italian Emigration* (1996), discusses the interesting juxtaposition of Little Italy to the Kingdom of Italy, stating that the identity of the community flowed from visible symbols of Italian ethnicity, e.g. religious statues, Italian flags (63-64).

[94] See Loretta Baldassar and Donna Gabaccia's co-authored introduction to their jointly edited study, *Intimacy and Italian Migration* (2011), in which the authors discuss the Italian diaspora's immigration patterns and the evolution of Italian ethnography, the politics of immigration, and its effects on the development of a cultural identity (1-22).

taranta's bite makes possible the resolution of social and psychic anxieties. The season of the

taranta and the harvest also mirror the staging of the Harlem feast in the high summer; the

notion that at the time when physical debts were traditionally repaid or acknowledged, it is also a

time to repay metaphysical debts, thanksgiving in its most literal sense. Finally, the iconography

of the feast of Mt. Carmel, the mythology of tarantism and its possible religious precursors in

Greek religious practices, and the predominance of a female divinity in southern Italian religious

history, all testify to the distinctive feminine expression of traditional southern Italian

spirituality.

The feast of Mt. Carmel also highlights the fact that within the realm of public displays of

devotion, it was the women of Harlem who were in the majority of those who walked in

procession and did public displays of penance and engaged in cultural practices deemed

scandalous at the time. In a sense, the feast truly belonged to the women of the community: "At

the rear of the procession walked the penitents. All of them walked barefoot; some crawled along

on their hands and knees; many had been walking all night. For the most part, it was the women

who walked barefoot on the searing pavement…" (8). A unique tradition reserved specifically

for women shocked onlookers: "Occasionally the following scene would be enacted. A woman

(this penance was never undertaken by men) would begin crawling on her hands and knees from

the back of the church toward the main altar, dragging her tongue along the pavement as she

went" (11). It was the women, during the procession, which would carry enormous candles, the

size of which would depend on the specifics of the request being made to the Virgin (3-4). Not

only were the women the main drivers behind the public devotions and processions, but they

were the motivating force within the family sphere, the "domus" as Orsi defines it (xix; 75-106).

The domus will come to be understood as the cultural center of the Italian community, wherein

during the days of the feast, the bonds of family and ethnic identity are affirmed through the

ritual of gathering for the celebratory meals of thanksgiving, given in honor of the solemnity of

the days themselves, and also as means of transmitting to subsequent generations the values,

customs, and histories of the culture of which they are a part.

Orsi states that the domus was the center of the Italian life; that Italians in America

defined themselves through their attitudes toward the home (75). Orsi avers: "The people

themselves quite clearly identify the domus as the center of their lives and culture" (77). In that

center, within the family construct, the real authority within the domus was the mother (13-15;

139) and the feast of Mt. Carmel annually reaffirmed publicly the private matriarchy:

> The annual festa of Our Lady of Mount Carmel revealed to the culture the socially and
> morally normative and stabilizing power of women as the culture believed it to exist,
> while at the same time it legitimated the authority of the public-private dichotomy of
> power…During the days and the nights of the festa and in their devotion to the Madonna,
> women were taught what their appropriate sphere was, what a wife and mother were –
> and they learned this in the presence of a most powerful woman… (211)

The home as the center of traditional culture within the Italian immigrant community is a

phenomenon that has a uniquely feminine dimension, as the matriarchal influence is most

strongly felt within the walls of the family domus. We will assert that Italian American culture,

correspondingly, has for subsequent generations of Italian Americans been accessed via female

members of the family; that part of our ethnic identity is bound to the memories of those habits,

sayings, or customs of our female progenitors.[95] With this idea in mind we turn our attention to

Italian American narratives that will further this thesis. To begin we will examine Mario Puzo's

The Fortunate Pilgrim for an illustrative heroine whose existentialism denotes immigrant

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[95] For further reading, see Mary Jo Bona's study, *By the Breath of Their Mouths: Narratives of Resistance in Italian America* (2010), in which she explores the influence female progenitors have had on the literary production of Italian American authors, in particular female authors (141-73).

pragmatism and realism; a character whose power and influence find their fullest expressions within the bounds of the familial construct.

Mario Puzo's 1996 preface states what his initial intentions were in writing this semi-autobiographical narrative: "When I began, the plan was to make myself the hero. It was supposed to be the story of a struggling writer, poorest of the poor, whose mother, sister, and brothers were enemies of his art...It was written to show my rejection of my Italian heritage and my callow disdain of those illiterate peasants from which I sprang" (ix). As a dimension that will be discussed further on, the desire to deny one's immigrant past is a theme common to the Italian American experience. Discussed in the previous chapters, the xenophobic America to which the Italians immigrated and the manner in which they were perceived by the larger society combined to create a tenuous space for Italians in America. In order for Italians to be considered Americans, traces of their ethnicity would have to be purged: ethnic last name, language, attitudes towards family. The "Americanization" of Italian immigrant children is reflected in Puzo's above preface: shame and disregard for his ethnic, immigrant past. But as Puzo goes on to say, through remembering his mother he discovered, "that my mother turned out to be the hero of the book. And that my sister was more honest, trustworthy, and braver than me. Through the writing, those immigrant Italians who worked twelve hours a day in gray, sweat-soaked fedoras, wearing great handlebar mustaches, had the dignity of heroes" (ix). When we consider all of the aspects that formed the decision to immigrate to North America and the hardships endured during Italian settlement in the New World, the maternal figure stands out as a formidable and potent character in Italian American narrative fiction. Here, Puzo's mother, Lucia Santa, will provide archetypal characteristics germane to our analysis:

> The country women from the mountain farms of Italy, whose fathers and grandfathers
> had died in the same rooms in which they were born, these women loved the clashing

steel and stone of the great city…As children they had lived in solitude, on land so poor that people scattered themselves singly along the mountain slopes to search out a living. Audacity had liberated them. They were pioneers…A small, round, handsome woman, Lucia Santa stood at the height of her powers in health, mental and physical; courageous and without fear of life and its dangers. But not foolhardy, not reckless. She was strong, experienced, wary and alert, well-equipped for the great responsibility of bringing a large family to adulthood and freedom. (7-8)

We are given the sense here that Lucia Santa is the lynchpin of the family unit, wholly responsible for her family's success in their new home. The Corbo-Angeluzzi family's saga, in which Lucia Santa is the primary player, relates events common in Italian American historiography: Lucia Santa being made a young widow (9), the fight between the immigrant and their Americanizing children (47; 63-64; 85-87), and the struggles and sacrifices born to provide for family (147-51). In all of these events, the predominant sensation is that the bedrock of Italian immigrant society was that of the home and the maternal influence exerted therein. Puzo's depiction of his mother testifies to an almost mythological specter, a power that made its influence felt in every corner of the author's memory: "Lucia Santa makes the family organism stand strong against the blows of time: the growth of children, and all the changes of worldly circumstance. She lives through five years in an instant, and behind her trail the great shadowy memories that are life's real substance and the spirit's strength" (197).

Thomas Ferraro's chapter entitled, "Mother," from his 2005 study *Feeling Italian: The Art of Ethnicity in America*, gives us a possible indication as to why Puzo's Lucia Santa has particular resonance: "I *know* Lucia Santa: not Puzo's actual mother, of course, but her uncanny double, my father's maternal grandmother, Rosa Marguerita Granito-Zito, who was not just any one of my original immigrant progenitors but *the* one that all the stories are about" (73).[96]

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[96] See also Maria Laurino's 2009, *Old World Daughter, New World Mother*, in which she details her family's influential, immigrant women and how their lives served as inspiration for her own quest of self discovery (91-113).

Ferraro goes on to underline a point that Puzo's narrative makes explicit: that women, within the immigrant community, were the true powerbrokers, as he states:

> What social historians call chain migration was going on here, but so too, I think was the subtle power dynamic of the Marian Catholic peasantry, in which outside the home the man is granted official stature, but it is the woman who more than likely solves the problems, makes the truly tough decisions, and commands the allegiance of all, especially her sons. (77)

Larry Angeluzzi, Lucia Santa's eldest son, is raised by his mother alone, as his father passed away years prior (Puzo 10). Characteristic of the immigrant work ethos, Larry's various incomes eventually end in the family coffers (74-75), in recognition of his mother's authority and in keeping with accepted parent-child roles of the immigrant generation (145-46). One of the primary detractors from the traditional customs relating to family and filial duties is Octavia, Lucia Santa's eldest daughter. Here Puzo encapsulates the feelings of many of the children of immigrants during this period:

> Dressing for work, she felt the familiar despair and hopelessness…At such times she felt doomed: she was afraid that one day she would wake on a warm summer morning as old as her mother, in a bed and home like this, her children living in squalor, unending days of laundry, cooking, dishwashing before her. (47)

Octavia highlights this notion that there is something intrinsically profane about the preordained fate of Italian women within the Italian community: the idea that they are to be wives and mothers, in essence replicating the duties preformed by their own mothers. This could be attributed to Octavia's own form of rugged individualism; but, it could also be indicative of the Americanization undertaken by the children of immigrants through public education. Here we will examine another Italian American narrative depiction of the immigrant woman, that of Helen Barolini's 1979 novel, *Umbertina*. We will once again look at the fictional portrayal of a female progenitor whose memory enables the author to understand more completely her ethnic and cultural identity.

Tinuzza or Umbertina is the title character in Barolini's journey of self discovery. In her pursuit of an ethnic identity and sense of place, Barolini revisits a past that had been deprived to her, that of a relationship with her maternal grandmother, Umbertina. Barolini's voyage through time and space via memories of her female ancestor, enables her to resolve the sense of alienation and ethnic ambiguity that she had felt since her childhood. As a third-generation Italian American narrative, Barolini's *Umbertina* is uniquely suited for our purposes here, much in the same fashion as Puzo's *The Fortunate Pilgrim*. In each text, the authors arrive at the same conclusion: to understand one's present self it is necessary to remember the past. Barolini's tripartite novel, detailing the lives of three generations of the Longobardi family, retells the financial struggles that caused emigration, life in the Italian colony of Cato, New York, the second generation becoming more American and their rebellion against the family order, and the third generation's struggle with questions of identity. Through all of this, the memories of Umbertina inspire the greatest contrasts amongst the generational gaps, but also the strongest link to their ethnic past; the physical embodiment of the family's success in America.

To begin, Barolini's Marguerite, the granddaughter of Umbertina, finds herself in Rome, the wife of a famous Italian poet and torn between two worlds: her American past and her Italian present. This dichotomy reveals itself to be a presence felt not just throughout the novel, but throughout the history of Italians in America:

> You know, while I was sick, I had Alberto bring me my father's old remedy…It was comforting. It was like going back to my childhood. It made me think of my father in a way that was different from usual. Before it used to be labeled in slots: Authority, Filial Duty, Respect to Parents – all those hang-ups I grew up with. Only now I've started to think of him with compassion as another guy caught up in the same goddam struggle and whose life hasn't been easy…I thought of him separating himself from the Italians of the North Side to make himself a real American. He turned reactionary to it, but he started courageously. He was caught in a terrible trap; he couldn't be either Italian like his father and mother or American like his models without feeling guilty toward one or the other

side. And even now he doesn't know how to be American while accepting his Italianness because it's still shameful to him. (18)

The third-generation Italian American, here Barolini's Marguerite, witnesses the rebellion of their parents' generation against their ethnic heritage and this theme of antagonism will frame our analysis here. The fact that that children of Italian immigrants were encouraged to divest themselves of their cultural identity in favor of the hegemonic American culture in order that Italian Americans might become "real" Americans has had lasting implications for the current conception of Italian American ethnicity. As a direct result of the information gaps that occurred as a byproduct of Americanization, third- and fourth-generation Italian Americans are left with a relatively hazy perception of their cultural heritage and history. Marguerite's journey of self discovery begins with remembering her maternal grandmother, Umbertina. Here we will discuss three particular dimensions to this part of Barolini's novel: The details of Umbertina's life before emigration, Umbertina's life in the Italian Amercian community, and the family's socio-economic advancement in America.

The Calabria of 1876 is the backdrop against which Barolini places Umbertina, a shepherd girl who grows up in the Italian south in the years following Italian Unification. Both Umbertina's family life and society in which she lives are both typified by late-nineteenth-century southern Italian inequity: poverty (26), governmental indifference (27), social constraints regarding women (33), and the gnawing helplessness of the rural poor (34). Into this Serafino Longobardi, a shepherd who had emigrated to America, returns and changes the course of Umbertina's destiny. Shortly after Serafino's return to the village of Castagna, he proposes marriage to Umbertina (41-42). It is here that we get the first glimpse of Umbertina's dynamism: "As for Umbertina, when Serafino's offer was announced to her she never considered not accepting…But why should she object? What was important to her was that Serafino represented

something new in her life. He had been to America, he knew the way" (42).[97] We can infer here - and it will later be confirmed- that Umbertina had designs on emigration well before meeting Serafino (46). In describing the beginning of the Longobardi family's emigration story out of the mountains of Castagna to Cosenza and then on to Naples, Barolini inserts an interesting thought that will have future import: "They were transients in the land of their fathers, heading away from it, and it gave them a queer sense to be adrift between old country and the new, belonging to neither. The journey impressed [Umbertina] with a feeling of place: Wherever it might be, one had to have a place in the world" (49). This has particular resonance with a third- or fourth-generation Italian American, but it also alludes to Umbertina's future: a necessity to carve out a place in a new country for herself and her family; the bending of her circumstances to her will. As Barolini describes, Umbertina quickly realized that success in America was a family affair: "It strengthened her resolutions that they had to take care of themselves and be their own salvation" (66).

Examples of Umbertina's self-determination and iron-clad rule within the family abound: the decision to migrate to Cato, in upstate New York (73), the building of the family *groceria* (91-92), and the fortunes derived from the labors of the Longobardi family (98). In all of this, Umbertina's will and determination demonstrate that within the immigrant narrative, the mother plays the pivotal role of family anchor. To this end, one of the most illustrative moments in Barolini's narrative takes place during the Longobardi's summer picnic, a reunion in which the matriarch Umbertina would be received by her progeny and honored as the source of all the family's current success:

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[97] Giovanna Del Negro's 1997 book, *Looking Through My Mother's Eyes*, in which she interviews several Italian Canadian women and compiles their respective immigration stories, demonstrates that women have played and continue to play a significant role in immigration politics.

Umbertina's children and grandchildren gathered together there to celebrate themselves as a family, to meet and eat and pay homage to Umbertina, the old lady dressed in black who sat under a tree and was served food all day and given babies to kiss. For Umbertina the picnic scene was her lifetime spread before her. She sat in the meadow on the shore of the lake under the shade of a large leafy elm tree…and waited for the foreign children of her own half-foreign sons and daughters to come in and greet her with their mumbled, memorized phrases of unintelligible Italian…; was it the food, the air, the dress of the New World that produced grandchildren she could not recognize? (134)[98]

The picnic highlights the disconnection between the immigrant generation and their offspring; what's more, Umbertina's solitude is reinforced by the fact that she alone knew the cost of bringing a family to success and health in this New World: "All that work that she and Serafino had known. Did any of these gay, chattering, well-dressed, and happy people around her know any of it?" (136). At the end of her life, Umbertina's final thoughts on her life in America provide us a point for critical analysis: "Now, she wondered, who do I have to tell my story to? No one. Not one of her sons or daughters, let alone her alien grandchildren" (138). In the end, the fact that what was sacrificed in favor of attaining the American dream were the lives of the first generation of Italian Americans, those immigrants whose experiences are lost to subsequent generations. After the death of Umbertina, Barolini's novel explores the experiences of a third-generation and fourth-generation Italian American, in the characters of Marguerite (Umbertina's granddaughter) and Tina (Marguerite's daughter). For our study her, we will briefly look at Tina's approach to her identity and sense of place and how, at the center of these issues, is the matriarch Umbertina.

The character of Tina is the synthesis of the effects of Italian migration and assimilation in American society. As a fourth generation Italian American, her identity is a complex melding of two distinct tensions, that of her American self and her Italian heritage: "I've never understood where I belong. It tears my whole life apart each time – I mean I go through this

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[98] Puzo's Lucia Santa has the same reaction to her own children and grandchildren (222).

absolute trauma of trying to decide here or there: Italian like my father or American like my poor Mom" (285). Ultimately, Barolini's Tina discovers, much in the same fashion as her mother was advised to do at the beginning of the novel, that Umbertina is the starting point; that Tina would discover in her maternal forbear the resolution of the uncertainties harbored by both Tina and her mother, Marguerite. The duality of the Italian American experience, at once foreign but in many respects truly American, frames our following study. The experience of the children of immigrants, the second generation and beyond, demonstrates that ethnic identity as an Italian American is ambiguous at best. Armed with the narrowest understanding of our ethnic past -as demonstrated in Umbertina's musings on her alienation from her children and grandchildren- subsequent generations of Italian Americans have been deprived of the cultural heritage from which they descend. By returning to the source of identity, one finds at its core a remembrance of the female progenitors who in a sense created the Italian American identity through their emigration and preservation of traditional southern Italian folkways. Barolini's Tina, in deciding to return to Castagna, the native village of her great-grandmother, at once both appreciates Umbertina's decision to emigrate (363) and experiences a long-awaited sense of belonging:

> The priest's eyes were drawn to the tin heart fastened on Tina's shoulder bag. 'That is of the old type that was done around here long ago. How do you happen to have it, *signorina*?' 'It was my great-grandmother's.' 'Who was she?' 'Umbertina Longobardi.' The old man's eyes lit in recognition. 'I have heard the name,' he said. Tina felt a tremor of excitement at his recognition. So, she *was* part of the place, connected by the tin heart which had come from there. (369)

Barolini's journey through three generations of Italian American women shows that one's own ethnic identity centers on memories of the past, and specifically the labors and joys of maternal ancestors. Both Puzo and Barolini, second- and third-generation Italian Americans, depict similarly strong-willed and potent female protagonists who, in recollection of their respective lives, help to better understand Italian American ethnic heritage. In keeping with our

ethnographic analysis, Italian American ethnicity has a tremendously deep-rooted feminine dimension that has been expressed in various cultural phenomena and also expresses itself in narrative form in the figure(s) of Italian American matriarchs. This is also a theme that has transatlantic parallels, as we will look at Elio Vittorini's *Conversazione in Sicilia*.

Vittorini's 1941 novel begins interestingly enough with Silvestro, the protagonist, who experiences symptoms not too dissimilar to the beginning stages of tarantism: 'Ero agitato da astratti furori, non nel sangue, ed ero quieto, non avevo voglia di nulla" (23). To add to this feeling of unease, he receives a letter from his father informing Silvestro that he has left his mother (25-26). Interspaced between the feelings of ennui, emerge memories of his childhood in Sicily and how his current alienation and his childhood may possibly be connected: "Non erano che topi, scuri, informi, trecentosessantacinque e trecentosessantacinque, topi scuri dei miei anni, ma solo dei miei anni in Sicilia, nelle montagne, e li sentivo smuoversi in me, topi e topi fino a quindici volte trecentosessantacinque" (27). Intending to send his mother her usual birthday card, Silvestro finds himself before an advertisement, "Visitate la Sicilia" (27), and at a metaphorical crossroads: "Mi trovai allora un momento come davanti a due strade, l'una rivolta a rincasare, nell'astrazione di quelle folle massacrate, e sempre nella quiete, nella non speranza, e l'altra rivolta alla Sicilia, alle montagne, nel lamento di mio piffero interno, e in qualcosa che poteva anche non essere una cosí scura quiete e una cosí sorda non speranza" (27-28). Silvestro boards the train and embarks on a journey that will ultimately resolve his psychic angst. The key to Silvestro's present lies in the rediscovery of his past. What we will see is that not surprisingly, Silvestro's recollections of his childhood will be dominated by the figure of his mother and the maternal tenderness that he had almost forgotten.

In a sense we may understand Silvestro to have a similar background to the Italian American second generation in that he appears to be a figurative immigrant, as when he is asked if he is American by another passenger because he was eating breakfast: "Un siciliano non mangia mai la mattina – egli disse d'un tratto. Soggiunse: - Siete americano, voi?... – Sí, – dissi io, vedendo questo. – Americano sono. Da quindici anni" (32). Silvestro's physical journey recalls the metaphorical return of Italian Americans to their immigrant antecedents. Silvestro, mirroring the Italian immigrant, is brought back to his roots, the natal sense of himself, by returning to his mother. Silvestro's own feelings of alienation reveal a very real sense of incongruence within the present state of things. The idea of imbalance is an overarching characteristic of the immigrant narrative: something had to impel the emigrant to leave roots, history, and home in search of a resolution in the unknown. The economic motivation in migration is clear, but what Silvestro's conversations expose is the loss of an identity and a past as an aftereffect of socio-economic advancement.

Silvestro's ennui is challenged when he arrives in Calabria and familiar sensations flood his consciousness: "Cosí un topo d'un tratto, non era piú un topo in me, era odore, sapore, cielo e il piffero suonava un attimo melodioso, non piú lamentoso" (29). In this renewed state, he arrives in Syracuse and embarks on the last part of his return, through the mountains to his mother's village of Neve. Silvestro's arrival conveys a sense of release and contentment, feelings in stark contrast to the ennui of the beginning of the journey:

> 'Ma guarda, – pensai, – sono da mia madre!'…E mi parve ch'essere là non mi fosse indifferente, e fui contento d'esserci venuto, non esser rimasto a Siracusa, non aver ripreso il treno per l'Alta Italia, non aver ancora finito il mio viaggio. Questo era il piú importante nell'essere là: non aver finito il mio viaggio; anzi, forse averlo appena cominciato…'Ma guarda, sono da mia madre,' pensai di nuovo, e lo trovavo improvviso, esserci, come improvviso ci si ritrova in un punto della memoria, e altrettanto favoloso, e credevo di essere entrato a viaggiare in una quarta dimensione. (57)

The end is the beginning of Silvestro's journey, as the trek to his mother's home represents the fullness of a trip through both memory and space. Even in the presentation of the surroundings, Vittorini's narrative conceives of Silvestro's birthplace as a female realm, dominated by his mother. In a figurative sense, "da mia madre" are those physical and metaphysical realms in which the maternal influence is most strongly felt. With his "onomastico" card in hand, Silvestro stands at the threshold of the culmination of his return: "Salii, nel sole, guardai ancora una volta l'indirizzo sulla cartolina, e fui da mia madre, riconobbi la soglia e non mi era indifferente esserci, era il piú pieno del viaggio nella quarta dimensione" (58). Perfumed with the aromas of roasted kid (60), Concezione (Silvestro's mother) and Silvestro begin a dialogue that will reconnect our protagonist with forgotten memories of a lost childhood and identity, buried underneath fifteen years of absence. Recollecting his youth, Silvestro comes early to a realization of the significance of his mother in his own metaphysical journey: "Era questo, mia madre; il ricordo di quella che era quindici anni prima, venti anni prima…il ricordo, e l'età di tutta la lontonanza, l'in piú d'ora, insomma due volte reale" (62). In essence, Concezione is like Sicily itself, "…tutto reale due volte, e in viaggio, quarta dimensione" (62). Here it may be said that the resolution of Silvestro's psychosomatic tension is found in remembering his past, dispelling the feelings of alienation and indifference.

Silvestro's childhood is recalled by means of food, specifically the diet they ate as a young family in rural Sicily. Concezione reminds Silvestro how enamored of "fave coi cardi" (61) he was; how he would have sold his primogeniture for a plate of "lenticchie" (61). The diet described here speaks to a barebones cuisine, characteristic of the working poor, but that even in their poverty he felt a sense of well-being: " – Si stava bene, – io dissi, e lo pensai, pensando ai pomodori a seccare sotto il sole nei pomeriggi di estate senza anima viva in tanta campagna. Era

campagna secca, color di zolfo, e io ricordai il gran ronzio dell'estate e lo sgorgare del silenzio, e

di nuovo pensai che si stava bene" (64). The conversation naturally leads to Silvestro's father

and his abandonment of his mother. Concezione believes herself to better off without him (72)

and that he was essentially useless, nothing like her own father (68; 79). Concezione is depicted

as strong-willed and intolerant of her husband's sentimentality (78); her refusal to support her

husband's amorous dalliances, not because of the physical abandonment, but because of the

emotional abandonment (90-92), demonstrates that she relied on no person save herself. A

pronounced female protagonist is relatable to the previous Italian American prototypes of

immigrant self-determination. In a certain sense, the characters of Umbertina, Lucia Santa, and

here, Concezione, provide us with a defining characteristic of the southern Italian maternal

figure: preservation.

Moreover, Vittorini's comments on his mother's physical form have significance with

regard to Italian American identity. As Silvestro watches his mother wash their lunch dishes, he

realizes that men are quick to discard the past, the worn and over-worked in favor of the new:

> Vidi le sue mani, ed erano grandi, consumate, nodose, completamente diverse dalla
> faccia, perché potevano anche essere di uomo che abbatte alberi o lavora la terra mentre
> la sua faccia era di odalisca in qualche modo…Pensai mio padre e me, tutti gli uomini,
> col nostro bisogno di mani morbide su di noi, e credetti capire qualcosa della nostra
> inquietudine con le donne; di come eravamo pronti a desertare da loro… (86-87)

The vision of a wife and mother whose hands are worked raw in support of the family echoes the

narratives of Puzo, Barolini, and many Italian American writers. Here, metaphorically, we can

appreciate the relationship that the second generation of Italian Americans developed with regard

to their parent's culture and ethnicity. The idea that the children of the Italian immigrants

exchanged their heritage in favor of identification with mainstream American culture stands as a

definite factor in the disintegration of ethnic identity across the generations of Italian Americans.[99]

As we have seen within tarantism, the power associated with women stems from agrarian religious practices celebrating the fertility of the earth and the potentiality of the female womb. The role women played in traditional southern Italian culture was transplanted in North America during the Italian migration at the end of the nineteenth century. We have seen, as demonstrated by Robert Orsi's work, that women would again play an instrumental role in the public life of the Italian community, preserving traditional religious practices in the form of the feast of Mt. Carmel in Italian Harlem. Celebrating the patroness's feast day, the Italian community in New York reaffirmed a vision of their shared heritage and identity, defining the characteristics of the culture of Italians in America. Additionally, the feast provided the community with the means to instruct the new generation of Italian Americans the customs and practices that anchor the community to their Italian past, to re-evoke the memories of place and of belonging. In turning to the literature produced by both southern Italians and Italian Americans, we have seen that a characteristic of both narrative traditions is the presence of a strong maternal force. In the sections that follow, we will begin to look at the theoretical analyses of Italian American identity, the various critical interpretations of Italian American identity and ethnicity, and the theoretical paradigms of a culture that finds itself torn in two directions, between America and Italy.

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[99] Another possible connection between Vittorini's narrative and narratives of Italian America is the specter of Silvestro's grandfather whom he can barely remember. Through their conversations, Concezione and Silvestro demonstrate that the memories of the past play a distinct role in how we perceive our reality, our notions of social and familial responsibilities bearing the indelible imprint of our ancestors (68-69; 79).

<u>The Metaphysics of Italian American Identity and Ethnicity</u>

The focus of this section will be a reflection on critical theories treating Italian American ethnicity and identity, the resultant construction of Italian America. Our purpose here will be to consider the discourse of Italian American literary and cultural theory and how generational disparities have created unique approaches to the question: Who am I? Current Italian American ethnic identity is a varied topic with contributions from scholarly as well as personal investigations of questions of identity. In keeping with the focus of this dissertation, we will consider the writings of the second and third generation of Italian America, those children and grandchildren of the immigrant generation. We will consider how the Americanization process endemic in the twentieth century created cultural gaps between the generations, obfuscating the ethnic heritage transported from southern Italy to North America. What's more, in pursuing financial and social advancement in the new country, Italian immigrants often fostered an ambiguous attitude towards their new home, placing the onus of becoming assimilated Americans on their children. In doing so, the first generational gap emerged between the immigrants and their children, widening as the second generation grew to maturity in a totally American environment. Through public education, the second generation learned what did and did not constitute a good American; moreover, and more to the point, the second generation learned that in order to be proud to be an American, one would have to become ashamed to be Italian. Through ethnic stereotyping and public discourses on the inherently barbaric nature of Italian immigrants, the second generation's ethnic identity was adversely shaped by how they, as Italian Americans, were perceived by the Anglo-Saxon American majority. The following section will explore both scholarly treatments of Italian American identity and also personal essays from Italian American writers. Firstly, we will seek to reconnect the process through

which Italian Americans begin their journey towards an ethnic identity by means of a female conduit. Secondly, we will assert that the markers of traditional southern Italian culture still persist in Italian American culture and that the dichotomy between Italian and Italian American is not the end result of some bastardization of Italian culture; rather, it is the unique phenomenon of the metamorphosis of southern Italian culture within the bounds of American civilization: the symbiotic relationship of two cultures in the process of redefining themselves. The purpose here will be to underline the Italian-ness of Italian American culture by reconsidering, as we have in the previous chapters, the southern Italian dimension of our ethnic heritage.

One of the pioneers of Italian American studies, Robert Viscusi, has written extensively in both his criticism and his narrative prose on the subject of Italian American ethnicity and its relationship to memory. His American Book Award-winning novel, *Astoria* (1996), is an homage to the person(s) of his deceased ancestors, in particular his mother, whose memory serves as both inspiration for the work but also as the means by which he better understands his place within a multicultural America. He begins his novel with an interesting reflection on the experience of immigration:

> Consider: you are the heir of immigration or revolution, or both, but you may be as I was, and scarcely know how. These historical events are very large objects in your personal condition, yet they have sunk without leaving many traces you can find. Especially in America. But they push you and pull you whether you recognize them or not…A whole nation walked out of the middle ages, slept in the ocean, and awakened in New York in the twentieth century. These persons, when I asked them during the years I was growing up, never could explain very well what had taken place while they were dreaming across the Atlantic. I held that against them, with the usual hard hand of an exiguous child. But later I came to see that there was nothing surprising in their incapacity: they couldn't tell me what they themselves didn't know. (21-22)

In their incapacity to articulate a pre-emigration experience, the second and third generations are subsequently handed an enigmatic post-immigrant identity that comprehends two core elements: a general sense of economic disparity prior to emigration and the hope of amelioration of said

economics through immigration.[100] Outside of these two components, the immigrant generation

did not, seemingly, transmit a sense of past, of history that connects people to a place. Helen

Barolini's essay, "How I Learned to Speak Italian," from her 1997 *Chiaroscuro: Essays of*

Identity, points again to a generational antagonism that pitted Americanized children against

their Italian parent(s): "It never occurred to my father to speak his own father's language to my

brothers or to me, and so we grew up never conversing with our only two living grandparents,

my father's father and my mother's mother, and so never knowing them" (26).[101] Fred Gardaphé

points out in his study, *Leaving Little Italy: Essaying Italian American Culture* (2004), that as a

third-generation Italian American, he viewed his Italian grandfather as foreign: "I believed that

my maternal grandfather, an immigrant from southern Italy, was not American. I was convinced

that the good immigrants were those who struggled to be American with the knowledge that the

past contained much of what was not considered to be American" (15).[102] Robert Viscusi's

critical study, *Buried Caesars and Other Secrets of Italian American Writing* (2006), provides us

with the paradoxical forces at work within current Italian American culture: those tensions that

Viscusi contends have influenced Italian American appreciation of their ethnic heritage. The first

is the movement towards greater assimilation into the American mainstream and the second, a

cultural return to an Italian standard. Discussing Italian American English as a dialectal variation

of the Italian language, Viscusi describes two distinctive evolutions within the Italian American

community:

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[100] Donna Gabaccia, interestingly, follows the migratory patterns of early, southern Italian emigrants, noting that those who returned to their native village after a stay for a determined period of time in northern Europe or North America were never fully reintegrated into their native society; that they were somehow marked as "different" and lived on the margins of their local society (*Italy's Many Diasporas* 105).

[101] See also *Umbertina*, 130-37.

[102] See also Barolini's *Chiaroscuro: Essays of Identity*, 106-14, in which she describes her own unease as an American, feeling that she occupied a marginal space of cultural ambiguity.

> The usual thing is that the Italian difference survives in two varieties. One kind becomes American, and this American version becomes the dialect, or the lower class, version; the other returns to Italian, and this becomes the standard, or bourgeois, model…As Italian Americans move toward the notion that *Italian* means something central and authoritative, their impatience with the immigrant stigma grows. Some spend huge amounts of energy protesting the Mafia mythology. Others simply buy themselves villas in Tuscany. (30-31)

One of the predominant features of the Italian American experience has been, as Robert Orsi has termed, the *domus*-centered society. When that socio-cultural entity encountered American social forces, namely through second-generation Americanization, the centrality and authority of the family began to slowly disintegrate.[103] Viscusi goes on to identify that the foundation of Italian American culture lies in the individual home(s) of Italian America. In so doing, he affirms Orsi's analysis of the domus-centered community (59-60) and also highlights the fact that certain aspects of traditional southern Italian culture were bound to a fate of inconsequentiality, like the *ordine della famiglia* and would gradually be replaced by more American-friendly notions of familial obligations, aspirations outside of the family constrictions, and an ever-evolving attitude towards an American identity (62-63). Let us turn now to Anthony Tamburri's analysis of ethnic literature and the hyphenated American.

Tamburri's 1991, *To Hyphenate or Not To Hyphenate. The Italian/American Writer: An Other American*, lays a theoretical groundwork by which we may better comprehend and appreciate the works of Italian American writers. His project begins by highlighting Italian American writers and their journey(s) to reclaim their ethnic heritage, as Tamburri defines it, their *italianità* (20). Speaking of this exploration of their ethnic selves, Tamburri states:

> American writers of Italian descent have obviously contributed greatly to the establishment of an Italian identity in America. Yet few have been able to avoid being relegated to the category of *ethnic* writers, and therefore cast to the margin, as opposed to

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[103] See Orsi, 107-49, and also Donna Gabaccia's *Italy's Many Diasporas* (2000), in which she discusses the economic effects of migratory emigration on southern Italian socio-economics and the social influence of America on immigrant family economics (97-102).

being considered part of the larger, dominant group we call American writers. The problem here, of course, is that the term *ethnic*, unfortunately, has a negative connotation for those prepossesive of an *American* mindset. (22)

Here we come to understand that even as the generations of Italian Americans have grown to maturity in twentieth-century America, their work still bears the impression of an ethnic difference; that their Italian heritage still prevents them from full access to the moniker American. Continuing with this thought, Tamburri further highlights a disjunctive component to the hyphenated America, that being the function of the hyphen itself: "I contend that the hyphen is much more of a disjunctive element, rather than a conjunctive one, when used in couplets denoting national origin, ethnicity, race or gender. It is…a colonializing sign that hides its ideological and, therefore, subjugating force under the guise of grammatical correctness" (44). The hyphen, as Tamburri goes on to summarize, keeps the ethnic American at bay, never allowing for total assimilation (45), stating: "*Of course, we're all Americans, but there are Americans and then there are Americans...*" (46). Fred Gardaphé furthers this point: "As we grew older we realized America was a misread metaphor, but there had been clues all along…foreigners had never fared well in the novels taught in schools and Italians, if they had written any American novels at all did not count…" (17). In keeping with this line of analysis, we turn to Maria Laurino's essays, *Were You Always An Italian?: Ancestors and Other Icons of Italian America* (2000), for another second-generation interpretation of Italian American ethnic identity.

Maria Laurino's personal essays on identity begin with a painful retelling of her own youth spent in search of an acceptable version of herself to present to her Anglo-Saxon peers:

> For much of my childhood I stood out in homogenized suburbia (hard as I tried to mask the Italian side of my hyphen); I grew up in a neighborhood where, in every other home, Mazola poured from clear plastic bottles, while we lifted heavy golden-colored tins of olive oil. To a child who wished to imitate others with the precision of a forger's brush, that was a clumsy, humiliating distinction. While such incidents embarrassed me, none

was as difficult as this conversation before gym class: 'You were shopping at Saks the other day?' the popular girl next to me asked. 'Uh-huh,' I meekly replied…'Yeah, I told my mother, 'That's the smelly Italian girl who stands in front of me in gym class.''…As she continued to chatter, I yearned to shed my smell, my self, that very instant. Standing in the powerless world of childhood, a world in which the words and actions of peers cast the parts that we play for years, I intuitively understood that I was bound to the sweat of my ancestors, peasants from southern Italy. (17-18)

Though accepting one's ancestry acknowledges a shared history, it doesn't always imply an understanding of the past, as was highlighted in Viscusi and Barolini. Additionally, because of linguistic barriers and immigrant reticence to recall their lives, in specifics prior to emigration, Italian American culture can at times appear to be a blank slate, just waiting to be inscribed: "The elusive search for the past, the journey to understand the self in relation…to the many moments that preceded our consciousness, seems an impossible task…How do you recapture the past when knowledge is limited and molded by others?...But I have few guideposts to understanding life in southern Italy" (30).[104] To further expand on Laurino's thoughts, let us take into consideration John Papajohn's psychiatric evaluation(s) of southern European ethnic Americans and their relationship to the American mainstream. In keeping with the second and third generation's sense of alienation from both American and Italian culture(s), Papajohn offers this initial sentiment:

Since the Pilgrims, this country has been populated predominantly by people from Northern Europe – Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, and white. Besides our language, our legal, educational, and commercial institutions have a decidedly English cast. Those who arrived later from culturally diverse parts of Europe – the Italians, the Portuguese, the Germans – confronted a society that initially did not accept them. It was expected that ultimately these culturally different groups would merge, or better 'melt,' into a common mainstream White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) society. However, a hundred years after the great wave of immigration at the turn of the century…this has not happened. This reality constitutes a paradox: an Anglo-dominant society comprised of culturally

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[104] Helen Barolini's chapter, "Difference, Identity, and Saint Augustine," from her work, *Chiaroscuro: Essays of Identity*, notes that her own journey of self-discovery was one that was conflicted by the competing forces of her immigrant past, her Italian present, and her American life. As a result, Barolini goes on to discuss why her work is not ethnic, as much as it is an American work with an Italian sensibility (105-14).

divergent ethnic groups who have preserved to a greater or lesser degree their 'old-world' traditional identities. (1-2)[105]

Papajohn restates a particular dimension that is at the center of any critical exploration of Italian American identity, that of Italian America's hyphenated status as an ethnic minority. Papajohn's psychiatric evaluation of the effects of Americanization on second and third generations of ethnic Americans, specifically Italian Americans, demonstrates the psychological conditioning that the immigrant experience has imprinted on the subconscious.[106] Papajohn's analysis here focuses on the children and grandchildren of Italian immigrants and their distinguishing characteristics as new Americans:

> The children and grandchildren of these immigrants integrate into American society, where they de-emphasize their ethnic heritages, anglicize their foreign names, and rarely marry partners from their own cultural, that is ethnic, background. They consider themselves Americans – and of course they are – and often deny or are unaware that their particular ethnic heritage continues to have an impact on their thinking, their feelings, and their behavior. The values that their ethnic parents and grandparents brought to this country continue to pattern their perceptions of how life ought to be lived, and how interpersonal relationships are negotiated as well as their views of human nature and physical nature and their cognizance of time. (3)

To underscore this analysis, Papajohn includes in his case study the sessions he conducted with a couple in a mixed marriage where one partner was Italian American (ethnic) and the other was American (WASP). In the case of Marianne Jones and Tony Phillips, the emotional divide that widened over the course of their marriage began when the couple moved from their Midwestern home to Boston, as Marianne had accepted a position at a large corporation (74).[107] When the couple arrived for the first session of marital therapy, the causes of the couple's unhappiness were multiple but the most salient related to their different upbringings. Papajohn underlines that

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[105] See also Luisa Del Giudice's introduction to her edited study, *Oral History, Oral Culture, and Italian Americans* (2009), 3-4, in which she discusses the preservation of Italian American culture through memory and the fact that Italian American culture encompasses certain folkways that are no longer found in Italy today.

[106] See also Maria Laurino's chapter, "Ancestors," in *Were You Always an Italian* for further discussion on the author's own strained relationship with her American identity (188-213).

[107] It should be said that Papajohn changed his patients' names in order to protect their identity (5).

Marianne was an only child and characteristically American, demonstrating a rugged

independence and drive to succeed professionally (76), and had shown herself to be so since she

met Tony in college several years prior (76). Tony, for his part, was torn emotionally between

his feelings for his family and his desire to be with Marianne, who represented the antithesis of

his ethnic formation (75-76), and it was in response to the demands of his own family on Tony's

time and energy that Tony was initially attracted to Marianne (76). Papajohn goes on to state:

"While Tony had not married an Italian wife, his unconscious expectations of an intimate

relationship were based on his experience in his Italian family. He expected the kind of closeness

that Marianne was not socialized to provide. She valued her space and was intent on having it"

(76-77). Papajohn refers to this discrepancy as "between American and Italian value orientations

in the *relational* area" (77). While Tony may have tried to shed his ethnic trappings (75), he

cannot escape his subconscious.

Additionally, with regard to Tony and Marianne, the illness of Tony's own father further

reveals a subconscious, cultural divide in values and in attitudes. When it was suggested that

Tony's father be sent via ambulance from Tony's Midwestern hometown to Boston so that Tony

could take care of him, the thought caused another significant rift in Tony and Marianne's

relationship. Marianne thought it totally inappropriate and Tony believed his wife incapable of

feeling empathy, which led to feelings of resentment and a view that his wife was evil (78).

Papajohn's evaluation and subsequent therapy would ultimately derive from their respective

value orientations and the "cognitive-restructuring," (78) thereof:

> I set the stage, at an intellectual level, to make it possible for each of them to understand
> more objectively that their different ways of thinking, feeling, and acting were due to
> their different value orientations and that this was affecting their ability to have an
> intimate relationship…Tony was able to see that Marianne's stance in terms of both her
> work and her relationship with him was not based on her flawed character but on her
> values, which he also shared in part. Marianne was able to see that Tony's posture toward

his family was not based on a pathological codependency, but on an ethnically patterned belief of what was required in such situations. (78-79)

Papajohn's case study ends with an update, three months after the couple began therapy, stating that the value orientation approach had resolved the marital tensions. In this case we have seen how the subconscious of this individual Italian American male was shaped by the traditions of his ethnic past and how the values that shape the respective spouse surface in ways that are unforeseen. Cultural values, as an aspect of ethnic identity, also materialize in other forms, such as family gatherings over shared meals. Here we will look at the family dynamics and the socio-cultural signification of a meal that not only reconnects the attendees to a time and place, but also retells the past pains and loss of the author's personal family.

John Cicala's study, entitled "*Cuscuszu* in Detroit, July 18, 1993: Memory, Conflict and *Bella Figura* During a Sicilian-American Meal," provides a fascinating insight into the interplay between food and memory; of traditions and values that are transmitted intimately within the bounds of the home.[108] Cicala's work follows his grandmother, Leonarda, and her preparation of "cuscuszu" or couscous for a dinner held for the extended family. Prior to and during the meal, Cicala describes the various family plotlines that lie just beneath the surface of the formal exterior of the family meal: His father and his aunt's dislike of one another (36); Leonarda's severe childhood growing up in a convent in Trapani (34-35); the family's underlying tension that was unknown at the time of family meal but was palpable to Cicala (32). As Cicala states at the beginning of his analysis:

> My informants were blood relatives, I knew their behavior, and they knew mine through years of association. There was one main drawback: During the dinner, the senior family members behaved in an excessive formal way that seemed to suggest a repressed tension boiling underneath. Something was going on that I did not understand…I had lived with it all my life; and furthermore, I did not care because my grandmother did not like me and I did not like her. (32)

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[108] Cicala's article is taken from *Italian Folk: Vernacular Culture in Italian-American Lives* (2011).

Cicala, on July 18, 1993, was joined by members of his immediate family (father, mother, brother), and by members of his extended family (aunts, uncles, cousins). As Cicala states, he had attended many meals at his grandmother's home, but none were as formal or as subdued as the "cuscuszu" meal on that July night. From the ordered presentation of the meal (43) to the seating arrangement (44), the entire meal appeared to Cicala to be a staged exercise in emotional repression: "Everyone seems to be walking on eggshells" (45). Cicala would appear to be an outsider looking in on his own family, not fully appreciating the personal histories and dynamics at play within his extended family.[109] Katie, Cicala's aunt and Leonarda's daughter, explains that the discomfort felt during the meal stems from years of family infighting and painful memories of the past:

> It was then I realized my role as researcher was that of the 'naïve intimate': I did not belong nor understand the memories or conflicts that had occurred during the previous generation in the teens, '20s and '30s, and that had continued to define the social interactions during the *cuscuszu* meal…After going through this refined ordeal, I asked the basic behavioral question: Why did Leonarda have *cuscuszu* with these guests?...Katie explained: '*Cuscuszu* is a family dish…For our family *cuscuszu* is associated with the past. When we have the dinner, memories of the old relationships return, and we may start behaving the way we did back then, and nobody wants that'…In other Detroit families I interviewed, *cuscuszu* provided a stage for people to bring up reminiscences related to family affairs that were joyous because they re-created the good feelings they had about the generation and individuals they had known as children and young adults. In the Cicala family, the stage was retained, but the associations with the past had to be repressed. (45-46)

The communal meal, within the context of the family, reinvigorates the recollection of past generations and family memories, the tools by which identity constructions are made possible. The distinctiveness of this particular meal with its significance both in the physical sense (joining disparate family personalities) and the metaphysical sense (reliving the history or times that have long since passed) conveys a continuity with a cultural identification by means of gastronomic

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[109] See Robert Viscusi's chapter, "Il caso delle case," in his work *Buried Caesars* for an interesting literary parallel to the topos of the home and house, 58-68.

and socio-cultural practices of the immigrant past. Be it the case of Tony from Papajohn's study or the Cicala family meal, the memories of the past weigh heavily on the present. Either through purposive repression or through unintentional psychological conditioning, the Italian immigrant past still plays an active role in current conceptions of Italian American ethnic identity.[110] As we will see, the divided nature of the Italian state prior to emigration only furthered the resultant divergences in personal and historical recollections of an ethnic history.

John Foot's 2009 investigation, *Italy's Divided Memory*, inspires this tangential parallel with regard to the manner in which Italy as a nation was formed. Foot's work begins with a theoretical dissonance in the form of "public memory," those events that define an historical identity from which an individual sense of belonging derives. In the case of Italy, Foot describes a confrontation between the state and public memory, noting that often the same past was understood in competing visions of what had actually occurred: "Over time, divided forms of public memory were created that allowed each 'side' to tell its own story publicly…The state's version of the past was important to those involved in local memory conflicts, but it often failed to satisfy desires for recognition or close divisions" (3). Foot's argument is that with regard to Italian history, the divided understanding of how events took place created dichotomous versions of historical occurrences between state and local levels. As such, Italy's own history, as Foot asserts, has been influenced significantly by divided accounts of its historical past: "Italian history has been marked by divided memories ever since the nation took shape in the nineteenth century…One aspect of this divided memory is that certain accounts were excluded from historical discourse for long periods of time" (11). We have noted in the first and second chapters of this dissertation the economic and political ramifications of Italian Unification on the

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[110] Joseph Papaleo's collection of personal essays *Italian Stories* (2002) furthers this analysis, in particular his essay "Nonna," in which memories and traditions are relived through the communal meal (38-50).

Italian south. Here Foot underlines the fact that "the Italian state has been in the throes of a semipermanent legitimation crisis ever since its inception" (14). For the immigrant, it would be difficult to verbalize to their children something that they themselves didn't fully understand. From 1861 forward, Italy was/is a geo-political reality, but the state itself established itself in the Italian south in a compromised manner, delegitimizing its own authority in the process. The result of this political process led to mass emigration from impoverished areas of Italy beginning in 1880. Those who left during this period from 1880 to 1924 bore with them the memories of an indifferent and hostile home and kept those memories hidden from children and grandchildren. A peripheral appreciation of pre-emigration poverty coupled with the American dream form the basis of many Italian American narratives. As a result of a non-desire to relive painful memories, Italian immigrants did their offspring a disservice by obfuscating their pre-emigrant past. Italian Americans of the second and third generations have turned to Italy in order to recover that past, only to find that their tours of Florence, Venice, and Rome have not done much in stirring an ethnic reawakening.[111] In viewing the modern state of Italy as the source of our cultural identity, Italian Americans are often disappointed to discover that their Italian ethnicity differs significantly from their European counterparts.[112] The nebulous perception of an Italian past, for most Italian Americans, begins with the most superficial perception of the "Old World," that of a history born in poverty, and ends with the Americanization of subsequent generations who must return to an Italy that was created, in certain respects, on the backs of so many disenfranchised southern Italians. This is due in large part to the racial and ethnic ideology of the early twentieth century whereby persons of Italian ancestry learned quickly that their ethnic identity was an

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[111] See Viscusi, *Buried Caesars*, 1-24.

[112] For further elaboration on this idea, see episode four, season two of HBO's *The Sopranos*. Entitled, "Commendatori," it follows Tony, Paulie, and Christopher during a trip to Naples and, in particular, follows Paulie who seeks in vain to establish a connection with the Italians he meets, trying in some way to establish a personal link back to Italy.

obstacle to their assimilation into the American mainstream. As Charles Gallagher points out, the

prevalent social perception of Italian immigrants has always been somewhere between American

and foreign:

> Today, social scientists distinguish between phenotypical characteristics (hair texture, skin color, facial features) which constitute racial categories and the cultural markers which designate ethnic membership. But until quite recently the distinctions between race and ethnicity were used interchangeably. Cultural characteristics like language and religion, as well as one's placement in the socioeconomic pecking order, that is, one's class position, were used as racial markers that placed individuals in a racial hierarchy. If you were Italian or Irish in the mid to late nineteenth century it was likely that, as a matter of common understanding and perception, you were on the 'margins of whiteness.' The shift from 'not quite white' or an in-between racial status to becoming an unquestioned member of the dominant racial order would take a number of generations to achieve. (11)

What this means for Italian Americans is that subsequent generations have been deprived of an

ethnic and cultural identity due to the parents/grandparents' need to become part of the greater

society. As Richard Gambino laments: "Italian American identity is in danger of being dissolved

into a sea of inauthentic myths" (275). To further this point, Gallagher avers:

> Despite the fact that the dominant white establishment used ethnocentrism in ways similar to racism…in the span of three or four generations this population went from being labeled as socially undesirable newcomers relegated to doing society's dirty work to entering the ranks of mainstream white America. The 'whitening' of these two groups [Italians and Irish] could occur because they were able to shed their ethnic identities. (16)

American cultural hegemony and societal pressure led the second generation Italian Americans

to reject their parents' ethnic heritage, viewing it in opposition to their future success in

American society. Simone Cinotto's study of immigrant food habits also sheds light on this

intergenerational conflict: "As a result of the widespread stigma of inferiority attached to their

parents' culture, many thought they could become Americans – meaning, with that to achieve a

new identity and belong to the larger white society defined by the official and popular culture –

only by discarding everything 'Italian' in them" (14).

The purpose of this project is to shed light on a decidedly southern Italian historiography lost to the Italian American experience. This quest to retrieve an ethnic heritage from Italy as we understand it to be now is misleading, providing wonderful memories but never really addressing the cause of the socio-cultural angst. Our goal throughout this study has been to uncover the southern Italian dimension of the Italian American experience; to detail, compare, and explain the cultural ties that bind Italian Americans to the Italian south. It has been our goal to provide a more nuanced understanding of our shared past and the elements of our ethnic heritage that have been lost to time, because of the dismissal of the material culture of the first generation by their children and grandchildren. The fact remains that as hyphenated, ethnic Americans Italian Americans have tended toward a nostalgic appreciation of the immigrant experience -the sense of family, community, etc.- without ever really looking any deeper into the monolithic Italian past. Suffice it to say, the second-, third-, or fourth-generation Italian Americans perceive their Italian past as just that, Italian, while the truest sense of their identity lies in the southern regions of that monolith. When we dig a little deeper, we discover that the specifics do play an influential role in our cognitive development. The immigrant's past, which derives in the majority of instances from a southern Italian society, has impressed on their progeny defining notions of intrapersonal and interpersonal values. In total, when we move beyond the generalities and move towards the specifics of Italian American identity, we must consider the historiography and ethnography of southern Italy because it answers the questions that the first generation never could: Where do we come from? What was life like for you before you came to America? As we have seen, the intergenerational gaps and the degree to which the second and third generations considered themselves American combined to distance future generations from an ethnic past. Furthermore, it has led to various interpretations of an ethnic identity, some feeling the Italian

pull more so than the American and vice versa. In this respect we assert that a more historically and culturally accurate history is necessary and that all begins with our progenitors, the immigrant.

In looking beyond the immigrant past and moving towards the pre-emigrant phase, we often do not know any more than economic hardship. This view of the Italian *paese*, an expression often used in Italian America in reference to the one's town of family origin, mars and belies a history that admittedly was poverty stricken, but was at one time a proud and vibrant society. The starting point is our immigrant ancestors, and by beginning with their ethnographic past, we get a clearer understanding of present Italian American ethnic identity. We most often remember, as has been highlighted by Barolini and Puzo, our female ancestors in recollections of personal strength and determination. Our point here is that it is not coincidental, that the ethnic heritage to which we pertain placed a great deal of importance, as was attested to by De Martino and Chiavola Birnbaum. Coupled with icons of a maternal divinity, the Italian immigrant laid the foundation for a distinctly family-centered culture, reflecting the pre-emigration interdependence of extended members of the family. All of these elements have their roots in the history and culture of southern Italy and it is to this end that this project has sought to reinvigorate Italian American studies with a uniquely southern Italian juxtaposition.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this dissertation, since its inception, has been to provide people like

myself with answers to the questions that our Italian ancestors left unanswered. Divided up into

distant memories, Italian Americans of my generation and beyond have only the most superficial

appreciation of our immigrant forbearer's culture and the personal histories that drove them to

abandon their roots in favor of the promise of America. We always understood the appeal of

America to the Italian immigrants and, on some level, we understood that hardship in the

broadest sense drove them across the Atlantic. What third- and fourth-generation Italian

Americans have never truly understood is the Italian dimension in their hyphenated identity. In a

cursory sense, Italy means the geo-political entity of the twenty-first-century Italy and when

faced with that reality, Italian Americans often have found a disconnection between their own

sense of Italian identity and what is Italian cultural identification within the borders of the

European nation. This project, therefore, has attempted to return to the source of Italian

American ethnic identity by analyzing the history of southern Italy, more specifically, the

historical and cultural phenomena of the pre- and post-Unification Italian south. By recognizing

that the majority of Italian American ancestry began in the Italian south, this project has sought

to reorient the Italian American perspective toward the specifically southern dimension of our

common ancestry. My analysis has centered on the questions that have plagued my own sense of

Italian ethnicity: If I am Italian, why doesn't my conception of what it means to be Italian sync

up with what I am told is Italian culture? It was because of this inability that this project was undertaken to reframe the Italian American experience according to the unique history of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and the cultural patrimony of the Italian south. We began this project by examining the history of the Neapolitan kingdom and highlighted the exceptionality that categorized the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Contrary to popular misperception, the Neapolitan kingdom prior to Unification was an economically and culturally vibrant area of Western Europe. Under the Bourbon monarchs, we discovered a rich tradition of scientific and social advancements that made the kingdom one of the most sophisticated regions of Europe with diverse spheres of economic development, with a rail system which was the first of its kind on the Italian peninsula, and an agricultural sector whose products were a highly desired commodity. The prosperity enjoyed by the regional elite stood in stark contrast to the socio-economic reality of the southern Italian peasant. Admittedly, the rural poor during the early part of the nineteenth century had a great deal of economic hardship with which they had to contend; however, their poverty was no less emblematic of Bourbon misrule than England's rural poor's was of Queen Victoria's mismanagement of British economic policy. As we have seen, Bourbon intransigence in the face of political upheaval during the Napoleonic period of 1799-1815 resulted in the diaspora of southern Italian intellectuals who, in large part, stirred the movement towards reform. Arriving in northern Italian cities like Turin and Milan, southern Italian intellectuals began a media blitz of catastrophic proportions, claiming Bourbon excesses and repressive control of the southern regions. Inspired in part by theories on race and cultural superiority/inferiority, an image was created of a southern Italian kingdom that was intrinsically different and ethnically inferior to their northern European counterparts. As the movement towards Unification took shape from 1848 to 1860, we saw this viewpoint expressed no longer

by southern exiles, but amongst the political elite, including Cavour and his ministers. In painting the south as a barbaric second-class race of Italian peoples, the Italian Unification movement moved towards uniting the peninsula under the supposed banner of liberation. In reality, the economic motivations that drove the Risorgimento and the Unification of Italy were a glaring fact that has been omitted from the narrative of the Unification process.

As the Unification of Italy was declared in 1861, the real work of creating a nation began. First, the new government of Cavour began to systematically dismantle the economic and social institutions of the Neapolitan kingdom, in particular the Banco Reale, whose assets were liquidated and shipped off to Turin in an effort to shore up the House of Savoy's financial debt. In so doing, the new government turned to compromised persons to enforce the new political and social order. Turning to the promises of social reform made by Garibaldi during his military campaign, the rural poor recognized a socio-economic opportunity that would have benefitted the masses but would have required the help of the compromised middle class whose main objective was to preserve the status quo. The resultant outbreak of social disorder in Sicily and the banditry of peninsular southern Italy demonstrated to the new government that the work of unifying Italy was still left to be done. The discontent many in the south felt towards the new government was only furthered by the unemployment and new taxes that were ushered in with the arrival of the new Italian state. An old adage common during this period held that a man in the Italian south had two choices: Either emigrate or brigandage (in whatever form of that may take). Add to this equation the promise of financial enrichment which lay across the sea in the form of America, the future emigrant weighed his prospects in the then current economic climate, saw that there was greater opportunity outside the Italian south, and began the process of abandoning his native roots in the rural Italian south.

In opposition to the emigrant are certain individuals with differing economic prospects, seeing in the disorder created during Unification an opportunity to exploit a blind-spot in the new government's peripheral view. The individuals who promoted social order and other enterprising individuals discovered the financial benefit in promoting the government's interest in the southern regions. From the agricultural sector to the political world, the Italian south, Sicily in particular, degenerated into a hybridized form of social status quo: The forces that stood in opposition to agricultural and social reforms were the very same that either employed or tolerated the rise of ill-intentioned individuals whose business was the protection racket. Beyond the conceptions of the preservation of social order, we discovered an economy of social control and economic exploitation that benefitted the criminal directly; indirectly, it enabled the middle class and conservative sectors of society to preserve a socio-economic system that was tilted in their favor. These operations in organized criminality would ultimately come to define the Italian south as inherently violent and incongruous to the more advanced regions of the north. This stems in part from the propagandistic campaign waged prior to unity; also, it is emblematic of the process by which the south was annexed to the rest of Italy, as the martial and political unity was established quite rapidly, whereas economic union was a different matter. The vitriol associated with the government's reaction to the chaos they caused in the south produced the migration of southern Italians to North and South America in search of economic amelioration.

In leaving their native soil, the southern Italian immigrants would bring with them their material culture which was focused primarily on the preservation of the family unit. In the agrarian zones of the Italian south, bonds of kinship and family ties defined the cultural identity of the rural poor. Belonging to a family unit, with all of the duties associated therein, formed the foundation of the culture that the first generation of Italian Americans would transmit to their

American-born children. Within this construct, the strictly defined social roles of an agricultural society could not tolerate dissenters. As was demonstrated by our analysis of southern Italian tarantism, the feminine aspect of southern Italian material culture manifested itself on both the physical and the metaphysical plane. In both the pre-Christian and Christian tradition in the Italian south, we have seen uniquely maternal-centered religious devotions and practices. Southern Italian socio-cultural mores reflect the mythological association of the natural world with female forms of the transcendent, supernatural forces that regulate the agrarian world which would also find expression in the form of the Christian Madonna. When examined together, we have seen that the predominance of the southern Italian woman within the social and domestic spheres was great; that quite often it was the mother who dictated the decision to emigrate. In so doing, it would be the women of the first generation of Italian America that would become the markers of traditional culture.

Our analyses of the Bourbon south, the rise of organized crime, and tarantism served to frame our subsequent exploration of the corresponding Italian American historiography and ethnography. There has been a great deal written on the Italian American experience and, especially with regard to the historical record, there has been an Italo-centric focus, vaunting the achievements of the Renaissance and classical Rome, to name a few of the examples most often employed. By including these historical chapters in the annals of Italian American history, we as a community have developed a skewed approach to our ethnic heritage. We have constructed identities based on the current entity of Italy, believing in some way that the nation had always existed, that its people(s) had always coexisted on a continuously "Italian" peninsula. The problem with this point of view, at least in my experience, has been that it is very hard to compare the two. When the American of Italian descent arrives in Italy, he/she may encounter

any of the following: A language that sounds nothing like what you were told was Italian, food that resembles nothing your grandmother made, and a very modern nation. I'm simplifying here, but this has been my own personal experience. The question that I have always returned to is: Why is it that Americans consider me Italian and Italians consider me American? As stated previously, I believe this derives from a misperception of Italian American ancestry stemming in part from the manner in which Italians in America became American. By disregarding the first generation's material culture in favor of an American, hegemonic norm, the second-generation widened the gap between subsequent generations of Italian Americans and their ethnic heritage. In so doing, the third and fourth generations of Italian Americans have returned to an Italy that doesn't necessarily reflect their vision of Italian-ness.

My goal has been to re-orient the Italian American experience towards a specifically southern Italian history. When we consider the historiography of southern Italy in the nineteenth century, we discover a cultural framework very similar to that of North America. The similarities in the socio-economic policies of both the Italian and American governments concerning the southern Italian peoples are extraordinarily similar, both perceiving the southern Italian as a threat to social and political cohesion. The philosophical and pseudo-anthropological campaigns concerning the Italian immigrant throughout the late nineteenth century in American newsprint, demonstrated that the attitudes of the post-Unification period were transmitted across the Atlantic to the point that, upon arrival, Italian immigrants were subjected to an openly hostile American society: From cartoon depictions of the enemy horde storming New York harbor to the Italian organ grinder, Italians were presented as the ignorant, barbaric races of the inferior south and completely unwelcomed in the xenophobic America of the late nineteenth century. In the same fashion as the southern Italian peoples of the post-Unification period, the Italian

immigrants were told that to be their ethnic self was to not be accepted; rather, they were encouraged to disavow their heritage in favor of an externally imposed standard. In both the Unification-era Italian south and the nineteenth-century America of the Italian immigrant laborer, the southern Italian was expected to participate in the construction of a nation. With regard to Italy, the southern Italian was expected to tolerate/support the imposition of the new government's taxes, conscription, and vision of national order so that the new state of Italy could establish its authority over the annexed southern regions. America, on the other hand, demanded the physical labor of the immigrant in the industrial boom of the American Northeast, the coal mines and steel mills of Pennsylvania, and the stockyards of Chicago. The immigrant was the fuel that propelled the industrialization of the American economy; however, his place in his new society was on the margins of urban poor. The perception of the Italian people(s) in America was greatly informed by nineteenth-century Italian sources and as such, American intellectuals and xenophobic politicians conceived of ways in which to limit both the flow of immigrants to American shores and the way in which these immigrants might be incorporated into American society. The end results of this "Americanization" had a multiplicity of effects, in many ways mirroring the effects of post-Unification social policy. One of the primary ways in which this was achieved was through public education. Aside from this, the National Quota enacted in 1924 and Prohibition in 1920 were specifically American WASP social movements aimed at the immigrant communities, in particular the "wine-swilling" Italian. As we have noted, Prohibition gained traction in part because of the association of immigrants (Italians, Irish, and Germans in particular) with alcoholism and violent crime, cultures incompatible with the hegemonic WASP culture of early twentieth-century America.

The results of this type of social engineering on the part of the federal government were a disastrous amalgamation of political and economic forces seeking to exploit the loopholes and blind-spots of the law. As we saw in the rise of organized crime in Sicily and in twentieth-century America, the compromised position of the national government, its corruption and ineffectual response to social disorder provided the ideal situation for a different type of criminal to arise, one who would use the law and the socio-political system against itself. Prohibition enabled the rise of enterprising capitalists of all ethnic stripes. In so doing, they would join the long list of native-born Americans who also openly flaunted the Volstead Act. But as Prohibition came to a close, an image of American criminality developed that perceived all criminal activity as a uniquely Italian occupation. The American government furthered this perception by means of the Kefauver and MacClellan inquiries of the 1950s and 1960s in which the federal government maintained that a national syndicate of Italian American criminals controlled all illegal activities in the United States, either directly or indirectly. Through popular film and fiction, American society of the twentieth century has come to believe that organized crime in America can be blamed entirely on the Italian American community and their supposed mafia. As we have seen, the association of Italian Americans with organized crime derives in part from a subconscious desire on the part of many individuals to address the persistent existence of organized crime in American society by creating a straw man in the form of the mafia. As a result, the Italian American experience has been indelibly marked by the mafia stereotype that was produced for us by an external culture that presupposed that Italian people(s) were predisposed to criminality which made it easy to connect organized crime in America in all its forms to the genetically criminal Italians.

Finally, we looked at the ways in which an Italian American identity has been shaped by the aforementioned historical phenomena. Beginning with the Italian American devotion to Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, we have seen a continuation of mores born of an agricultural past within the urbanized Italian American community of the American Northeast. In so doing, we witnessed the distinctly family-centered culture of the immigrant generation, an aspect of Italian American culture with a multiplicity of functions, the first of which being the source of ethnic identity. The family unit, much as in the fashion of the agrarian south, formed the space in which values and an ancestry were transmitted to the younger generations. In all of this, the maternal figure wielded enormous influence. Our investigation has demonstrated that the immigrant generation and in particular the women of that generation have left distinguishing marks on the subsequent generations of Italian Americans' cognitive development. On both the conscious and subconscious level, the immigrant past weighs heavily on the American present mainly because of the information gaps that prevail in Italian American ancestry. The third and fourth generations of Italian Americans, by virtue of their distance from their immigrant forbearers, never had the opportunity to engage with them, therefore never truly appreciating their ethnic heritage. Coupled with second-generation Italian American aspirations to assimilate into American society, subsequent generations of Italian Americans return often to the memories of their female ancestors when attempting to address issues of ethnic identity.

In summary, this project has sought to coalesce my own diverse interests in southern Italian historiography and ethnography in an attempt to better understand a past that was denied to me as a third-generation Italian American. Out of my own struggle to discover the roots of a historic and ethnic past, I have attempted to unearth a history that was never present in any presentation of an Italian past. In looking at the specifically southern history of Italy, the Italian-

ness of the Italian American community appears to be better contextualized, more suited to the ethnographic conventions of the community itself. By returning to the source of Italian American ethnicity and going beyond the exhausted motifs of rural poverty and economic angst, we have seen a dynamic Mezzogiorno whose history and culture have a more direct influence on the historical and cultural appreciation of the Italian past for Italian Americans. The Kingdom of Naples and southern Italian history in general reflect a society that was, in some aspects, one of the most influential regions of Europe throughout its history. It has been our intention that the Italian American of the twenty-first century should be given a more historically accurate and culturally sensitive analysis of the three most emblematic components of Italian American culture: Mothers, Men, and Mafiosi. Our goal has been to recontextualize the Italian American experience, to liberate it so to speak from the bonds of rural poverty, to the larger history of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies; to look at the achievements of the southern regions in an effort to dispel the persistent myths of socio-cultural backwardness associated with the rural poor. This dissertation project was an attempt to better understand the effects of socio-economic and historical influences on Italian American culture, beginning with the origins of the Italian American ethnic identity: the southern Italian. As a community, Italian America is entitled to know the historic roots of their culture in the specifics, no longer superficially Italian, but distinctly southern Italian. We have asserted that the experiences of our forbearers in Italy endured the same prejudices and were plagued by the same questions of identity in a new Italy as the second-generation Italian American did in their new American home. Our experience as Italian Americans has a specifically southern Italian dimension, one that must be explored in order to better appreciate our current conceptions of ethnicity and identity. It is my hope that my

investigation may offer the current generation of Italian Americans an insight into the history and

culture of which we are all a part.

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