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# Sicilian Intellectual and Cultural Resistance to Piedmont's Appropriation (1860-1920)

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SICILIAN INTELLECTUAL AND CULTURAL RESISTANCE TO  
PIEDMONT'S APPROPRIATION (1860-1920)

by

Giordana Poggioli-Kaftan

A Dissertation Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

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December 2016

## ABSTRACT

### SICILIAN INTELLECTUAL AND CULTURAL RESISTANCE TO PIEDMONT'S APPROPRIATION (1860-1920)

by

Giordana Poggioli-Kaftan

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2016  
Under the Supervision of Professor Gregory Jay

Through my analysis of literary works, I endeavor to bring to the fore a cultural and intellectual counter-hegemonic discourse that came to be articulated by three Sicilian writers in the years following Italy's unification. Their intent was that of debunking a national discourse that constructed Italian Southerners as "Otherness." My study focuses on six primary texts, five short stories, and one novel, written at the turn of the twentieth century. These texts include Giovanni Verga's "What is the King?" and "Freedom"; Luigi Pirandello's "Madam Mimma," "The Black Baby Goat," and "The Other Son"; Luigi Capuana's *Rabbato's Americani*. In order to expand my discussion and bring it to present-day Italy, I also analyze three films: Florestano Vancini's *Bronte: a Massacre that History Books never Reported*, Emanuele Crialesse's *Golden Door*, and the Taviani brothers' *Chaos*. My investigation of these works draws upon theories of many different fields of study like postcolonialism, narrative and trauma studies, new historicism, film studies, border studies, and critical race theory. Consequently, the secondary texts I consulted are by many and diverse authors, such as Homi Bhabha, Shail Mayaram, Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault, Stuart Hall, Etienne Balibar, Russ Castronovo, Cathy Caruth and Kali Tal, and Laurie Vickory, Henri Bergson just to mention a few. Above all, I premise my analysis of the literary texts on Michael Rössner's theorization that the texts by Verga, Pirandello, and Capuana are conducive to be read through the postcolonial lens because of their

authors' subaltern position within the newly formed Italy. I give a postcolonial reading to my primary texts to uncover a counter-hegemonic discourse that, by discrediting the process of unification as a story of freedom and success for all, constructs the *piemontizzazione*, as a colonization of southern territories. I, then, demonstrate how this counter-hegemonic discourse aimed also to debunk a race rhetoric that had been taking shape in nineteenth-century Europe, and created taxonomies of superior and inferior peoples. In Italy, the local race discourse created Southerners as racialized "Otherness" on which Italy's failures could be conveniently dumped, and against which the real and pure Italian race was to be constructed. Finally, I finish with the analysis of Sicilians' emigration to America that can be interpreted as resistance, exile, and trauma. Emigration can be read as resistance insomuch as it was the only possible way to defeat any racial construction of Southerners as intrinsically Italy's "losers." Likewise, emigration can be read as Sicilians' exile that is as their punitive banishment from their own island and the trauma that it entails.

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Figure 1: Map of Italy in 1860. Bloy, Marjie. *The Italian Peninsula Before Unification in 1860. A Web of English History*. 2016 ed. N.p. 11 Nov. 2013. Web. 13 Oct. 2016. <<http://www.historyhome.co.uk/europe/italymap.htm>>.



. Figure 2: Map of present-day Italy. ephotopix.com. *Italy Political Map*. eMapsWorld. N.p. N.d. Web. 13 Oct. 2016. <<http://www.emapsworld.com/italy-political-map.html>>.

## Introduction

An unintentionally revealing and popular joke in Italy goes as such: “Why does the United States have Blacks and Italy has Sicilians? Americans got to choose first.” This joke’s humor is inscribed in racist semantics, where, in perfect symmetry, one national subgroup is compared and contrasted against the whole nation to be constructed as undesirable and consequently deserving to be ridiculed. Moreover, in order for the joke to be effective, Sicilians, just like Blacks, are pushed into a separate subgroup with distinct characteristics from those of other subgroups within Italy. In other words, the joke relies on Italians’ supposed shared knowledge of the typical characteristics that make Sicilians different from other Italians, ultimately underlining Italians’ perception that Sicilians, just like Blacks, are part of a distinctive and inferior race. This joke is useful to set up the theoretical framework of my dissertation, *Sicilian Intellectual and Cultural Resistance to Piedmont’s Appropriation (1860-1920)*.<sup>1</sup>

My work examines the origins of the Italian national discourse that created Sicily as racialized “Otherness” and how some Sicilian writers resisted their people’s racialization that came with the Piedmont’s appropriation of their island. How could Sicilians, whose bodies are not as visibly different in Italy, have been constructed into a distinct and inferior race, though? Although the Piedmontese Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909) attempted to create a science, phrenology, which would make the supposed deviation of Italian Southerners’ bone measurements correspond to their social deviation, his phony theories have long been discredited and debunked.

Yet, as the joke testifies, in the Italian collective imagination Sicilians are still a different and inferior race. How can such racism be articulated? To answer this question, I turn to Etienne Balibar, who describes racism as:

A true “total social phenomenon” (which) inscribes itself in practices (forms of violence, contempt, intolerance, humiliation, and exploitation), in discourses and representations which are so many intellectual elaborations of the phantasm of prophylaxis or segregation (the need to purify the social body, to preserve “one’s own” or identity from all forms of mixing, interbreeding or invasion) and which are articulated around stigmata of otherness (name, skin color, religious practices). It therefore organizes affects (the psychological study of these has concentrated upon describing their obsessive character and also their “irrational” ambivalence) by conferring upon them a stereotyped form. (18)

Balibar moves away from the notion that race, and the consequent racism, is inscribed in the body alone. The body is one of the “stigmata of otherness,” but so are religious practices and names. In the above joke, the name “Sicilians” becomes the “stigmata of otherness” in Italy as skin color becomes that of Blacks in the United States. Balibar, then, distinguishes between an Anglo-Saxon race discourse, whose theoretical models are based on sociobiology, and present France’s model, which, without discounting sociobiology, is more based on what P. A. Taguieff defined as “differentialist racism.” That is, a racism “whose dominant theme is not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences, a racism which, at first sight, does not postulate the superiority of certain groups or peoples in relation to others but ‘only’ the ... incompatibility of life-styles and traditions” (Balibar 21). Thus, what is at the heart of differentialist racism is the failure of a group of people to assimilate to the dominant culture that is presented to be universalistic and progressive (Balibar 25).

Differentialist racism can be applied as successfully to the Sicilians’ case today as in my dissertation’s timeframe, 1860-1920; although, in those years, the sociobiological racism was

present, too, as I will show especially in my Chapter 2. As Balibar contends: “there is not merely a single invariant racism but a number of racisms, forming a broad, open spectrum of situations” (40). Balibar’s contention underlines the notion that within the same nation and at the same time more than one form of racism may be at work. The same concept of nation, and consequent nationalism, cannot be void of racism since any nation state holds to the idea of a fictitious, historical, and authentic ethnicity represented by the dominant group within that country (Balibar 49). As a corollary to racism, which necessarily invokes the concept of hegemony and domination, I think it is necessary that I provide also a definition of the terms “subaltern,” “dominant,” and “hegemonic.” Much of my dissertation is, in fact, premised on Sicily’s subaltern position vis-à-vis the hegemonic North and the consequent articulation of a race discourse that constructed Sicilians as an inferior race.

With the concept of subalternity, Antonio Gramsci moves away from orthodox Marxism, which tended to consider the political superstructures secondary and subordinate to the economic structures (Fresu, “Stato, società civile e subalterni”). Unlike Marx, for Gramsci, history is not determined only by economic relations of domination and exploitation, but also culture plays an important role in creating the power structure through which hegemony is ultimately affirmed (Fresu, “Stato, società civile e subalterni”). Gramsci distinguishes between domination, achieved through coercion, and hegemony, achieved through consensus, which is cultural and ideological control imposed from the superstructure downward. Hegemony is affirmed through many of civil society’s ideological structures, such as churches, schools, media, and intellectuals. Although Gramsci believes that every person is intellectual because they are able to have “intellectual activities,” not everyone can function as an intellectual within a society. Gramsci gives the “organic” intellectual the role of cultural and ideological leader of the dominant social class, or

the class that aspires to be dominant, since through his/her ideas and writings the dominant class can exercise a hegemonic power over all society. Subaltern refers to the groups of people within a society who are subject to the hegemony of the dominant class. According to Gramsci, Italy's unification was achieved through a process that generated inequalities: the North's economic and industrial development determined the South's impoverishment (Fresu, "Stato, società civile e subalterni"). The North became the dominant and the South the subaltern. However, this unequal economic relation between the North and South was kept in place by an alliance between the North's industrialist block and the South's noble block and the bourgeoisie. These latter were employed in the state's political institutions, functioning as an efficient instrument of northern politics and bureaucratic apparatus to create consent in the South. Hence, southern intellectuals, like Benedetto Croce and Giustino Fortunato, became the organic intellectuals of the North, leaving the South, and especially the southern peasantry, without a leader (Fresu, "Stato, società civile e subalterni"). As a consequence, southern peasantry was "disintegrated," lacking a coherent and unified voice, and its responses were rebellious and "spontaneous," meaning not having an educated leader to organize them (Buttigieg 828).

Southern cultural differences, which at times were forced to become visible through their Southerners' bodies, were used to justify the perceived primitiveness of their civilization<sup>2</sup> considered to be so inferior to the European standard so as to pose a threat to the newly formed state's existence, development, and acceptance into Europe. Thus, from the inception of Italy's unification, the North and the South became constructed as culturally divided. The North was the site of power and of its enunciation, and the South the site of liminality, that which can be hardly considered to be part of Italy. Recent historians have stressed the immense economic and cultural

diversities of the regions constituting the South, making it impossible to write about it in general terms (Davis,  *Casting Off* 208). Therefore, my research focuses solely on Sicily.

In 1861, the region known as Italy's South was annexed to the Savoy monarchy of Piedmont and Sardinia, and became a thorny point in Italian history.<sup>3</sup> From the very beginning, some southern intellectuals and politicians lamented the imposition of an alien—and often adverse—political and economic regime, as well as the brutality of its implementation, even comparing it to that of European colonial powers, such as England and France (Martucci 291). Soon, references to “colony” and “colonization,” to describe Italy's unification, became part of the lexicon and imagery of a large number of Southerners as Alfredo Niceforo's and Antonio Gramsci's writings testify.<sup>4</sup> More recently, even the Sicilian novelist Silvana La Spina stated that all post-unification Sicilian novelists dealt with “what one can define, without any doubt, the ‘colonization’ of their own island” (121). Whether or not one can talk of actual colonization of the South by the North remains a contested issue that keeps dividing historians and scholars of Italian Studies alike. On the one hand, Paolo Pezzino and John Dickie, for example, resist the idea of an internal colonization of the South by the North (Pezzino 54; Dickie 10). Dickie, for instance, warns us that “the Mezzogiorno<sup>5</sup> was not the victim of a colonial exploitation by the North for which racism might have provided a legitimization” (10). On the other hand, historians like Tonia Romano and Claudia Petraccone report that from the very onset of the unification, some southern intellectuals complained about the South's new condition as the North's land of conquest (Romano 91; Petraccone, “Nord” 518). Within this complex hermeneutics of the Italian unification, my ideological position is that the South's annexation, achieved through fraudulent means, and its forced *piemontizzazione*, that is, the rigid implementation of Piedmont's central

political administration on southern territory that eliminated all local political institutions, may be construed as a de facto colonization (Riall, *Sicily* 90).

Naturally, the South's colonization needs to be conceptualized within the Postcolonial Studies' epistemological frame. Postcolonial Studies focuses on the relations between a European state parent to non-European territory. In contrast, my analyses center on an internal colonization: Sicily's colonization at the hands of the Savoy kingdom of Piedmont and Sardinia, which unified the country by annexing also the South. In my discussion, I contend that Sicily was made into a colony insofar as it was made to absorb and adapt to a regime of northern political institutions, as well as to economic policies that, directly or indirectly, did not favor its progress. Consequently, within the Italian kingdom, Sicily found itself to be politically and culturally subordinated to the North and its people in a subaltern position vis-à-vis their northern counterparts. I also contend that, from the very beginning, some Sicilian writers articulated a counter-hegemonic, national discourse of intellectual and cultural resistance to the South's colonization and the racialization of its people.

Writing about resistance in Third World<sup>6</sup> countries, Jane Schneider acutely contrasts postcolonial scholars, like Cuban Fernando Ortiz and Bengalese Partha Chatterjee, with Italian intellectuals, such as Gramsci and Ernesto de Martino. The most significant difference Schneider detects between the two is that according to Ortiz and Chatterjee the subaltern is able to find a unifying consciousness that turns margins into centers making "coherent identities out of fragmented histories" (17). Instead, Schneider argues, in the South of Italy the subalterns' voices and actions were characterized by fragmentation and lack of trust:

... the writings of Third World scholars ... presuppose positions or arguments that, if they were applied to the Italian South, would lead one to seek out



unsuspected domains of autonomy, hidden well-springs of opposition to the industrial capitalist civilizational system and its multiple, nested, Orientalist discourses ... these arguments were not produced by southern Italian intellectuals.

(18)

Although I agree with Schneider's position about Italian southern subaltern voices and actions being fragmented and, at times, lacking "coherent identities," I contend that some southern voices claimed and acquired an agency able to turn margins into centers. I am especially interested in demonstrating that "hidden well-springs of opposition to the industrial capitalist civilizational system and its multiple, nested, Orientalist discourses" are actually present in some texts and are screaming for consideration. It is, thus, imperative that we turn our attention to these texts in order to detect and understand how they articulate their resistance to "Orientalist discourses," seemingly without drawing attention to it.

My work's scope does not include the brigands' armed resistance that has been well documented by scholars like Dickie, Eric Hobsbawm, and Carlo Levi, to name a few. Out of intellectual honesty, I want to position myself within Italy's geography, politics, and culture as African-American feminist theorist Valerie Smith suggests: "If those of us working on the connections between race, class, and gender in cultural production acknowledge the relation of our theoretical work to our personal circumstances, then we will be able to expand the radical possibilities of our scholarship" (qtd. in Tal 4). I am a woman, born and raised in Rome; in a Catholic, upper middle-class environment; and racialized as "withe," with all of the privileges that entails. My interest in Sicily, and its position within the newly formed Italy, was kindled by many of my Marquette University students who, through the years, tried to convince me that although their ancestors came from Sicily they were not Italian; they were Sicilian. I soon

became determined to eradicate such heresy out of my students' minds, thus starting my odyssey that ultimately took me to my dissertation. Since my dissertation is interdisciplinary, addressing professors from different disciplines, I start with a short overview of the historical facts that led to Italy's unification, where I touch upon the so-called "Southern Question," and the race discourse that was taking shape in Europe and Italy at that time.

### **Historical Background**

At the inception of the nineteenth century, Italy was still a highly divided country. The Italian peninsula comprised a southern kingdom, governed by the Bourbon monarchy; a northern kingdom, with the Savoy monarchy; the Papal State, headed by the Pope; the independent Dukedom of Tuscany; and, finally, Lombardy and Veneto under the Hapsburg Empire (see fig. 1). In the middle of the century, Savoy King Vittorio Emanuele II aspired to reunite all of Italy under his reign. Thanks to his dexterous Prime Minister, Camillo Benso, Count of Cavour, by 1860 Emanuele II's kingdom already included Tuscany, the Papal State (with the exception of Latium), and Lombardy. As Garibaldi landed in Sicily on May 11, 1860 and worked his way northward, the Bourbon king, Frances II, desperately tried to forge an alliance with the Savoy king's Prime Minister, Cavour, but to no avail (Petracone, "Cavour" 126).

Cavour wanted and obtained that the Bourbon kingdom be annexed to the Savoy kingdom. As mentioned previously, southern intellectuals and politicians were quick in voicing their complaints about the new monarchy's choice of a highly rigid, centralized government that reproduced the Piedmontese administration on a national scale (Riall 122). Already by the 1880s, Italy's unity was undermined by what became known as "Italy's dualism." Italy became a two-tier country: the North was the industrialized powerhouse and the center of wealth, with the South lagging behind both economically and socially (Teti, *La razza* 50-1). During the 1870s,

the government sent experts to the South to study the reasons for its presumed inability to progress, thus initiating the myth of the “Southern Question.” “Southern Question” refers to the creation of a national discourse articulated through two different parameters. Northerners, in their anxiety to be part of the industrialized, capitalist, and progress-driven northern Europe, looked at the South as the site of savagery and lack of civilization, preventing Italy from achieving its potentials.<sup>7</sup> Italy’s economic failures, which became apparent already in the 1870s, were, thus, displaced onto the southern regions (Wong 6). Arguably, the Italian North and South divide may also be seen as a reflection of the rift between northern Europe and southern Africa, taking place within the same years. With few exceptions, European imperialism had all but passed Africa by, being interested in and directed mostly at the Americas and Asia. However, by the 1870s, Europe started looking southward, to Africa as a land of conquest, and on the June 3, 1878 the European countries met at the Congress of Berlin to carve up Africa among themselves (Wesseling 5, 18).

Like for Africa, the South’s backwardness will be too often and easily justified on the ground of culture and race, rather than on the Italian government’s incompetence—or, perhaps, unwillingness—to understand the South’s complex and different reality, and what it needed to progress. Vittorio Daniele and Paolo Malanima, for instance, write about the South’s lack of infrastructure as compared to the North, a disparity that prevented its industrialization because geographically the region was too far from European markets (25). Therefore, from the 1880s, Southerners were constructed ideologically as an inferior race. Cesare Lombroso, the founder of the Italian School of Criminal Anthropology, formulated the hypothesis that Southerners’ specific, atavistic, and primitive somatic traits were the matrix of their criminal inclination. For Lombroso, a delinquent is socially “abnormal” because organic factors keep him/her from

progressing into a civilized human being (Teti, *La razza* 197).<sup>8</sup> Through his influential writings, and those of his colleagues, a southern race was created with precise physical and moral characteristics, against which the proper and pure Italian race came to be imagined and constructed. It was through the creation of the “Southerners” as a specific, inferior race that the *Mezzogiorno* was created, too; not just as a geographical region, but as a culturally homogeneous category to be consistently contrasted with the putatively more advanced and civilized North (Teti, *La razza* 62).

As Edward Said states, the construction of an inferior, subaltern, and abject race, to whom access to power is denied, is the hallmark of any effective and successful colonizing project (3-4). Another important characteristic of any colonization is a working alliance between the colonizers and the colonized elite, to the detriment of the lower classes, which is exactly what happened in Italy between the northern bourgeoisies, and the southern land aristocracy and the *galantuomini* ‘class of notables’<sup>9</sup> (Fanon 24). Homi Bhabha describes the formation of a nation as an ambivalent event, due to its transitional history and its conceptual indeterminacy, thus representing at the same time “the *Heimlich* pleasures of the hearth, (and) the *Unheimlich* terror of the space and race of the Other; the comfort of social belonging, (and) the hidden injuries of class ...” (2). As Italy became a nation, it fluctuated between the two poles of *Heimlich* and *Unheimlich*, making the success and degree of its political and cultural union less than certain. More importantly, as Bhabha states, the nation needs to write itself not only through the rhetoric of a nation but also “through the articulation of difference in language” that can “alter the conceptual object itself” (3). In other words, nations, just like languages, are unstable entities whose meaning is constantly shifting, as well as their margins and power sharing.

As Benedict Anderson suggests, a nation is an imagined community (48); however, within this community there are different and competing ideologies creating hierarchies of values that necessarily favor some groups and exclude others, as Foucault reminds us (*Society* 61). Italy's political unity came to be "imagined" through nineteenth-century, liberal<sup>10</sup> ideology's paradigms embodied by the Savoy Prime Minister, Cavour, representative of the northern noble class. Although Cavour's government looked for and then established a working cooperation with the southern liberals, he vehemently opposed an alliance between the Savoy and the Bourbon crowns, as proposed by the Bourbon diplomat Giovanni Manna. As it is clear from the letters exchanged between Cavour and his envoy to Naples, Villamarina, Cavour's choice to annex the Bourbon kingdom was due to his deep distrust of it: "If we accept an alliance, we are lost. On my part, I feel greatly embarrassed"<sup>11</sup> (Petracone, "Cavour" 115).

Bhabha argues that "traditional histories do not take the nation at its own word, but, for the most part, they do assume that the problem lies with the interpretation of 'events' that have a certain transparency or privileged visibility" (*Nation* 3). Following Bhabha's lead, I argue that Cavour's harsh comments on the South and its representatives became the "event" that has acquired a privileged visibility in Italian national history, making the creation of one nation an almost impossible task to achieve. Because of the cultural and racial divisions I exposed previously, the construction of a cohesive Italian "imagined" community remained (and still remains) a chimera.

My research project starts from this very point, and attempts to show how a people who have been considered inferior can resist that oppression and in the process voice their dissatisfaction. My interest concerns how resistance to ideological oppression can be articulated. What are the means and the parameters of such a resistance? Since, as Bhabha writes, a nation is

constituted as such through culture as “a force for subordination, fracturing, diffusing, reproducing as much as producing, creating, forcing, guiding” my project will deal with intellectual and cultural resistance to an antagonist regime, as inscribed in cultural products such as literary and visual works (*Nation* 3). My premise is Foucault’s dictum that states that where there is power there is resistance, and resistance is never outside of power but rather it works within it (*History* 96). In other words, the only way to resist power is to inhabit its place and appropriate its language, which, I argue, is what Sicilian writers Giovanni Verga, Luigi Pirandello, and Luigi Capuana quite successfully did with the works I analyze in this dissertation. In order to expand my discussion, including more contemporary readings of the historical issues and their implications presented in my dissertation, I examine also three films by Florestano Vancini, Emanuele Crialese, and the Taviani brothers. The films were released almost one hundred years after the literary works. The analyses of the three films allow me to bring my discussion into Italy’s twentieth and twenty-first centuries’ problems that often have their roots in the post-unification years.

### **Chapter 1: *Piemonizzazione* and Its Discontents**

In this chapter, I analyze a short story by Verga, “*Cose è il re?*” (“What is the King?”), and one by Pirandello, “*Mimma*” (“Madam Mimma”). My interest in these two authors, as well as in Capuana, is rooted in their testimonial power. Both Sicilian authors were able to witness the unification’s historical moments and its repercussions, although Pirandello is one generation younger than Verga. Thus, they were able to register the changes in their region, as the world turned on its head. Neither of them seemed particularly vocal in his denunciation of the unification’s shortcomings, especially vis-à-vis Sicily and its second-class status within the new nation. My contention is that their reticence was due to the authors’ financial necessity to write

for mostly northern readers and northern editors (Rössner 312). Personally, their reticence is what makes them particularly interesting, because it allows me to read them “against the grain”; that is, through the postcolonial lens. My use of the term “postcolonial” follows Padmini Mongia’s definition, which states: “the term post-colonial refers not to a simple periodization but rather to a methodological revisionism which enables a wholesale critique of western structures of knowledge and power, particularly those of the post-Enlightenment period” (2). Through my reading, the Savoy structure of knowledge and power is put under scrutiny to demonstrate its failures in trying to build a national, civil society without cultivating alliances also with the rural masses.

The two short stories have been considered marginal in the writers’ literary careers, attracting little interest from critics. I first explicate Verga’s story “What is the King?,” where the mental confusion of the protagonist *Compare Cosimo*<sup>12</sup> becomes symptomatic of the southern rural masses’ disenfranchisement from the unification process. Verga’s political disillusion, with the new state for which he fought, comes to the fore, underlining how the Savoy kingdom’s constitution was no guarantee of a real improvement for the rural masses. Verga’s story contrasts the Savoy king, whose power is limited by the constitution, with the Bourbon monarch’s *Corpus Mysticum*, as described by Ernest Kantorowicz, whose power is absolute, like that of Jesus Christ (7). The story denounces, then, the paradox that the Bourbon monarch, in his paternalistic governance, was better for the impoverished rural masses than the constitutional Savoy king. Far from improving Cosimo’s lot, the Savoy monarchy, even with its constitutionality, worsened his and his family’s living conditions, leaving them in a state of confused despair. Moreover, Italy’s unification under the Savoy sovereign further developed a national discourse that systematically racialized Southerners because of their subaltern position within the nation. In the story, this

praxis is brought to the fore by showing Piedmontese authorities renaming Cosimo's son "the Turk."

The second short story "Madam Mimma" by Pirandello, deals with the disastrous aftermath of a poorly achieved unification and highly centralized governance. The Italian Parliament's decrees outlawed century-old practices, like that of delivering children by midwives, utterly ruining Mimma's life. In her struggle for survival, Mimma tries to shed off her midwife identity to acquire that of an obstetrician, as required by the law, but she fails. Her attempt to become the subject that the *piemontizzazione* requires her to be is what Bhabha refers to as the mimicry condition of the colonized (*Location* 83). As a colonized subject, Mimma is expected to acquire a new identity like that of the *piemontesa*, the obstetrician who came from Piedmont to usurp her job. However, Mimma can never achieve "sameness" with the *piemontesa*. Not being able to live in this cultural split—being required to be what she is while at the same time denied to attain—Mimma completely loses her identity, and her ability to be productive and support herself. Alcohol's destructive power becomes her only consolation.

## **Chapter 2: Resistance to Race Discourse**

In the first section of this chapter, I analyze "*Il capretto nero*" ("The Black Baby Goat") by Pirandello, which underscores the limits of liberalism, the Victorian Age's rationalism, and positivism.<sup>13</sup> Pirandello contrasts Henri Bergson's theory of time duration, which severed time from space, with the Victorian Age's<sup>14</sup> mechanistic interpretation of time, which conceptualizes it as a succession of minutes, hours, and stages in space. This latter interpretation of time was at the basis of social Darwinism's and Eugenicist's descriptive race discourse that classified world peoples in inferior and superior races, according to their putative degrees of biological and genetic development. English imperialism was often morally justified as a necessary catalyst for



the development of “inferior races.” Pirandello’s intent is precisely that of debunking that discourse supported not only by the Victorian Age’s rationalism but by French positivist theories.

Italy’s homegrown positivist thinkers, like Pasquale Villari, and criminal anthropologists, like Lombroso e Giuseppe Rossi, to mention a couple, were quick in attributing Southerners’ supposed inability to progress to their inability to assimilate to the northern liberal culture, thus invoking differentialist racism first and, then, supported by the study of phrenology, a sociobiological one. Constructing Southerners as a different and inferior race was paramount for liberal thinkers for two reasons: It helped justify liberalism’s failure and the Historical Left’s electoral victory (1876), and it deflected stereotypical prejudices toward Southerners, which traditionally had been affecting Italians. With my work, I bring Pirandello’s debunking of Italy’s race discourse to bear on his essay “On Humor,” where he draws philological lines separating humor from irony and comical effects. These three rhetorical devices, I argue, become Pirandello’s weapons through which he is able to resist his own people’s racialization.

In the second section of Chapter 2, I analyze the short story “*Libertà*” (“Freedom”) by Verga and the film *Bronte: cronaca di un massacro che i libri di storia non hanno mai raccontato* (*Bronte: Chronicle of a Massacre History Books Never Reported*) (1972) by Florestano Vancini. I also bring into my discussion Benedetto Radice’s essay *Nino Bixio a Bronte* (*Nino Bixio in Bronte*) (1891) to weave a critique of Garibaldi’s general Nino Bixio’s bloody repression of the Bronte peasants’ revolt. The revolt was instigated by Garibaldi’s promise to allocate the use of the common lands to the peasants to assure their support to his revolution. However, when Garibaldi realized that his promise alienated the southern noble and

notable classes' from participating in his military maneuvering, he retracted his promise, ordering his generals to repress any uprising.

Contemporary scholars, like Leonardo Sciascia and Salvatore Lupo, criticized Verga's short story because of its vagueness in the telling of the events and its omissions of important facts, ultimately accusing him not to take a political stance (Sciascia, *Nino* 17-18; Lupo, "Tra centro" 13). Through my postcolonial reading, though, I argue that Verga's subaltern position, as a Sicilian writer working for northern readers and publishers, ultimately forced him to omit facts that would have been too incriminating for a northern national hero like Bixio. By bringing into my discussion Raymond Williams's conceptualization of counter-hegemony (112), I contend that writing within a cultural and intellectual structure dominated by a prescriptive race discourse required Verga to shift between resisting and inhabiting the hegemonic, national discourse.

Finally, I turn to Vancini's film *Bronte: Chronicle of a Massacre History Books Never Reported*, which deals with the same historic events as Verga. As in Verga's story, in Vancini's film, Garibaldi's broken promise is brought to the fore to show one of the most disastrous and painful shortcomings of the *Risorgimento* ("Italian unification's process"). Moreover, Vancini's film addresses the North and South's cultural divide, and the ensuing, deep incomprehension between the two political and geographical regions. This cultural divide has been the site of a race discourse, which is still active in Italy today, and, at the same time, the locus, where the agrarian elite was able to manipulate and maneuver a weak central government for its own gains and to the detriment of the rural masses (Pezzino 56).

### **Chapter 3: Emigration as Resistance, Exile, and Trauma**

This last chapter deals with Sicilians' emigration to America as the most basic form of resistance to the island's poverty and oppression. Although my critical readings deal with a novel

by Capuana, a short story by Pirandello, and a film by Crialesse and one by the Taviani brothers, my theoretical starting points are Sciascia's and Teti's conceptualization and construction of emigration. In his essay "*Sicilia e sicità*" ("Sicily and Siciliness"), Sciascia conceptualizes emigration as exile, "the exile that generations of Sicilians endured, and are still enduring, to escape the island's poverty" (16). Interestingly, Sciascia chooses the word "exile" instead of "emigration," which is much more commonly used to describe the displacement of millions of Sicilians to the Americas, since the turn of the twentieth century.

Daniela Berghahn and Claudia Stenberg, expanding on J. D. Peters's description of exile, define it as "a painful or punitive banishment from one's homeland and the trauma associated with the experience" (13). Unlike the word "emigration," which entails the individual's agency, the word "exile" indicates a punitive action taken by the national state. Moreover, exile is described to be so painful so as to result in trauma, which I argue is as much individual as it is historical. In the end, by choosing the word exile, Sciascia is accusing the Italian state of punishing Sicilians by inflicting on them the traumatic experience of displacement. His word choice indicates that their departure, although due to escaping poverty, had its origin in the Italian state's political will (or lack of it) and agency. This accusation is what sets Sciascia's description of Sicilians' emigration apart from other accounts—like, for instance, that of Jerre Mangione and Ben Morreale in their *La Storia: Five Centuries of the Italian American Experience*—that more tend to chronicle Sicilians' difficult assimilation into American society.

The 2000s witness the creation of a distinct field of studies dedicated to emigration and border theories, which takes us to the second scholar I will consider, the anthropologist Teti, who describes emigration as:

The true “revolution” for the southern masses ... who chose a sorrowful and exasperating exodus to leave behind their towns’ hunger, destitution and oppressions.... By their departure, hundreds of thousands of peasants demonstrated that the “one-Italy” was only a rhetorical construction.... Only in America, the “one thousand Italies” slowly invented and created their own, new Italian-American identities, feeling finally ‘united’ despite the old and everlasting “separations” and “divisions” as well as the new ones developing in the New World. (*La razza* 55)

Teti’s approach to emigration differs from that of others, like Giuseppe Verdicchio, for instance, in his conceptualization that emigration was “the true revolution” for the Southerners who finally were able to emancipate from the tyranny of destitution. From the division and separateness of the “one thousand Italies,” they were able to create communities in America, where paradoxically they became united under the adjective “Italian” for the first time.

Emigration, which reached its highest peak during the years 1894-1920, was a very divisive matter in Italian politics and among its Parliament members. Among those who were against it, we need to mention Francesco Crispi and the Calabrese Minister of Finance Bruno Chimirri. This latter was a staunch critic of emigration, which he considered a real calamity for the South. He was highly skeptical of this phenomenon’s benefits and lamented that the South’s “best workers [were] leaving in swarms from our shores to fertilize distant lands” (qtd. in Wong 118). Above all, he protested the government’s inactivity and incompetence in alleviating the South’s economic problems that made emigration so alluring and necessary for its population. The Neapolitan economist Francesco Nitti, in contrast, was one of the most outspoken supporters of Southerners’ emigration, considering it a “self-medicating” means for the South to improve its

economic problems. Without discounting emigration's huge emotional and social price, due to families' frequent break-ups and emigrants' separation from their loved ones, Nitti argued that Southerners had been very successful in creating thriving communities in the Americas. Their success in foreign lands helped them both become aware of the prejudices they were victims of and overcome them. Thus, for Nitti, emigration could be considered a "powerful school, the only great salvation for a country deprived of resources and ferocious with men" (Wong 116-18).

In their works, Capuana and Pirandello espoused the two opposite political positions, presented in this chapter separately in the two different sections. In the first section of this chapter, I deal with Capuana's novel *Gli Americani di Rabbato* (*Rabbato's Americans*) and Crialesse's film *Nuovomondo* (*Golden Door*) (2006). Both Capuana and Crialesse focus on, among other things, the emigrants' rite of passage, entailing their characters' acquisition of a "hyphenated-identity," as described by Lavie and Swedenburg. The "hyphenated-identity" is what Bhabha defines as "the third space," where the hegemonic and subaltern cultures meet, and the latter learns to resist and adapt to its newer hybrid existence. Capuana's and Crialesse's characters acquired their hyphenated-identity through different routes, though.

Whereas Capuana's Rabbato people are able to create a thriving "hyphenated-community" of Italian-Americans in New York, Crialesse's characters are forced to live in the "third space" already in the ship that is taking them to America. The ship, thus, becomes the locus, where the passengers' identity starts shifting as they are required to share their living space, creating alliances that cut through divisions based on gender, nationality, and social class. However, Capuana's main intent is clearly to describe Sicilian emigration as a tale of success for both the people who left and their native towns that enjoyed greater wealth and economic development thanks to the emigrants' money.

In contrast and almost one hundred years later, Crialesse's film invites the viewer to disavow Capuana's reading of emigration. In the film, America is represented either by surreal images of unimaginative richness, constructed with the only purpose of deceiving their onlookers, or by Ellis Island, that is the border that has the power to include or exclude; to keep families together or split them; to test intelligence and examine bodies to assure access only to those considered fit to be productive in the New World. Ultimately, the film represents America only as a dream that for most emigrants remains highly elusive. Naturally, Crialesse's emigration story, centered on the border's power, transcends the Italian experience, of the beginning of the twentieth century, and refers also to the experience of the Third World immigrants for whom, in the last thirty years, Italy has become the new "America."

In the second section, for comparison and contrast, I analyze Pirandello's short story "*L'altro figlio*" ("The Other Son") and the Taviani brothers' filmic rendition of that story in *Kaos* (*Chaos*) (1984). Unlike Capuana, Pirandello sees emigration as a national trauma, rooted in Italy's unification. By appropriating Cathy Caruth's conceptualization of personal trauma as inherently historical (5), I argue that Pirandello uses his protagonists' personal traumas as a metaphor of Italy's unification and post-unification historical traumas. He is able, then, to denounce the complicity, between an unscrupulous, Italian political class and an equally unscrupulous Sicilian *borghese-mafiosa* one, in post-unification Italy. Linguistically, the word "trauma," borrowed from Ancient Greek, means "wound," and both Crialesse and Pirandello represent emigration as the wound further separating Italians who missed, for the second time, the historical chance to become one people. However, while for Pirandello emigration is not a possible solution since it entails further trauma, the Taviani brothers present it as the only conceivable form of rehabilitation for the Sicilian rural masses. By 1984, the year the film came

out, Sicily had been going through *gli anni della mattanza*<sup>15</sup> (“the years of the killing”), referring to the Mafia’s almost daily homicidal activities on the island. The Italian state’s inability and unwillingness to effectively deal with the Mafia and its criminal activities arguably, in the film, makes expatriation into the only possible form of escape from the island’s present trauma, rooted in its traumatic past.

## **Conclusion**

Although many scholars like Dickie, Nelson Moe, and Wong, just to reference a few, have brilliantly described and exposed the political convenience of creating an “Otherness” within Italy, my research interest lies on the resistance to Southerners’ ideological representations that Verga, Pirandello, and Capuana were able to articulate, during the nation’s forming years. My minimal contribution to the complex field of Italy’s national foundation resides precisely in detecting, between the lines, Verga’s, Pirandello’s, and Capuana’s counter-hegemonic discourses that need to be brought much more to the fore. Within this field, the questions should not be limited to “How were the Southerners imagined and constructed?” or “To what purpose were the Southerners created as ‘Otherness’?” Rather, we need to ponder also on questions such as “How can writers, subaltern within the nation, debunk a national discourse that has constructed them as ‘Otherness’ and racialized them?”; “How can a counter-hegemonic discourse be ‘sold’?”; “How can a southern intellectual be credible within northern literary circles, unless he is willing to shed his Southernness, first?” When we start answering these questions, we can understand why these writers’ ideology has been hard to classify in any fixed and determined way, for instance. More importantly, we can comprehend how, as subaltern voices, they lack a stable and monolithic identity. Living and working within the dominant

culture that created them as inferior, they had to learn to resist the national discourse and, at the same time, inhabit it in a financially viable and productive way.

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<sup>1</sup> Piedmont is a region in northwest Italy (see fig. 1).

<sup>2</sup> I use the words “civilization” and “civilized” in accordance with Raymond Williams’s definition in *Marxism and Literature*. Williams reminds us that although the notion of “civilizing,” as in the meaning of “bringing men with in a social organization,” had been in use for quite a long time in Europe, the concept of “civilization” (and, thus, “civilized”) was coined only in the eighteenth century to express “two senses which were historically linked: an achieved state, which would be contrasted to “barbarism,” (and) an achieved state of development, which implied a historical process and progress” (13).

<sup>3</sup> From the beginning of Italy’s unification, the national discourse came to be articulated through the binary opposition of two geographical and political regions that soon became two cultural categories: “the North” and “the South.” By 1861, the North included the regions of Piedmont, Lombardy, and Veneto. The South included the regions of Campania, Abruzzi, Molise, Apulia, Calabria, Basilicata, and Sicily (see fig. 1).

<sup>4</sup> Already in 1898, Niceforo used the word “colony” to indicate the South “the North has an important role in educating its colony” (6). In the *L’Ordine Nuovo* January 3, 1920 issue, Gramsci wrote: “The Northern bourgeoisie has subjugated the South of Italy and the Islands, and reduced them to exploitable colonies” (*The Southern* 28).

<sup>5</sup> I use the words “South,” “*Mezzogiorno*,” and “*Meridione*” interchangeably since they are used as synonyms in Italian. The word “*Meridione*” is a nautical term, as is the word “*Settentrione*,” indicating the North. *Mezzogiorno* means “midday,” which is the hottest time of the day. Traditionally, it is a time when workers, both in the fields and in factories, take a break from work.

<sup>6</sup> Here it is important to note that the term “Third World” refers to the historical period known as “the Cold War,” when the world was divided into the First World (the industrialized, capitalist countries of Western Europe, North America, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand), the Second World (the countries under the direct or indirect influence of communist Soviet Union), and the Third World (the developing countries of Africa, Asia, and South America). With the fall of the Berlin wall (1989), the Cold War period was basically over and with it that type of terminology. Today, scholars prefer to use terms such as “Non-Western” or “Global South” or “Countries with developing economies” to indicate those countries that used to represent the Third World. However, some scholars, like Bhabha, Anzanda, and Schneider, still use the term “Third World.”

<sup>7</sup> Neapolitan liberal intellectual Pasquale Villari observed that liberalism, which was supposed to solve all disparities between the South and the North, did not bring the expected results in the South. This finding was quite disconcerting for him, as for other intellectuals who were mostly concerned about the country’s lack of homogeneity. Italy remained highly divided between the North and the South, and the South between a tiny class of landowners and a huge mass of “brutalized peasants who (were) often forced by their desperate circumstances into brigandage” (Mangoni 97-98). Villari’s anxiety was vented in his four “Southern Letters” published by a moderate Rome newspaper *L’Opinione* in 1875 (Dickie 54). Dickie marks the publication of these letters as the “birth of the Southern Question” inasmuch that they analyze the South’s perceived economic and social backwardness vis-à-vis the northern progress, asking for the government’s intervention for its solution. As Aliza Wong acutely observes, Villari did not intend to contribute to the construction of a barbarian and savage, “other-ed” South; however, in his anxiety, desire, and attempt to bring light to the South’s problems, he “both alienated and differentiated it from the seemingly more progressive and more affluent North... This dichotomy served to further distance the South from the North and the rest of Europe” (32). Villari’s letters galvanized a whole generation of *meridionalisti* (scholars who set themselves to study the historical/social/cultural reasons of the perceived southern backwardness) (Wong 53).

<sup>8</sup> During the second half of the nineteenth century, a new social phenomenon took front stage in Europe: the ubiquitous presence of the masses of people. Intellectuals had to face this new social element that had been dormant



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until then, and were very aware and even scared by its force and possible political power. The Paris Commune experience of 1871 was a shocking reminder of what the masses were able to do. Villari, like many other liberals, became increasingly worried about the masses' presumed social decay that would surely lead them to violence (Mangoni 85). It was precisely in this intellectual climate, characterized by positivism, the unsettling presence of the masses, and the failure of liberalism, that in 1898 Pasquale Rossi published "*L'animo della folla*" ("The Soul of the Masses"). In this essay, he theorized that, historically, old peoples, like southern Europeans, had a rebellious character, whereas the young peoples, like northern Europeans, had an evolutionary character. In Italy, too, "northern people have a modern character, southerners have a senile character. One has a collective geniality; the other has an individual geniality" (qtd. in Teti, *La razza* 159). More importantly, Rossi argues that the different historical events that the North and South experienced created two different races. "A northern race that came into existence through contacts with northern Europeans and their civilizations," and a southern race engendered through "ancient Greeks' apathy and lack of idealism, as well as Spaniards' arrogant vanity and the parasitism that makes us hate work which, we believe, humbles us. We inherited eroticism and corruption from those two peoples, which together with the individual geniality and the collective mediocrity are typical traits of a senile race" (qtd. in Teti *La razza* 168). In his argument, Rossi moved from the characterization of "peoples" to that of "race," arguing that each race has its own psychic and ethnic characteristics (Teti *La razza* 161). In the same year that Rossi published *L'animo della folla*, Cesare Lombroso published *In Calabria (In Calabria)*, a collection of his medical reflections on the *Calabrese* (people from Calabria), written 35 years earlier when he worked there as medical officer. Unlike Villari, a Southerner with whom he was often in polemic confrontation, Lombroso, a Northerner, did not believe in the social origin of crime, but rather believed a criminal was determined as such by his own somatic traits, equating some biological traits to moral depravity and psychological weakness (Mangoni 93).

<sup>9</sup> By the English word "notables," I translate the Italian word "*notabili*." In using this choice, I follow John Davis's example (*Conflict and Control* 52). *Notabili* are also named "*galantuomini*" or "*cappeddu*" (Sicilian word for "*cappelli*"). This last word means "hats," denoting a hat with a large brim typically worn by the upper class. The peasants wore *berriddi* (Sicilian word for *berretti*), a type of hat without a brim.

<sup>10</sup> Liberalism's ideology contrasted French revolutionary Jacobinism in Europe, which called for state regulation on behalf of the poor. Liberalism originated in Britain in the eighteenth century, at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, and called for the government not to interfere in economic processes (*laissez-faire*), since only free operation of the market was thought to be able to stabilize society (Di Scala 15).

<sup>11</sup> As Cavour explained in his letters, his embarrassment was due to numerous factors: the Bourbon army's poor performance against Garibaldi's military actions; King Frances II, himself "a Prince that does not inspire confidence, esteem and not even merci"; and by the King's envoy, Manna, a man "insignificant and so weak ... he will pass to our camp and become *annexionist*" (Petraccone "Cavour" 116).

<sup>12</sup> The Italian word "*compare*" comes from "compadre." Traditionally the title of compadre was given to a child's godfather. In southern Italian towns, *compare* and *compadre* are often used as endearing nicknames (Devoto-Oli).

<sup>13</sup> Positivism was a philosophical movement that believed that only a science-based epistemology would allow humanity to progress. August Comte, the founder of Positivism, "not only espoused, but deeply probed the rationale for, a cooperative form of society; a rationale which he linked on the one hand to the fundamental (and historically developing) nature of social being, and on the other to the problems of developing a non-transcendentalist religious perspective in tune with the scientific age" (qtd. in Wernick 90). Comte was also a partisan of order, as well as progress. He was hostile to any form of popular insurrection or, indeed, democratizing project (Wernick 11).

<sup>14</sup> "Victorian Age" bears the name of the Queen of England, who was in power from 1836-1901. On the economic front, England kept its lead in industrial production, technology, and commerce founded on the principles of liberalism and free trade (MacLeod 197). To use Roy MacLeod's words, science, supported by reason, was the "creed" of Victorian England and soon became of all the Western World. Faith in progress was grounded on the belief that science and technology would keep spurring new industrial enterprises, as well as "facilitate peaceful intercourse between the peoples of the world through the spread of trade, and promote the sobriety and literacy upon which modern industry depended" (Searle 3). However, progress had a very high human and social cost, as many intellectuals realized. Victorian capitalism had created an exploitable underclass living together in polluted,

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dangerous, and ugly manufacturing centers, and whose existence was marked by material hardships and physical, as well as moral, degradation (Searle 3). For many intellectuals, though, science ultimately remained also the only possible key to the solution of any nation's social problems. One of those intellectuals, economist and empiricist John Stuart Mill, wrote: "We hope the time is coming for more *rational mode* of distributing the productions of nature and of art, than this expensive and demoralizing plan of individual competition, the evils of which have risen to such an enormous height" (qtd. in Searle 2, italics mine). What Mill invoked was a more "rational mode" by which he meant a mode more so based on the scientific method, which had demonstrated to be valid in many facets of human endeavors. Mill in Britain and August Comte in France were both advocating for the creation of a science of society that would study and establish the "Laws" of human behavior. These laws would have to be tested and assessed through the scientific method of the positive sciences; that is, a method based on observation, deduction, and induction (Heyck 133-134). Comte's key presupposition was borrowed from Newton's mechanistic worldview: "nature is reason, it is immutable" (Guerlac 22).

<sup>15</sup> *Mattanza* refers to the way Sicilian fishermen kill tuna fish.

## Chapter 1

### *Piemonizzazione* and Its Discontents

#### Introduction

As the title suggests, this chapter focuses on the modality by which Sicily was annexed to the kingdom of Piedmont and Sardinia, and how it negatively affected some sections of the island's population. Sicily's annexation resulted in the implementation of a strong central administration that reproduced on a national level the Savoy kingdom's model. As exposed in my Introduction, from the very beginning the imposition of an external and foreign political, jurisdictional, and institutional system was opposed by many southern intellectuals and politicians who considered it a de facto colonization of their lands. In the first part of the chapter, I analyze Giovanni Verga's short story "*Cos'è il re?*" ("What is the King?"). My analyses are premised on historian Roberto Martucci's critique of some of the unitary state's strategic mistakes that had two important consequences: first and foremost, the rural masses' exclusion from Italy's unification process and, second, the Savoy king's inability—or, maybe unwillingness—to forge a "pan-Italian regality." As a result, for the rural masses, the constitutional Savoy monarchy paradoxically turned out to be more oppressive than the Bourbon king's absolute power, coached in and emanating from his *Corpus Mysticum*, as conceptualized by Ernest Kantorowicz.

In the second part of the chapter, I explicate, through the postcolonial lens, Luigi Pirandello's short story "*Donna Mimma*" ("Madam Mimma"), who is one of the *piemonizzazione's* first victims. *Donna Mimma*, a midwife, loses her job because she cannot compete with the colonizer, the *piemontesa*, who holds a degree in obstetrics. The new government's laws force Mimma to attain a degree in obstetrics and, consequently, "sameness"

with the *piemontesa*. However, by living her mimicry condition, Mimma shows with her failure that as a colonized she is inherently unable to reach “sameness” with her colonizer, the *piemontesa*. In her struggle to be what the *piemontizzazione* requires to be without ever being able to achieve it fully, she loses her job and identity.

### **Rural Masses’ Exclusion from Italy’s Unification Process in Verga’s “*Cos’è il re?*”<sup>1</sup> (“What is the King?”)**

Verga’s short story, “What is the King?” is part of the collection *Novelle Rusticane*, published together for the first time in Turin in 1883. The stories had been published the year before in many and different journals, like “*Rassegna settimanale*,” “*Gazzetta letteraria*,” “*La Domenica letteraria*,” “*Fanfulla della domenica*,” and “*Fiammetta*” (Musumarra 5). “What is the King?” focuses on the Sicilian rural masses’ disenfranchisement from Italy’s unification process and King Victor Emmanuel II’s missed opportunity to create a stable unitary regime. The Savoy monarchy’s constitutionality, yearned by southern liberals, was no guarantee for the rural masses’ improvement of their living conditions, which actually worsened. Paradoxically, the Bourbon king’s absolute, yet paternal, power is depicted as more “salvific” than the Savoy king’s constitutional one.

The story opens with the official visit of Bourbon King Ferdinand II and his wife, Mary Therese of Austria, to Caltagirone on October 10, 1838 to announce the construction of a carriage road from Messina to Catania (Tropea 22). On that day, the whole village is celebrating with a lightshow; the village band; and a float, with the royal couple’s portraits, going around the village. Also Cosimo, who is in Caltagirone with his litter hoping to find customers, is enjoying the party, until:

He is told that the king wanted to talk to him. Actually, it was not the king who wanted to talk to him, because the king does not talk to anybody. It was one of those men the king talks through, when he has something to say. He said to Cosimo that His Majesty wanted his litter the following day at dawn to go to Catania. (Verga 226)

While the order comes from the king, one of his men delivers it because “the king does not talk to anybody.” What is left out that needs to be understood is “who is a commoner” Then it would read: “the king does not talk to a commoner.” The only verbal interaction that is possible between a king and a commoner, like Cosimo, is through the delivery of orders. Orders he must attend to, even if unsettling and frightening. That is the nature of the absolute monarchy.

The uneducated Cosimo may not know the concept or even the definition of “absolute monarchy.” Its meaning and power are, however, inscribed in his body that, once he receives the order, contracts in painful agony: “the more people were partying, the more his fear grew inside his body. He feared having to carry the king in his litter. All those fireworks, the lightshow, the crowd, the bells weighted down on his stomach and did not allow him to sleep that night” (227). Clearly, Cosimo is not happy to have to attend to such an important task, even if generously compensated. Actually, he would even pay to be exonerated from it. The reason for his deep uneasiness is his awareness that the royal couple has power of death over its subjects: “the king, with his word, could have the head cut to whoever he likes” (230). Even Cosimo could run that risk, should one of his mules take a wrong step and drop the queen: “But she [the queen] could have anyone’s throat cut with only one word” (231).

The awareness that his head or throat could be cut easily should an error occur makes the trip totally unbearable to him:

Cosimo could not enjoy the sun and the beautiful day. His heart was darker than a rainy cloud, and he could not take his eyes away from the pebbles where his mules were putting their hooves.... His heart was beating like a hammer at the thought that the stream could overflow when they had to cross it.... He could not take the risk of riding on his mule with his head on his chest, taking a little nap, as he did when he did not have the queen with him. (Verga 230)

Cosimo's agitation is physically palpable. He has near panic attack symptoms, with his heart, turned dark, that beats like a hammer. He is straining his eyes and brain to focus on the present and future obstacles, like the pebbles or the flooded stream, fearing for his life should one mistake occur.

It is important to keep in mind that Ferdinand II was probably one of the most hated of the Bourbon kings in Sicily, due to his bombing of Messina's port during the 1848 uprising. His bombing earned him the nickname of *re bomba* ("the bombing king"). The physicality of Cosimo's fears and agitation is, then, effectively dramatized by contrasting it to his mules' total unawareness of their important job and precious cargo: "while the mules, which had no knowledge of whom they were carrying, enjoyed the flat and dry road, the lukewarm sun, and the green countryside" (230). In this case, ignorance is definitely blissful, since knowledge is limited only to Cosimo's awareness of his total powerlessness in front of a possible mortal punishment. Through Cosimo's comments and terror, the Bourbon couple is described as aloof and frightening in their authority. Before starting his trip with the queen, though, a dejected and wary Cosimo is able to witness the king's salvific power:

Then, he saw a very pale, young woman, dressed like a nun, threw herself to the king's feet crying out, "Pardon." She was asking the king to pardon her father,

sentenced to death by decapitation for plotting against him. The king said one word to one of his men, and that was enough for the girl's father to have his head saved. (Verga 229)

The young woman's "paleness" underlines her emotional and psychosomatic state. She is frightened, just like Cosimo, and, like in his case, her fear is inscribed in her body.

They are both terrified by their royal couple's absolute power that chops off heads and cuts up throats. The young nun, who is God's servant on earth, embraces humiliation by throwing herself to the king's feet: "crying out 'Pardon.'" The pardon she is asking is for her father, who, by plotting against his king, committed high treason, the worst crime of all, deserving decapitation. Once again, the image of the body comes of the fore: the king's feet and the nun's father's head. The body, at the same time, is the site of the nun's and Cosimo's panic, the nun's father's punishment, and the king's power. I will go back to the image of the body soon, after explicating the last sentence of the passage above. Although the nun's father committed the most heinous crime, the king is willing and able to pardon him with just one word. The king's salvific power is transmitted to a commoner through "one of his men."

Again, we have the image of the word loaded with power, which is transmitted from the king to "his men" and, then, to the commoners. In other words, the king's word needs to be mediated to underline the distance between him and his subjects. Even if mediated by his men, the king's word is reified, almost like in the Bible's creation story, and can save one man's head. Through his words, the king can order things to happen, thus, his words are "exercitive-performative." Within Speech Act theory, the exercitive-performative is that discursive practice that produces that which is named, thus changing the social reality, and can be pronounced only

by those who are recognized as having that power (Austin 155). Above all, just like God's, King Ferdinand II's words have the power to give and take life, as he pleases.

To continue with my discussion on the king's body and his quasi-divine power, it would be helpful to use the work of Kantorowicz. According to Kantorowicz, from the Middle Ages the king had been constructed as having two bodies: a natural body and a political one—precisely like Christ, who had a human, material body, assumed from the Virgin Mary, and an ecclesiastical, or collegiate body (198). The natural body was biological and mortal, whereas the political body consisted of policies to govern, direct, and manage his subjects and the public wealth (Kantorowicz 7). Kantorowicz suggests that late mediaeval commonwealths had been greatly influenced by the ecclesiastical model of the *Corpus Mysticum* of the Church. During the Middle Ages, the State and the Church mutually borrowed and exchanged insignia, political symbols, prerogatives, and rights of honor (8).

These infinite cross-relations produced a certain political and theological fusion between the two powers; what Kantorowicz calls a political theology (8). As a result, from the late Middle Ages to modern times, nation-states' formation was highly influenced by a political theology that took much of its imaginary, rhetoric, and elements from the Christian church. Glory, enveloped in its splendor and songs, was the most important element that united the Church and the kingdom: theology and politics (Agamben 193). During ritual ceremonies, the king, wearing cumbersome crowns and attire to fully show his glory, needed his subjects' validation through acclamations and hymns of praise (195).

In line with Kantorowicz's and Agamben's descriptions of the king's need for his people's acclamations in ritual ceremonies, the king's arrival at Caltagirone is welcomed by the people's merry expectations and the village festivities:



On that day, everyone came to see the king. There was great commotion in the streets of Caltagirone, decorated as for the feast of Saint James.... People were walking in the streets as if it were Christmas night.... They were going to enjoy the celebration, buying *torrone*<sup>2</sup> and walking around tired, waiting for the king.... People had been walking aimlessly along the streets for the past forty-eight hours, day and night with rain pouring on them.... And St. James church was lit up and looked like it was spitting fire and flames ...waiting for the king with all its bells tolling. (226, 228)

The king's arrival has a religious connotation, and the streets are decorated like for Saint James' Day, the patron Saint. In their aimless walk, undisturbed by the wet weather, the village people seem almost inebriated, that is, in a psychological state of high excitement.

Their walking for forty-eight hours also denotes that they did not work, nor were they paid, for two days. The king's arrival consents a two-day long rest, one day longer than God sanctions in Genesis. More importantly, his subjects are willing to take this rest even at a substantial financial loss, since at that time the vast majority of the rural masses were made up of daily laborers (Aymard 21). The festivities also include a float carrying the royal couple's portraits around the village, just like during the procession for the patron Saint. Then, in a climactic way, the king's arrival goes from having just religious connotations to being compared to Christ's arrival on earth. Although it is October 10, Caltagirone people are walking in the streets like they usually do on Christmas night. People are buying and selling *torrone* along the streets, and the church is all lit up with bells tolling.

Christ's and the king's glory are indissolubly intertwined, and it is precisely through this kind of acclamation that the people expressed their consent to the king. It is within the context of

the Bourbon's absolute monarchy's political theology that Ferdinand II's actions and words need to be read. When consenting to pardon the young nun's father, Ferdinand II is acting like the head of his kingdom's *Corpus Mysticum*. Although the power of giving life or death to his subjects resides in the king's political body, I would argue that the king's natural body influences its execution. More precisely, the king's political authority is somewhat subjected to his humanity, and, thus, to his own feelings and whims. Just like for Christ, the two realms live in one person and cannot be totally separated. As a consequence, Ferdinand II might use his powers whimsically and arbitrarily. On the one hand, the arbitrariness of his judicial power makes him frightening, on the other, though, it makes him also strangely approachable, as the young nun's story demonstrates. Just like Christ, he can save with his words. The young nun is well aware that she can appeal directly to the king's heart and will, without having to go through the proper channels that any constitutional power would have required.<sup>3</sup> Since the Bourbon monarchy had no constitution, the young nun does not appeal to her father's inalienable rights, like that of being tried by a judge or by a jury of his peers.

Her connection to the king is emotional and filial, not one regulated by civil rights. Moreover, in the Bourbon kingdom, women were commonly used to ask the king to pardon one of their male relatives because of their politically weak position vis-à-vis society:

The contrast between the king's power and women's weakness—dramatized through the rhetoric of supplication—ratified the image of the king like a compassionate father, with consequent advantages for the Crown....The king's generosity toward a woman did not signify his giving in to a liberal ideology, but rather reestablished his absolute power and his religious basis. The images of “the

poor, undefended mothers-wives” reinforced the king’s own image as a father and man of faith. (Guidi 268)

Women’s supplications were used as a means to move the king and dispose him to display his paternal, and paternalistic, salvific power over his male subjects. Unlike men, women were not thought to operate through a counter-hegemonic ideology. Due to their low social-status, they did not threaten the sovereign, who could, then, act as a compassionate “father” toward them and their requests. Here, the image of the “compassionate father” needs to be read both socially and religiously. As *pater familiae* (“father of the family”) and as God the Father, the king can lavish favors on his children. However, in order for the king to act like a compassionate father, the woman needed to humble herself, since any act of supplication must start with an exhibition of humiliation. Hence, the need for the nun to throw herself to the king’s feet, just like in the Gospel the supplicants did with Jesus.<sup>4</sup>

As Renata De Lorenzo observes, the Bourbon monarchy “was based on a king-people contract instead of a state-society one, which was what the Neapolitan intellectuals had been fighting for since the 1840s” (355). De Lorenzo’s quote underlines the historical and political change that was taking place in Europe during the nineteenth century: the creation of the nation-state as a binomial entity. The historical, ethnical, and cultural aspects of the nation were coupled with the political and juridical aspects of the state (Negri “A proposito del concetto di Stato-Nazione”). Frederick Hegel, one of the most important theorists on the subject, wrote that the formation of the modern state would be impossible without the presence of a civil society and a constitution, regulating their relation (285).

According to Hegel, the individual and the family, which constituted the civil society, are maintained and protected by the state of which they are an integral part. Their interrelation is

articulated and organized by the constitution that regulates the actions of the government and its branches, as well as protects the rights of the individuals (285-86). From the beginning of the nineteenth century, Italian intellectuals fought to obtain a constitution that would regulate and limit the king's power over his subjects. In general, European intellectuals tended to consider the Bourbon monarchy as a backward institution because of its absolutism, which forced many Southerners to flee to northern Italian cities, especially to Turin (Martucci 32). Returning to De Lorenzo's quote, the contrast she makes between the king-people's contract and the state-society's is important to keep in mind as I continue with my discussion, since, unlike the Bourbon monarchy, the Savoy's tended to be more based on a state-society contract.<sup>5</sup>

After this long parenthesis on De Lorenzo's quote and the constitutional differences between the two monarchies, I jump to the story's end, taking place just after Italy's unification:

Many years later, Cosimo's mules were confiscated in the king's name because he had not been able to pay off his debt. Cosimo could not make sense of the king's decision to apprehend the very mules that took the queen, safe and sound, to her destination,... Had it not been for his mules, the queen would have certainly died trying to cross that region that had no carriage roads.... Cosimo did not want to understand that today's king was a different one, and that the old king had fallen off his saddle. (Verga 231-32)

Cosimo's deep and disorienting confusion is painfully obvious. He does not understand that the king, who gave the order to confiscate his mules, is different from the king who ordered him to take his wife to Catania with his litter. More than twenty years and two kings went by between the two events. To Cosimo's credit, we need to remember that Ferdinand II's kingdom lasted from 1830-1859, just one year before the landing at Marsala.<sup>6</sup> Ferdinand II's son, Francis II,

remained on the throne, or on “the saddle,” as the story goes, only for little more than one year. Then, came the Savoy king and the confiscation of Cosimo’s mules to pay off his debt. The nature of his debt is not completely clear, and I will go back to it later in my discussion.

From Cosimo’s thoughts and reflections about his present, personal, and meager situation, Verga zooms on the whole village’s public opinion with great choral effect:<sup>7</sup>

Everyone kept saying that the king and the queen came to Sicily precisely to have roads built because there weren’t any, and that was a real scandal. Yes, but that was how litter-carriers could live. Cosimo would have been able to pay off his debts, and the king’s men would not have confiscated his mules. All this would not have happened, if the king and the queen had not come to have those roads constructed. (232)

Evidently, Cosimo is not the only person in his village, Grammichele, to be confused and disgruntled about the king’s new decisions. Also the village people seem confused about whether having roads was advantageous to their community or not. Not having them was a scandal, yet having them was economically disastrous for people like Cosimo, who ended up unemployed. No employment meant no salary, hence his debt.

However, his mules were not confiscated until the monarchy changed. Whether the mules were confiscated because the new monarchy imposed higher taxes<sup>8</sup> or for other reasons the text does not say. What is clear, though, is that Cosimo’s financial situation worsened under the new king. The village’s choral voice does not hesitate to point to the construction of the roads as the beginning of Cosimo’s misfortune, which escalated later with the Savoy monarchy. Although roads were very much needed in Sicily, the story denounces the lack of any safety net to protect those who lost their jobs due to construction of such roads.

While the creation of roads displaced Cosimo economically, his mortal blow came later when the new king's men came to seize his own son:

Then, they took his own son, Orazio, to draft him in the artillery. They nicknamed him "the Turk" because he was so dark and strong. His poor, old wife cried like a fountain. On that day, he remembered the young nun who threw herself to the king's feet begging for her father to be pardoned. The king sent her away happy with only one word. Cosimo did not want to understand that today's king was a different one, and that the old king had fallen off his saddle. He kept saying that if the king had been there, he would have sent him and his wife away happy... with only one word. He could have anyone's head cut off. He could also send his people to confiscate his mules, if he did not pay off his debts. He could even take anyone's son for his army, as he liked. (Verga 232-33)

I will explicate the importance of his son Orazio's apprehension, following that of his mules, later in my discussion. Here, I want to keep the focus on Cosimo's confusion about the kings.

As the story reports, he "did not want to understand that today's king was a different one," and, thus, he imposes his personal image of the Bourbon king over the image of the Savoy king: "He could have anyone's head cut off. He could also send his people to confiscate his mules, if he did not pay off his debts." My contention is that Cosimo's confusion was rooted in the continuity, or worsening, of his meager living conditions, even under the new monarchy; the new king brought no change to the people like him. In his state of total despair, Cosimo remembered the event of the young nun when he was able to witness Ferdinand II's salvific power: "The king sent her away happy with only one word." Not realizing that Ferdinand II was no longer in power, Cosimo longed for that favor that "he would have sent him and his wife

away happy.” In other words, the king would have pardoned their debts, and given them back their mules and son.

Unfortunately, Cosimo is unaware that the sovereign who had power over people’s life and death was replaced by one whose power is filtered and limited by a constitutional state. The Savoy king was the unquestionable head of the state; yet, he was not the state itself. Although King Victor Emanuel II had the power of pardoning (art. 69), the pardon to be effective had to be signed by the kings’ ministers. Even if the signature were a pure formality because the ministers were elected by the king, the Savoy king would not have been able to pardon only with his word, as in the case of King Ferdinand II and the young nun (Piazza 11). Unlike Ferdinand II, the Savoy king’s utterance could not be “exercitive-performative,” and, thus, it did not have the power to change Cosimo’s social reality. Consequently, Victor Emanuel II cannot “send him and his wife away happy.”

I want to argue that the story allows for two intertwined readings. On the one hand, the story portrays how new rules and regulations, dictated from a distant capital, caused real financial distress to common people, like Cosimo. This reading underlines how, for the rural masses, a constitutional monarchy was no guarantee for the improvement of their lot. Not only had their living conditions worsened, but the constitution did not allow the Savoy king to act like “a compassionate father” and change his subjects’ social reality, just with one word. On the other hand, by describing Cosimo’s total unawareness about the change of monarchies, the story underlines the rural masses’ disenfranchisement from the process of Italy’s unification and state formation.

Going back to De Lorenzo’s quote, she rightly states that the Neapolitan intellectuals were fighting for the constitution. However, the rural masses were left out of that fight because

their needs did not coincide with those of the bourgeoisie. Vincenzo Cuoco, first, and, then Antonio Gramsci denounced the separateness and incomprehension between the bourgeois intellectuals and the masses that, they argued, were at the root of the failure of the democratic process in Italy (Urbinati 143). Although I hesitate to support a nationalist historiography that makes Italy's unification coincide with its modernization, I must admit that a constitutional monarchy is politically much more desirable for its citizens than an absolute one.

My point, however, is that for the rural masses there was no significant difference between the two regimes, which politically was a real tragedy. For them, the Savoy's constitutional monarchy turned out to be more oppressive than the previous one and Cosimo's confusion is symptomatic of that historical reality. More on target, Martucci makes the following observations about Sicily's entrance into the new kingdom:

Due to different factors like Sicily's mountainous and isolating territory, its scarce number of educated professionals, and its high rate of illiteracy, *rural masses, who had been segregated for centuries, tended to ignore and not understand that the monarchy had changed and with it everything else.* (246-47, italics mine)

In line with Verga's story, Martucci is underscoring the rural masses' state of political confusion and lack of awareness about the kings' change.

Sicily's geography and its social state of affairs were not the only culprits for the peasants' ignorance and consequent marginalization. The Savoy monarchy was at fault, too:

The unitary state made many strategic mistakes, for which it paid dearly in the decades to come: Underestimating the invention of a new, pan-Italian national regality; not carrying out a nationalization of the rural masses, especially in the South, in order to support a unitary regime; and completing the political transition



for the creation of the kingdom of Italy by the plebiscite. These mistakes created an endemic weakness in its government's structures and its public agencies.

(Martucci 247)

Even at its inception, the new nation-state was crucially unstable because of the rural masses' exclusion from the unification process, which was guaranteed by a plebiscite, not fully reflecting the popular will.

The plebiscite was an attempt to legalize, both internally and externally, the Bourbon kingdom's military annexation<sup>9</sup> by demonstrating that it had the necessary popular consensus to survive and be legitimate. Its legitimization was also very important to guarantee national stability to other European countries, especially France and England. These countries were very wary that the Savoy's annexation of an independent and internationally recognized state could disrupt the international political equilibrium, set up by the Congress of Vienna, in 1815 (Martucci 247-48).<sup>10</sup> Both France and England had their eyes set on the 1861 plebiscite, and the legitimacy of the new state. Consequently, they required from Cavour that it be based on a male universal suffrage. Cavour accepted their condition and made sure, by adopting coercive measures, that the "si" would win (Martucci 250).

In the kingdom of the Two Sicilies, especially in Sicily, the polling situation was worse than in the other state that had recently become part of Italy.<sup>11</sup> The plebiscite's true nature, where citizens were asked not so much to vote but rather to ratify their approval, is also evoked in Giuseppe Tommasi's *The Leopard*. In the little feud of Donnafugata, all men are called to vote at the plebiscite. After the election, the mayor announces the results: Voters listed 515; Voted 512; Yes 512; No 0. The prince, Don Fabrizio, being certain that at least forty people voted "No," goes hunting with Don Ciccio and asks his opinion about the plebiscite:

“Excuse me, Excellency, but there is no point in your question. You know that everyone in Donnafugata voted ‘yes.’” Don Fabrizio did know this; and that was why this reply merely changed a small enigma into an enigma of history.... Italy was born in that sullen night at Donnafugata.... During that too brief announcement of figures ... he had a feeling that something, someone had died, God only knew in what corner of the country, in what corner of the popular conscience.... At this point calm descended on Don Fabrizio, who had finally solved the enigma. Now he knew who had been killed at Donnafugata ... a newborn babe: good faith. Just the very child who should have been cared for the most, whose strengthening would have justified all the silly vandalisms. (104-05, 110-11)

What is at stake for Tommasi is the lack of fair and legitimate elections—needed to truly demonstrate the South’s popular consensus—in the unification’s process, and, thus, the lack of any legitimacy and legality the kingdom of Italy enjoyed from the beginning. Only a real popular consensus, the “good faith,” would have justified a war waged against an independent and internationally recognized state.

Instead, “the newborn babe” was killed the very first time all Sicilians, regardless of their social classes, were called to vote on an issue that would have created their nation. This lack of consent ultimately resulted in making an already weak southern civil society even weaker (Riall 13), as I will discuss more in detail in Chapter 2. Even though the story does not explicitly deal with the plebiscite, Cosimo’s confusion about the monarchies points to the plebiscite’s ambiguous nature and result. Clearly, Cosimo did not register that the monarchy had changed forever. Hence, the title of the story “What is the King?,” rather than “Who is the King?,” which

would have been more fitting had Verga wanted to linger only on Cosimo's difficulty in identifying the present king. On the contrary, Verga is positing what I would term a "politically ontological dilemma." The question "What is the king?" tries to understand the nature of the king as a legitimate power-holder. So the question can be expanded to: "What is the newly formed kingdom of Italy?"; "What is the difference between the Bourbon kingdom and the Savoy kingdom of Italy?" Lastly, and equally important: "What is the Savoy king to the southern rural masses?" Judging from the story, the only possible answer is nothing.

As Frank Rosengarten acutely observes: "one has the impression from Verga's account of the events that the liberation of Sicily would do nothing for the common people of the island except give them temporary but illusory hope that they would be freer under a new order than under the present corrupt regime" (123). Ultimately the Savoy monarchy was not able—or, maybe not willing—to deliver the so much promised improvements to the impoverished southern masses. Verga's position toward "Italy's present reality where the burgeoning capitalism reinforced the exclusion and oppression of the masses,<sup>12</sup> especially in the South, making their subhuman lives ever harder, instead of improving them" (Baldi 35) has been given different ideological readings.

Before continuing with my discussion, I will summarize some of the most important critical readings of Verga's fiction, which, then, I will use as a baseline to contextualize my own critique. Critics have never arrived at a unanimous verdict to assess his art's ideology.<sup>13</sup> Partially, such ambivalence stems from the difficulty in sorting his art's ideology from his personal political views. As Guido Baldi reports, he was, after all, "the typical southern, conservative, land-owner *galantuomo*"<sup>14</sup> (35), who believed wholeheartedly in Crispi's imperialistic politics

toward Africa in the 1890s and had a pure revulsion toward socialist-worker movements that were taking form in those years in Italy (Marchi 36).

Scholars, like Vitilio Masiello, Salvatore Lupo, and Gian Paolo Marchi, just to quote a few, underline Verga's political conservatism—or at the very least his apolitical position within his art—due to his lack of proposed alternatives to the bourgeois oppression of the lower social classes. For instance, Masiello writes that although Verga “does not ignore the sufferance, the miseries, and hardships of the subaltern social classes, he is not able to denounce these atrocities and reclaim a different and more human life for them” (70). In contrast, scholars such as Guido Baldi, Romano Luperini, and Alberto Asor Rosa, to name a few, refuse to consider Verga's writing reactionary.

Baldi insists on Verga's lack of nostalgic, and, thus, conservative, look at “the past ways of living” to construct a world better than the present one. Asor Rosa underlines Verga's lack of any populist inclinations, since he does not believe that *il popolo* (“the masses”) are necessarily the ultimate depository of positive values to contrast the bourgeois society's corruption, inequalities, and brutal injustices (76).<sup>15</sup> Verga does not fall in the populist trap because he “refuses the cup of consolation that the bourgeoisie is always ready to take when dealing with the so-called social problem ... Verga prefers knowledge and awareness. His rejection of any progressive ideology is not the limit, but rather the source of his success” (Asor Rosa 76). Unlike Emile Zola, Verga does not believe in the improvements that the future has in store for humanity. Thus, he has no confidence in the progress that the new kingdom was supposed to bring to Sicily. Baldi's and Luperini's words indicate Verga's disillusion in and, consequent detachment from, history's master narrative, which proposes the idea that history moves forward.

My contention is that the story does not foreground progress as problematic per se but rather the way it was carried out. In Italy, like in any other country, capitalism deeply changed the economy structure often without providing any protection for those who consequently lost their employment. By detecting a social criticism of capitalism in the story, my reading would lean more toward Asor Rosa's, Baldi's, and Luperini's front. My reading, though, differs from theirs insomuch as it goes beyond the story's anti-capitalist stance to incorporate also a critical view of the Italian nation-state's creation and ontology. Just like Asor Rosa and Baldi, I do not think that Verga was a populist, nostalgic of the old, political, and economic regime. Rather, he was critical of how it was brushed away and a new one was imposed without any popular consensus. In other words, the story points to a lack of legitimacy and legality of the whole process of unification, since the South was annexed through a well-documented voting fraud.

After the parenthesis on Verga's fiction's hermeneutics, I want to go back to Verga's disillusion and pessimism about Cosimo's life, which did not improve even with the Savoy's constitutional monarchy. Actually as far as Cosimo is concerned, the new monarchy brought higher taxes, with the consequent confiscation of his mules, and a seven-year mandatory conscription for his own son, who probably had become the only means of sustenance once his mules were taken away. Both monarchies are described as alien and oppressive powers. In Cosimo's mind, the identification of the two kings becomes blurring and slipping, to the point that the images of the two overlap, precisely when he describes their overbearing powers: "with only one word. He could have anyone's head cut off. He could also send his people to confiscate his mules, if he did not pay off his debts. He could even take anyone's son for his army, as he liked" (Verga 232) In Cosimo's eyes, the new king is geographically, politically, and jurisdictionally too removed to be able to assist people like him, as in, "if the king had been

*there*, he would have sent him and his wife away happy” (italics mine). His words denounce the Savoy king’s and his politicians’ absence from Sicily and ignorance about the island’s culture and political traditions, as testified by the fact that Cavour never visited the “new provinces” (Riall, *Sicily* 126).

Also the Bourbon king, though, is described almost as a foreigner: “As his wife was entering the litter, the king, while talking to his troops, approached Cosimo, tapped on his shoulder and addressed him with his Neapolitan accent, “Be careful! You are taking your queen!” (Verga 229). At the crack of dawn, as King Ferdinand II was entrusting his wife to Cosimo, he actually talks to him without his men’s mediation. The talking, of course, is limited to giving Cosimo the order of being careful with his queen; thus, adding anxiety and discomfort to his trip.

Arguably, the distance between the king and the commoner is kept and marked by the king’s “Neapolitan accent.” Unlike Tropea, who writes that the king’s Neapolitan was a language dear to all his people, even those like Cosimo (26), I would argue that Verga’s stress on the king’s Neapolitan is highly politically loaded.<sup>16</sup> After the Congress of Vienna in 1815, Ferdinand I merges the Kingdom of Sicily with that of Naples, creating the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, with Naples as its capital, in 1816. That political maneuver was not well liked and accepted by Sicilians, who looked at Neapolitans as usurpers of their freedom and independence (Lupo 15). Nineteenth-century historian Raffaele De Cesare writes that in Sicily after the 1816 merge, the kingdom “needs the support of police and army to survive, just like the Austrians are doing in Lombardy and Veneto. The adjective, *napoletano* (“Neapolitan”) is abhorred on the island as much as *croato* (“Croatian”) is abhorred in Milan” (qtd. in Lupo 15). The distance between the commoner Cosimo and the royal couple is marked also by the queen’s speaking “a

language that nobody understood a damn about it,” (Verga 231) referring probably to German, her native language.<sup>17</sup>

Both monarchies are constructed as colonizing powers on Sicilian land. This latter is a theme very dear to Leonardo Sciascia, an independent leftist Sicilian intellectual. In his essay, “*Sicilia e Sicilitudine*,” Sciascia coined the word *Sicilitudine* to describe Sicily’s peculiar history, as a land of conquer and colonization, and its reaction to it: “Sicilians distrust the sea that brought to their own shores the Berbers, the Normans, the Lombards, the greedy barons of Charles of Angiò, the adventurers coming from the poor and stingy land of Catalogne, Charles V’s and Luis XIV’s armies, the Austrians, the *garibaldini* and the *Piemontesi*” (13). In coining the word *Sicilitudine*, Sciascia is invoking Aimè Cèsaire’s neologism *nègritude*. *Nègritude* is translated into Italian as *negritudine*, which, then, fathered the new word, *sicilitudine* (Orieles 231).

In a radio interview, released in 1963 to Maurice Heulin, journalist for the literary journal *Prèfaces*, Cèsaire defines *nègritude* as “a literary movement completely devoted to expressing the problems of Black people who become aware (*sur la base de une prise de conscience*) of their very own and real condition ... it is the realization that *nègritude* can weigh on reality (*puet peser sur la rèalitiè*).” As Cèsaire explains, *Nègritude* is about Black people becoming aware of their real historical condition, which are colonialism and their consequent racialization (*Colonialism* 35). By invoking Cèsaire’s *nègritude*, Sciascia is drawing an interesting parallel between France’s colonial experience and Sicily’s history of colonization by outsiders with the racialization of its people.

Cosimo’s racialization is manifested through the image of his son, Orazio, who “They nicknamed ... ‘the Turk’ because he was so dark and strong” (232). The word “they” refers to

the *piemontesi*, who are articulating the discourse of nationhood. They are, thus, interested in drawing the boundaries between the North, claiming to be part of Europe, and the South that is constructed as “Otherness.” Due to their assaults and consequent sackings of Italian cities, the Othman Empire’s Turks represented a real threat to Italy for centuries. Even in today’s Italian collective imagination, they are considered to be among the most violent and brutal of the peoples who attacked Italy throughout history. Today’s jargon expression, “*Mamma li turchi*” (“Mother, here come the Turks”), uttered in front of a manmade disaster, still testifies to this atavistic fear. A nickname like “the Turk” would both assimilate Orazio and his social context to Muslim Turkey and evoke images of savagery. By naming Orazio “the Turk,” the *piemontesi* construct a subaltern identity for him, separating him from those who have the power to name. Undoubtedly, the right of naming resides in the mouth of those who have power over the named object or person. More precisely, the naming is the act through which the possession is actualized, as many colonial narratives testify. In these narratives, the “discoverer” often names a land as a mark of possession, as in the case of Amerigo Vespucci, who gave name “America” to the newly “discovered” land (Shoat 19).

Unlike Vespucci, the *piedmontesi* did not rename new territories; rather, they renamed southern people with epithets that marked them as different and not belonging to the Italian nation. The renaming of Orazio is even more telling when compared to Victor Emmanuel II’s resistance and ultimate rejection of being renamed when he became king of Italy.<sup>18</sup> By resisting his renaming, he asserted himself as the only and indisputable power-holder. In the story, Cosimo’s son is named twice at two different levels. At one level, he is nicknamed “the Turk” by the *piemontesi*. On a second level, he is named Orazio by his parents on the day of his birth and



probably his baptism. Orazio is a name anchored to a very popular Roman legend, that of “Horatii and Curatii.”

According to the legend, during the kingdom of King Tullius Ostelius, the Romans and the people of Albalonga decided to have three soldiers fight for their native villages rather than the armies doing so. The Horatii brothers fought for Rome; the Curatii brothers did for Albalonga. As the duel began, the Curatii killed two of the Horatii, leaving only one standing. Yet, that one clever and swift Horatius (“*Orazio*” in Italian) assured the victory for Rome by single-handedly defeating the three Curatii. Because of this legend, the name Orazio has acquired a strong patriotic connotation in Italy and Europe. In 1784, the French painter Jacques-Louis David portrayed the Horatii brothers to symbolize the French republic with its new, moral values and physical prowess. Verga’s choice of that name is hardly accidental, as it symbolically represents Italy’s “new man.” However, Orazio is reappropriated and renamed by the *piemontesi* in a denigrating way that will seal him as “Otherness.”

Verga’s project takes on a deeper dimension when it is located alongside the work of Ernest Renan’s “What is a Nation?,” presented at a conference at Sorbonne University just one year before the publication of Verga’s “What is the King?” Verga’s story title is very reminiscent of Renan’s essay. The story and the essay seem to be in a dialogical conversation, and Renan’s last comments, which sum up his thesis, are very illuminating for the reading of the story:

A nation is therefore a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future. It presupposes a past; it is summarized, however, in the present by a tangible fact, namely, *consent* (italics mine), the clearly expressed desire to continue a common life.... A nation never has any real interest in annexing or

holding a country against its will.... Man is a slave neither of his race nor his language, nor of his religion, nor of the course of rivers nor of the direction taken by mountain chains. A large aggregate of men, healthy in mind and warm of heart creates the kind of moral consciousness which we call a nation. (19).

Renan defines a nation as built on consent, which eliminates the possibility of annexing a country against its own will. A nation must also transcend race, language, religion, and geographical boundaries. Consent, forced annexation, race, and language are all elements that are central in the story, as I demonstrated. However, the story underscores the lack of those elements, which are needed to create a nation, making the failure of Italy's unification painfully manifest to its readers.

It is manifest in Cosimo's eyes how distant and inhumane the Savoy king is. In the story, King Victor Emmanuel II's presence is constructed only by his overbearing power over his subjects: "send his people to confiscate his mules, if he did not pay off his debts. He could even take anyone's son for his army, as he liked." To Cosimo, the Savoy king exemplifies the *Unheimlich* that which makes Cosimo feel weary and uneasy. Whereas, even in all of his absolute and threatening power, King Ferdinand II was still able to pardon someone who had plotted against his own life, moved by the daughter's supplication.

In what might be considered a politically perverted way, King Ferdinand II was able to reveal a humanity toward and closeness to his subjects that King Victor Emmanuel II could not match. Unlike Victor Emmanuel II, King Ferdinand II is described in his material body and physicality: "The King had tapped his shoulder and he knew him. He had seen the king right in his face, with his red pants and his sword on his belly" (Verga 229). It is precisely the description of his physicality, his face and his belly, that makes him human, approachable, and empathetic

toward one of his subjects. Furthermore, it is significant that Cosimo feels that he knows the king because he tapped his shoulder. The physical contact with the king gives him the perception that he knows his king, at some kind of personal level.

Here again, we need to think of Ferdinand II's physicality as an expression of his *Corpus Mysticum*. In other words, that physicality entails also the power of giving pardon and, thus, life. In Cosimo's eyes, King Ferdinand II exemplifies the *Unheimlich*, as the power that can take his life, but at the same time, also the *Heimlich*, as the power that can protect and save him. Homi Bhabha rightly describes the formation of a nation as an ambivalent event representing at the same time:

The *Heimlich* pleasures of the hearth, (and) the *Unheimlich* terror of the space and race of the Other; the comfort of social belonging, the hidden injuries of class; the customs of taste, the power of political affiliation; the sense of social order, the sensibility of sexuality; the blindness of bureaucracy, the strait insight of institutions; the quality of justice, the common sense of injustice; the *langue* of the Law and the *parole* of the people. (*Nation 2*)

According to Bhabha, the formation of a nation would entail the presence of both the *Heimlich* and the *Unheimlich*. Unlike Ferdinand II, though, Victor Emmanuel II is described as possessing only *Unheimlich* qualities, like that of the "terror of the ... race of the Other" shown in Orazio's renaming ; "the power of political affiliation," like the fraudulent plebiscite; "the common sense of injustice," as felt by all those who, like Cosimo, saw their meager life become even more meager after the unification; and "the *langue* of the Law," that is too incomprehensible, distant, and impersonal for Sicilian commoners.

## Conclusion

Verga's "What is the King?" needs to be read within the context of Sicily's transition from the Bourbon's absolute monarchy to the Savoy's constitutional one, so much sought for by southern liberals. The worsening of Cosimo's living conditions both testifies that the constitution was no *panacea* for the rural masses, and points to the shortcomings of Italy's unification as it sidelined southern peasants and illegally swindled civil society's consent. As the story suggests, the constitution was a bourgeois privilege sought for by southern liberal intellectuals whose interests did not coincide with that of the peasantry.

For people like Cosimo, the absolute king's *Corpus Mysticum* possesses *heimlich* characteristics that the constitutional king lacks. First and foremost, the Bourbon king had the power to pardon only with one word, thus allowing for a paternal sense of justice. Furthermore, the Bourbon king had a "bodily" presence in his kingdom, arguably giving his subjects a sense of social order that is missing with the new monarchy because of the king's physical distantness. With Sicily's *piemontizzazione* came also its people's racialization as demonstrated by Orazio's renaming, further underlining the Savoy's appropriation of the island and the creation of its subaltern identity.

### **The Creation of the Subaltern Subject in Pirandello's "Donna Mimma" ("Madam Mimma")**

"Madam Mimma" is part of a collection of short stories, *Novelle per un anno* (*Short stories for one year*), published in 1937, after their individual publications in different newspapers and magazines, such as *Il Corriere della sera* and *Il giornale di Sicilia*. Pirandello's literary goal was that of writing a story for each day of the year; the project, though, was prematurely interrupted by his death (Radcliff-Umstead 344). The story, published for the first time in 1912, focuses on the changes in cultural practices<sup>19</sup> that Italy's unification entailed. In

any society, cultures, just like classes and races, are unequally ranked and stay in opposition to one another, and in a relationship of domination and subordination (Hall, *Resistance* 39). After Italy's unification, the northern Italian culture became the dominant and the southern the subordinate, further complicating the already present differences between the North and the South.

In "Madam Mimma," the ranking of the two different cultures comes to the fore, showing the devastating consequences that the imposition of the Piedmontese culture had on a midwife's life in a little village in Sicily. Mimma is literally put out of work by the arrival of a *piemontesa*, a young woman who graduated from the University of Turin and holds a certificate of obstetrics. Through the antagonistic relation of the two women, the story dramatizes the Pirandellian contrast between *vivere* and *vedersi vivere*, ("to be" and "to appear"), or to what critics have often referred to as *il gioco delle maschere* ("the wearing of masks") (Donati 33, 48). In this story, *il gioco delle maschere* acquires a postcolonial connotation, since Mimma has to attain a "mask" to look like her colonizer nemesis, the *piemontesa*, to avoid sure unemployment. This chameleonic feat requires her to lose her own identity, which becomes her own demise.

The idea of "wearing a mask" in a postcolonial reading of a story cannot but remind us of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*. In his book, Fanon asserts that Black people, to be accepted by the white colonizers, consciously and unconsciously learn to perform the colonizers' identity: "the wearing of European clothes ... using European furniture and European forms of social intercourse; adorning the native language with European expressions; using bombastic phrases in speaking or writing a European language; all these contributes to a feeling of equality with the European and his achievement" (25). The performing of the colonizers' identity is necessary to hide cultural and linguistic origins, as well as skin color.

Fanon's description of the condition of Black people vis-à-vis the white colonizers is very similar to that of the village people vis-à-vis the *piemontesa*, as I will demonstrate. In most of his works, Pirandello brings to light the struggle between the modern subject and the bourgeois societal rules that tend to suffocate her individuality. This struggle forces the individual to "split," to constantly live between the contrasting conditions of *being* and *becoming*, *life* and *form*. For this reason, Pirandello's dramas have always been considered highly philosophical, since they tend to transcend modernity's ideological and political crisis to expose and give universal validity to the ontological and epistemological crisis of the modern human being (Donati 77-81).<sup>20</sup>

However with "*Donna Mimma*," Pirandello moves into the representation of a political and historical drama: Italy's unification, and its political and social consequences. This was not a totally new territory for him, as with the publication of *I vecchi e i giovani* (*The Old and the Young*), published in 1908. Pirandello tackles Sicilian intellectuals' disappointment with the unification for not delivering what it promised it would. Yet, whereas the novel takes place in the 1880s, "*Madam Mimma*" deals with the years just after the unification in 1861, when Turin was still the capital of Italy.<sup>21</sup> This allows Pirandello to display Mimma's drama of *being* and *becoming* as a painful result of a process of national unity that was haphazardly and poorly done.

Although of the same gender and profession, Mimma and the *piemontesa* could not be more different. Pirandello takes great pains in drawing a very visible and dividing line between the two women. Mimma belongs to an almost ageless, idyllic, and mythical time. A time made of legends, innocence, and decent modesty:

When wrapped in a black, long shawl with a light blue scarf knotted under her chin, Mimma walks through the village's streets, basked in the sun, one could even

say that she does not project a shadow.... As she walks she has a way to make everything around her look fake: the sky looks as if made of paper, the sun looks like the star in the *crèche*.... This is the world she represents to the children when she tells them that she went very far away to buy them ... to Palermo with a beautiful, white, ivory litter pulled by beautiful white horses, without bells, along the dark streets ... Mimma feels the sacredness of her work but she covers it to the children's eyes with a veil of modesty (7-8, 10).

Pirandello starts a depiction of Mimma by describing her clothes: the scarf knotted under her chin and the long shawl wrapping her body.

In nineteenth-century Sicily, these were the traditional clothes that veiled the woman's body. The scarf is knotted under her chin to cover her hair and good part of her face as her long shawl covers her body. Her body, just like her work, needs to be veiled out of modesty. She *seems* to belong to a fairy-tale village: "with that golden sun and beautiful blue sky" (7). With Mimma's presence, the village becomes softly fake and still like a *crèche*. The word *crèche* evokes the wholeness and holiness of this rural Sicilian village, not dissimilar from the sense of softness and sacredness present in Jean-Francois Millet's peasant paintings. In their respective works, both artists seem to transcend the hardship of the peasants' life through the quietness and blessedness of its representation.

As a result, their rural images become almost surreal, like Mimma, who does not even project a shadow and "makes everything around her look fake." Her world is made of surreal tales like her purchasing children in Palermo to be delivered by "a beautiful, white, ivory litter pulled by beautiful white horses." Through these "white" lies, she tries to protect the children from what she clearly regards as immodest and indecent: their parents' sexual desire. In

*Mimma*'s life, the only note of harsh realism is the image of the unplanned children further burdening their parents' misery: "It may be a great party for the wealthy families and their newborn babies, and sometimes not even for them. Bringing babies to poor families' houses broke her heart, though" (10). *Mimma*'s world hearkens back to ancient times when decency and modesty were shared values that veiled even natural instincts like that of procreation.

The *piemontesa*'s world, on the contrary, represents modernity and naturally clashes with the world around her:

This haughty, twenty-year old *piemontesa* woman who comes from the continent wearing a short, yellow skirt with a green jacket, hands in her pockets just like a guy. She is a custom employee's sister and single. She graduated at the Royal University of Turin, which forces you to make the sign of the cross with both hands. Oh God, a young woman, who has not lived yet, going into such a profession! And with such an impudent attitude! A girl knowing these things.... What a shame! What has become of us!... And on her velvet hat, a white feather wavering in the wind. (10-11)

The village women's comments introduce the *piemontesa*, and their choral voice becomes the expression of the colonized world's opposition to the civilizing mission of modernization that the North forced upon the South (Rössner 314).

The village women resist and oppose everything that comes from her: her clothes, her living condition, her education, and even her profession due to her young age. They call her the *piemontesa*, and this is her name throughout the story. Her real name, Elvira Mosti, is only inscribed on a plate on her door: "she had that plate with her name and profession hung on her house door. What is her name? Elvira ... what? Elvira Mosti?" (11). A written name in a quasi-



illiterate village is a strident note that connotes the foreignness of the written word's power. More specifically, it connotes Turin's written-based, bureaucratic and centralized government, marking her not just as an outsider but also as a woman coming from the site of political power. Being aware of her clout, she displays it in her "haughty" and "impudent" attitude that makes the village people resent her, hence her nickname. Her authority resides also in tangible signs, like a university degree that, one may expect, was not very common in a *crèche*-like village.

Above all, the *piemontesa*'s modernity is characterized by her clothes, though: "a short, yellow skirt with a green jacket ... and her velvet black hat, a white feather wavering." Here it is important to notice that both women are described and characterized through their clothing. Mimma's "black, long shawl" contrasts with the *piemontesa*'s "short yellow skirt." Whereas Mimma's clothes cover her body, the *piemontesa*'s expose it; her skirt is probably short enough to show her ankles. The difference in their clothes' colors is important too. While Mimma's shawl is black, the darkest color, the *piemontesa*'s skirt is yellow, the lightest and the most attention-grabbing. Her clothes are scandalous, almost more than anything else about her, and smash with the surroundings. As Eugenia Paulicelli remarks: "fashion, we might say, is a system of signification as well as an on-going process of communication which narrates history... fashion does not exist without the notion of change, and it is for this reason that it has an intimate link with modernity" (284) and I would add with power.

Both women make use of fashion's representative clout to assert their authority within a patriarchal society. Writing about the relation between women's clothing and power, Enaya Othman states:

Women's clothing conventions are the product of social and cultural powers that operate to 'discipline the body.' Despite this, women subject to these forces

deliberately choose to maneuver within their society's standard code of dress for mobility. Thus the standards for dress do not simply discipline; they are a means by which women can reassign their roles within their communities. In other words, the deliberate use of clothing within a defined temporal and spatial context allows women to position themselves in places of authority and power. (3)

I would argue that both women "maneuver within their society's standard code of dress for mobility." Whereas Mimma's mobility remains within the village's paradigms and is reflected by her traditional clothes, the *piemontesa* (re-)assigns herself a new, modern role within the community by wearing outrageously scandalous and transgressive clothes, which are as shockingly modern and immodest as her science.

The *piemontesa*'s clothing does not signify only modernity and change, it also implies foreignness. The feather on her velvet hat connotes a northern fashion:

To illustrate the relationship between fashion and the desire to create a national image, we might mention two fashionable items. One is the famous *cappello alla calabrese* ("Calabrian style hat"),<sup>22</sup> adopted by some Milanese women and derived from a popular, rustic and exclusively masculine world.... At the same time, a distinctive *vestire alla lombarda* (dressing in the Lombard fashion) appeared in the iconography of that period. The political message of their trend was contained in the fabric used to make the clothes: black velvet which was produced in the region. (Paulicelli 286)

As Paulicelli writes, fashion is a system of signification, just like a language. The *piemontesa*'s clothing style comes from Milan. The velvet hat's southern-style is reappropriated by northerner stylists and transformed into a national image.

This image, though, in Mimma's southern village, where women still wear traditional scarves, resonates as foreign and transgressive. The language of clothing, thus, becomes another avenue to establish a national discourse that is dominated by the North. Furthermore, the *piemontesa*'s language is gender-transgressive on two accounts: the wearing of the hat and the keeping her "hands in her pockets, just like a guy." Transgression, as a symbolic violation of the social order, is usually the language of a subculture, though. Dominant culture is predicated on signs that are unconsciously accepted as the "normal common sense" rule of behavior; hence, they cannot be transgressive (Hebdige 11). Her transgression, thus, needs to be read as part of her modernity and unintentional. Or, better said, as Gramsci affirms: "common sense is a collective noun ... there is not just one common sense, for that too is a product of history and a part of the historical process" (qtd. in Forgacs 323). For Gramsci, each social bloc has its own "common sense" system through which it makes sense out of reality. Different "common sense" systems are often in opposition and contrast with each other. Pirandello's story fully displays the negotiation that necessarily takes place when two different "common sense" systems collide. At the end of the story, the *piemontesa* changes her dress code for mobility and to better enter into a business relation with the village people, to her own economic advantage.

As Mimma soon discovers, the *piemontesa*'s modern clothes and customs are not the only surprise that she has in store for her. From the mayor, she finds out that she can no longer practice her profession because of new law passed by the Parliament of Turin:

Here it is, Mimma! Do you see? We got another letter from Turin. There is nothing to do. You are forbidden to practice your profession.

I, forbidden?

Yes, because you do not have a degree. My dear Mimma, the law ...

Which law? The new law?

The new law? No, the law is not new. We have known you for such a long time here that we trusted you and allowed you to practice in flagrant violation of the law. These darn formalities ... and before, you were the only one delivering children.... But now it's different. That new woman came and she found out that you have no degree and she denounced you to the people in Turin. Now you can no longer work. You must go to the University of Palermo to get the degree. (13-14)

The new law that came from Turin changed the cultural practice of delivering children, which became a scientific practice that required a degree from a university; thus, Mimma can no longer practice. As the mayor informs her, the law is not new. Yet, she had been allowed to practice in “flagrant violation of the law” because everyone in the village trusted her and her experience. To fight for a share of the market, though, the *piemontesa* upholds the law and forces the mayor to act upon the “flagrant violation.” Mimma has no choice but to comply with new law and get a university degree.

With the unification, education became one of the most pressing issues for the government. Although Cavour gave great importance to agriculture, as an essential part of the Italian economy, he was very aware of the risk that Italy might be excluded from those “*moderni perfezionamenti*” (“modern improvements”) (Laicata 90). By “*moderni perfezionamenti*,” he meant the learning and practical applications of science and technology, necessary to become a developed and modern country. One of Cavour’s main points for Italy’s economic development model was the “spreading of education,” starting with the managing class (Laicata 90, 92).<sup>23</sup> The

North became the designated and privileged center for the teaching of science and technology, with Turin and Milan hosting the most esteemed schools of Engineering.<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, from the very start, southern universities did not enjoy the same consideration and respect in the teaching of science and technology that their northern counterparts did. As Stuart Hall indicates, in modernity, science becomes “the ultimate signifier” (*the Floating*).<sup>25</sup> It is not surprising, thus, that the domination of the northern culture is predicated precisely on the scientific discourse originated in northern universities. Along this line, Michel Foucault indicates that in modern times, scientific discourse was invoked as a means for the state to control human behavior and, at the same time, to justify and improve that control. From the seventeenth century, the power-over-life that the state exercises on its citizens has had two basic poles:

One of these poles ... centered on *the body as a machine*: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls.... The second formed ... centered on the *species body*, the body imbued with the mechanisms of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, birth and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity.... Their supervision was effected through an entire *series* of interventions and *regulatory controls: a biopolitics of the population.* (*Society* 139)

The above passage underlines that historically any state has assumed the right to discipline its people into docility to achieve efficiency in any given production system, and a university might be easily construed as a means to acquire the needed docility through discipline.

It is not accidental that within institutions of higher education the different fields of knowledge are often referred to as disciplines. As a university subject, obstetrics focuses precisely on biological production, or reproduction. The power over life, or biopolitics, would be incomprehensible, however, without capitalism, which needed “the insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes” (Foucault, *Society* 141). Once Italy’s liberal and capital-driven government took power, Mimma’s field of knowledge needed to be controlled. A very effective bureaucratic apparatus assured the implementation of new laws directed to discipline knowledge. Bureaucracy is the hallmark of modernity having an indissoluble relation with modern capitalism and the nation-state; as such, it became the *fulcrum* of the *Piemonizzazione*, as well (Dandeker 7). It is with great humoristic sarcasm that in *The Leopard* Tommasi describes the Piedmontese Chevalley as “congenitally bureaucratic” (168). Writing about bureaucracy and modernity, Max Weber argues that “the constitutive feature of modern capitalism is the institutionalization of rationality in all social institutions. Rational capitalist enterprise, the rational legal state as well as scientific reasoning and capital accounting would be impossible without bureaucracy” (qtd. in Dandeker 7-9).

Weber’s description of the rationality of modern bureaucracy is twofold:

First, bureaucratic decisions and calculations depend on *knowledge of the files* that is on the mastery of the information stored centrally in the organization, rather than on tradition or charismatic inspiration.... Second, bureaucratic administration is based on *rational discipline* ... bureaucracy is analogous to the machine in the extent to which subjective or irrational elements of will and mood are eliminated.... The Official’s sphere of competence is clearly defined by legal

rules with his or her decisions subject to scrutiny through a regular chain of command. (Dandeker 9-10)

Bureaucracy sets up a different relation among the people of the village: tradition and charismatic inspiration, as well as elements of will and mood must be eliminated. The mayor is compelled to enforce the law in his village once the *piemontesa* denounces Mimma's violation. Had the mayor not acted to discipline her, "the chain of command" would have disciplined him. The story perfectly shows the Italian kingdom's preference for a strongly centralized and hierarchical administration that left very little autonomy to local officials. The Historical Right Deputies, who were the masterminds of this "liberal dictatorship," justified it out of the necessity to avert anarchy in the southern regions (Romano 95).

In order to survive, Mimma needs to comply with the new law and decides to go to Palermo to get her degree, even if hesitant because of her old age. Michael Rössner rightly observes that, in the years at the University of Palermo, the only thing Mimma really learns is to try to be like the *piemontesa*. To achieve this feat, she becomes like the parrot-like lady in the Pirandello essay *On Humor*, who makes a fool out of herself to try to be the young woman she no longer is.<sup>26</sup>Mimma, though, parrots the colonizer to the point that she loses her identity and becomes a caricature (316).

When she comes back home after two years of studying, the village people are taken aback by her transformation, and she is brutally mocked:

Mimma ... what? With the hat? Yes, with the hat! Run, come and see her. She just arrived from Palermo with the hat, with that big hat! Holy Mary! She looks like a monkey! One of those monkeys that dance on the concertina at the fair!

Everyone is in the street to take a look at her. All the street boys are running after

her beating rocks. Really? She is wearing the hat? Yes, the hat. Yes, she graduated from the university just like the *piemontesa*! After two years of intense study! She got white hair in those two years. Her hair was black when she left. Thanks to those studies, now she can hold herself up even in front of the university professor who used to use words she could not understand. Now she knows those words, all of them by heart. And the hat? Of course she wears the hat! It is her right, after two years college. All the other girls who studied with her wear it, and of course she has to wear it too. (25-6)

The choral representation of Mimma's mocking is exquisitely powerful. One has the impression of seeing all of these people getting out of their abodes and pointing at her laughing, while sharing their viciously dehumanizing comments: "She looks like a monkey ... that dance on the concertina at the fair."

The comparison to a monkey, dancing on the concertina, is telling of the people's perception and opinions of her transformation. In their eyes, Mimma lost her self and is forced to perform her new identity to be able to survive, just like the monkey performs on the concertina. Her "parrot-like" performance has a comic effect on her compatriots who feel disdain for her, being unable to reflect on her change. The village folks' laughter has also a disciplining function, though. According to Mario Guarna:

Laughter is one society's instrument to repress individual attempts of revolt, all those behaviors that are anomalous and do not want to adapt to its laws. The comic element becomes the last resort, of a positivistic and naturalistic order (based on cause-effect), to shutter any form of individual resistance to and revolt against society's norms. (88)



The people's laughter demonstrates that they already accepted the *piemontesa* as the norm of whom Mimma is only a pale imitation. Another important element in the paragraph is the hat, or, more precisely, that Mimma is wearing a hat. The wearing of a hat, instead of the traditional scarf, becomes the tangible sign of her transformation and modernization: "All the other girls who studied with her wear it, and of course she has to wear it too." However, Mimma wearing the hat in her village is a strident note for the people who ridicule her for wanting to be what, in their perception, she is not. In her parroting the *piemontesa*'s modern ways, Mimma appears as "a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha, *Location* 83).

Bhabha names "mimicry" that mode of colonial discourse that is predicated on the difference between the colonizer and the colonized:

Mimicry is, then, the sign of double of articulation, a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline which "appropriates" the Other as it visualizes power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of the colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both 'normalized' knowledge and disciplinary powers. (*Location* 83)

Ultimately, mimicry sets up a discursive practice through which the colonized is called, maybe even required, to live according to Western paradigms. The colonized, though, is never allowed to achieve "sameness" to the colonizer. The colonized's identity always keeps sliding away from that of the colonizer, never quite being like the colonizer.

The wearing of the hat through the streets of her village is a perfect example of mimicry, and "it is from this area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double ... becomes transformed into an

uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a ‘partial’ presence” (Bhabha, *Location* 123). *Mimma* becomes the “disciplinary double” that threatens the North’s “reforming, civilizing mission” because she cannot be but a ‘partial presence.’ Consequently, she cannot fully and effectively acquire the new knowledge on delivering children:

She looks at her expert little hands ... *Mimma* looks at them with pity and tears in her eyes. Could her little hands know how to move now as they did before? Now her hands feel tied up by all the new scientific notions. They shake and they no longer *see*. The professor gave *Mimma* the glasses of science, yet he erased her natural sight. What will *Mimma* do with the glasses if she can no longer see? (23)

*Mimma*’s new unstable identity, her being in between the two cultures, makes her doubt both her past, and new knowledge and expertise. In the above passage, natural knowledge contrasts with the scientific one, creating two antithetical systems unable to incorporate the other. Her expert hands lost their empirical touch, needed in her previous natural system of knowledge, becoming blind and ineffective.

*Mimma*’s new scientific knowledge, however, is futile, too, since it collides with the old, resulting in a paralyzing confusion. At the end, *Mimma* will not be able to perform what she is required to do because her hands and mind get tangled up by the two systems. Parallel to *Mimma*’s transformation, the *piemontesa* undergoes her own, too. Not only has the *piemontesa* replaced her professionally, she has almost usurped *Mimma*’s identity. She took up those cultural attitudes and practices that marked her as the child’s deliverer in the eyes of the village people. Going back to her village, *Mimma* finds out that the *piemontesa* is wearing the same clothes that she was wearing before leaving for school.

Moreover, she tells the children the same folk tales *Mimma* used to tell them, and for which the *piemontesa* made fun of her:

She no longer wears her hat, but she wears a shawl and a blue scarf. What is she saying to the children? She is saying that she buys them in Palermo? With the litter? Ah traitor! She does this just to steal the bread right out of my mouth! Just to conquer the hearts of these poor ignorant people. Rotten woman! Why did I go to the university? So that she would steal all my patients, by wearing the same clothes I wore and telling them the same things I used to tell them? (26)

Rightly, Rössner observes: “the modification of the woman from the North” as an example of mimicry that leads the *piemontesa* to become a hybrid personality.

As Rössner puts it:

Speaking in terms of cultural translation, we could say that translation is not complete, but a work in process, as simultaneously the context, the system of culture of origin and of destination, changes; and that in both women we may perceive the tension between an “original” which is no longer an original and a “translation” which never becomes a stable result. In terms of post-colonial theory, we could say that both women appear as more or less deformations of the presumably “pure” identities they had before. (317)

Also, the *piemontesa* needs to translate from one culture to the other to successfully displace Mimma and “conquer the hearts of these poor ignorant people.” The *piemontesa* understands that to be able to communicate with the village people, the style of her clothing must change, and she needs to dress like them (25). Consequently, she must appropriate those clothes, like the scarf and the shawl, which would make her recognizable to the people.

By learning their semantics, she can take possession of the way they are making meaning out of their lives. She uses what Lévi-Strauss refers to as the technique of *bricolage* to assemble signs whose meaning is somewhat changed: “The elements which the bricoleur collects and uses are “pre-constrained” like the constitutive units of myth, the possible combinations of which are restricted by the fact that they are drawn from the language where they already possess a sense which sets a limit to their freedom of maneuver” (13). To be able to enter into a business relationship with the village people, the *piemontesa* needs to use the “pre-constrained” units of a non-verbal language, like clothing. Mimma’s clothes already “possess a sense which sets a limit” to the *piemontesa*’s “freedom of maneuver.” In other words, the *piemontesa*’s mobility and maneuvering is limited by the village people’s ability to recognize her service by the clothes she wears.

However, unlike Mimma, the *piemontesa*’s mimicry is consciously used only as a marketing strategy. She becomes almost a billboard to advertise her business through her clothes. The *piemontesa*’s hybrid personality is starkly different from Mimma’s insomuch as she consciously inhabits two cultures at once and to her own economic advantage. Moreover, she took the decision to leave her own village and region to settle in another geographical place. One may reasonably conceive that she also has the choice to go back home, if she so desires. On the contrary, Mimma is forced to live her mimicry condition that displaces her in her own home village, marking her subalternity.

Going back to Rössner’s idea of the “cultural translation” process that both women undergo, I would add that also the village people are part of that process. Specifically, as the *piemontesa* learns their semantics, they, too, learn to speak her language, Italian:

The moms are happy because they are called ‘madam.’ By dealing with the *piemontesa*, the village people feel they learned to speak the language and acquired the continent’s finesse and civility ... and the satisfaction to have everything explained in scientific terms just like by a physician. (24)

The happiness of the moms is twofold. They are happy for having acquired the Italian language and the Italian title “madam” (instead of *Donna*). Second, they are “satisfied” because they have acquired the language of science, the “ultimate signifier” of the hegemonic culture.

Writing about the colonized people’s acquisition of the colonizer’s language and culture, Fanon has the following to say:

I ascribe a basic importance to the phenomenon of language. That is why I find it necessary to begin with this subject.... Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above this jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s cultural standards. (17)

The inferiority complex Fanon writes about is painfully present in the village women who have already associated the learning of Italian with the acquisition of “the continent’s finesse and civility.” The continent is deemed civilized, of course, because it is recognized as the site of the discourse of science. Furthermore, the village women’s attitude demonstrates that civility was perceived as an outside-of-the-island quality and enterprise.

In Gramsci’s terminology, one may say that the village women “consented” to the dominant order represented by the *piemontesa*. Gramsci reminds us that it is through consent that hegemony works: “the normal exercise of hegemony on the now classical terrain of

parliamentary regime is characterized by the combination of force and consent ... without force predominating excessively over consent” (qtd. in Hall *Resistance* 39). Expanding on Gramsci, Hall states:

Hegemony works through ideology, but it does not consist of false ideas, perceptions, and definitions. It works primarily by inserting the subordinate class into the key institutions and structures which support the power and social authority of the dominant order. It is, above all, in these structures and relations that a subordinate class lives its subordination. (*Resistance* 39)

The village people were “inserted” into the cultural structure of the northern and hegemonic power, without even realizing it.

Through their consent, the new law became the “norm” in only two years. The normalization of an imposed, and, thus, aberrant social practice works on two different yet connected levels. On the one hand, it gives validity and authority to the ordinances that come from the nation’s capital; on the other hand, it builds consent among the people for whom the ordinances were enacted. It is important to notice that the ordinances were enacted through a process of enunciation that came from Turin, the site of authority, creating cultural differences that produce “fields of force, reference, applicability, and capacity” (Bhabha, *Location* 155).

Ultimately, she is betrayed by her own people who, through the implementation of alien laws, learn to consent to the system supporting the hegemonic group’s ideology:

*Mimma* cries. She would like to find some comfort in talking to the children. In vain she takes off her black hat, hoping they will come closer to her. They no longer recognize her ... nor want to go near her. They remain hostile and resistant

to her presence. They just look at her from a distance.... Then, after drying off her tears, Mimma leaves for fear of making things worse. (29)

In her transformation, Mimma becomes estranged to her own people, and even the children avoid her. She tries to regain their trust by taking off her black hat, her most visible sign of “modernization,” yet to no avail, and they “remain hostile and resistant to her presence.” The story, though, does not stop at the simple denunciation of Mimma’s utter estrangement within her own village.

It also displays the workings of a centralized and bureaucratic state that functions through a center-to-periphery system. More precisely, as Dandeker states, bureaucracy works through a system of contacts between the center and the periphery (194). In Italy, municipalities became the “contacts” of the Italian bureaucratic apparatus, marking even more the difference between them and the rural villages (Patriarca 227). Municipalities had many of the institutions of education and public health that were completely lacking in the countryside villages (Patriarca 227). Often liberal, national elites’ modernization plans were thwarted by local municipal authorities’ shortsightedness and greed. These latter ones often neglected the implementation of plans beneficial to the rural villages, like the constructions of roads, hospitals, and schools (228). Pirandello dramatizes the contrast between the city, Palermo, and Mimma’s village by placing her in a university classroom where her *Palermitan* classmates treat her with the *piemontesa*’s same impudence and haughtiness:

At school, forty-nine devilish girls, with boyish, haughty attitude just like that trouble-maker from the Continent who landed in her own little village, surround her on the very first day. They make fun of her blue scarf on her head and the black, laced shawl modestly tied around her body. Here comes grandma! The

fairytale grandma coming from the moon. She is too prudish to dare to show her hands. And she still talks about *buying* children. (18)

First of all, it is important to note that higher education became more common for women after the unification, which was most definitely a very positive improvement, allowing women to become more independent (Guidi 282).

Nevertheless, the contrast between Mimma and her devilish classmates underlines the presence of a highly centralized government that created a power structure that favored the center to the detriments of the periphery. The same center-periphery structure was adopted both at the national and regional level, aggravating the already existing resentment of the peripheries against the center, which had forever undermined the Bourbon regime in the South (Riall, *Sicily* 121). Consequently, in Palermo, women acquired the modern ways and attitudes earlier than in Mimma's little countryside village. From a strictly social and economic perspective, the countryside villages were mainly populated by peasants, whereas, in the municipalities "the higher classes, landowners, capitalists, and merchants" resided (Patriarca 228).

From its inception, the centralized government's model was criticized by many intellectuals, like Carlo Cattaneo, Pietro Maestri, and Cesare Correnti, to quote a few, who supported a decentralized model of governance. In his report to the International Statistical Congress held in Florence in 1867, statistician Correnti defined the rural villages as "the natural foundation of human society endowed with a fundamental role in the making of the liberal polity; indeed on their constitution, on their relative autonomy depended the implementation of the liberal ideal of 'self-government'" (Patriarca 220-21). One of the intents of the International Statistical Congress was precisely to give validity to Correnti's theory that the only way to curb the power and corruption of the local municipal authorities was by decentralizing the



government and by increasing the power of the countryside villages (Patriarca 225). His suggestion, though, was never implemented.

After her graduation, Mimma is called once to substitute the *piemontesa*, and she tries very hard to demonstrate that her method is as scientific, if not more, as the *piemontesa*'s.

However, her attempt fails:

What? They want me, Mimma? They want me to substitute her, the *piemontesa*?  
She really does not want to be a substitute. But at the end, she gives in to the supplications. She puts her hat on and goes. She thinks she can show them that she studied for two years at the university just like the other one. She knows as much, if not more. She knows all the rules of hygiene. She wants to show all the rules of science, one by one ... so many rules applied, so many times demonstrated ... that, at a certain point, one must go to look for the other one, the *piemontesa*, if child and mother are to be saved, otherwise they could die, suffocated by all the rules and precepts. (30)

At the end, Mimma demonstrates that she is not really like the *piemontesa*, since she cannot remember all the rules well enough to successfully deliver a baby.

To avoid sure disaster, she is forced to send someone to fetch the *piemontesa* to save mother and child. With that comes her agonizing realization and acceptance of the *piemontesa*'s dominance, which shifts from being de jure to de facto. Davis Spurr writes that "colonization is a form of self-inscription onto the lives of a people who are conceived of as an extension of the landscape. For the colonizer ... it becomes a question of establishing authority through the demarcation of identity and difference" (7). In other words, colonization requires the colonized to perform the colonizers' identity, thus becoming their *modus vivendi*. At the same time, though,

the colonized must be constantly reminded of the difference and, thus, the distance that separates them from the colonizers. Accordingly, Bhabha asserts: “mimicry ... becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a “partial” presence” (*Location* 86). As Pirandello informs us, being a partial presence (to be like but not quite) undoubtedly becomes Mimma’s doom: “There are those who say that she took up drinking ... coming back home, she cries and cries inconsolably, which, of course, is the effect that wine has on people” (30). Her partial presence and existence drives her to utter alienation, loneliness, and, ultimately, to alcoholism, a condition that is associated with human degradation.

At the closing of the story, the two women remain starkly apart, even after all of Mimma’s attempts to become like her nemesis. From this point of view, the story goes full circle and ends where it started: the two women’s deep and un-dialectical difference that cannot come to a synthesis. Rather, they stay divided as if by a line. The outcome of their impossible synthesis results in the *piemontesa*’s triumph and Mimma’s utter annihilation. Both women are quite anti-Pirandellian characters, though, which make the story even more interesting. As Mary-Ann Frese-Witt writes: “Pirandello’s female characters often play one or more roles assigned to them by the absent, but controlling author and by the male characters in their lives. These roles can be defined broadly as those of mother/wife/daughter/woman” (58).

In contrast, Mimma and the *piemontesa* escape this description. They are neither mothers nor wives, though they deal with pregnancy and mothers. They are professional women uncontrolled by any man. Naturally, Pirandello controls them since they are his characters. So what are the roles Pirandello assigned to them? I would dare argue that ultimately they represent the two different nations: the Bourbon and the Italian. The representation of a nation through the body of a woman is a very common trope in colonial literature. As Anne McClintock writes:

“women are subsumed symbolically into the national body politic.... Women are typically constructed as the symbolic mothers of the nation.... The term “nation” derives from *natio*: to be born” (63). Mimma’s and the *piemontesa*’s representational power is, thus, twofold.

On the one hand, through their profession, they are directly involved with the *natio*, that is with the “birth” of the nation, through the delivery of its own citizens. On the other hand, their women-ness is “symbolically subsumed into the national body politic.” In her symbolic representation of the nation, Mimma goes from having an old, modestly veiled and magic body, which does not cast a shadow and makes everything around her look fake as if made out of paper and *crèche*-like, to acquiring a body of knowledge that will never be useful to her but will discipline her into the citizen of the new state, even at the cost of her disintegration. The *piemontesa*’s body, instead, goes from being flashy, transgressive, and, thus, repulsive to the locals to acquiring conniving and deceiving clothing to “conquer their hearts,” and to be able to enter into a business relationship with the village people to her own economic advantage. Through the “conquering of their hearts,” the new nation’s norms are imposed and the old ones are brushed away, together with the people who lived by those norms. Also, their age difference underlines their representative roles: Mimma’s old body represents the old system as much as the *piemontesa*’s young body represents the new and modern.

In their representative roles, Pirandello seems to reduce both women to masks on the stage of Italy’s post-unification years. Writing about Pirandello’s “political-philosophical torment,” Leone De Castris suggests that:

[it was] due to the fracture of the idealist dialectical paradigm for which Pirandello had a deep nostalgia. Due to his skepticism, he lives in a positivistic crisis which, far from satisfying him, forces him to look for absolute

“knowledge.”... He applies the idealist lens to reality ... however, history then, becomes for him an inconclusive photogrammetry with the past breaking away from the present, and *being* from *becoming*. In his art, the nineteenth-century’s grand systems’ conflicts and crisis ... become the failure and collapse of unsubstitutable values signifying a historic rupture that spontaneously takes on “existential” dimension. (10)

Pirandello’s nostalgia for the idealist dialectical paradigm partially stems from his disappointment with Italy’s unification that should have been the synthesis of the Bourbon and Savoy nations, instead of the South’s annexation to the North and its *piemontizzazione*.

Ultimately, Mimma’s failure represents the *Risorgimento*’s failure, hence, Pirandello’s nostalgic desire for an idealist, maybe even Hegelian, paradigm. Because of its teleological nature, an idealist paradigm would have been very comforting and satisfying for an intellectual like Pirandello, who had lost faith in history, as well as in any ideology. Pirandello, instead, seems painfully aware of the “accidentality” of history and the impossibility to return to a past that he sees (or wants to see) as more integral and genuine in its simplicity: “Mimma knows that she will never be able to throw out science. And this is the real and irreparable evil” (Pirandello 29).

Just like Verga, Pirandello does not believe that the *moderni perfezionamenti* (“modern improvements”) will better the life of the southern rural masses, because they were not intended for those regions. History demonstrated that he was almost right; they arrived, but late, and in a diluted way. As in the case of Cosimo, for Mimma the new kingdom ended up ruining the lives of those it had promised to improve. Mimma’s and Cosimo’s sorrows are echoed in the personal correspondence of many southern politicians and intellectuals with Antonio Ranieri, a

Neapolitan intellectual and *Deputato* (House Representative) in the Italian Parliament in Turin. These letters often reflect the Southerners' material and psychological discomforts due to a deeply changed political situation, and the obliteration of their traditional and multi-secular institutions. Giuseppe Lazzaro, a *Deputato* of the Historic Left,<sup>27</sup> writes to Ranieri: "the country can be considered land of conquest for the lords of the Piedmont.... As you remember, we did not want the annexation. We wanted One and indivisible Italy, and with this condition we accepted the King Victor Emmanuel II as our constitutional king" (Romano 91). Pirandello dramatizes precisely the bitter resentment, inscribed in Lazzaro's letter, toward a quasi-colonial regime<sup>28</sup> imposed on the South and its people. Just like Verga, Pirandello is interested in and committed to portray the "naked reality of the disinherited popular masses marked not only by exploitation, cruelty and misery, but also a potential for revolution" (Dombroski, *Pirandellian* 130).

I must admit that Dombroski's idea of "a potential for a revolution" is very seductive, yet I concur with Gian Franco Venè in asserting that Pirandello lacks the political conviction of the possibility of a mass revolution (8). It was probably this lack of political conviction that ultimately took his art to a more "existential dimension." Although Pirandello was politically conservative, his work had populist and anti-capitalist impulses that were perceived and praised also by two anti-fascist intellectuals Piero Gobetti and Gramsci. In the socialist newspaper *Avanti!*, Gramsci lauds *Liola*, one of Pirandello's first plays, as a model of classical popular art that has a freshness and vitality totally lacking in the twentieth-century bourgeois art (Donati 27).

## **Conclusion**

Through "*Donna Mimma*," Pirandello displays Italy's post-unification years' failings. The Savoy's monarchy implemented a quasi-colonial regime, the *piemontizzazione*, which did

not take into consideration Sicily's political, economic, and cultural diversity. As a consequence, local cultural practices had to change in accordance with the new laws, and Mimma could no longer deliver children without a degree. In her attempt to survive the *piemontesa*'s competition, *Mimma* is required to perform the colonizer's identity, forcing her to live in a mimicry condition. Living as a "partial presence," to be like the *piemontesa* but never quite like her, is her final demise.

Not only does Mimma fail to acquire the skills conferred by her degree, she also loses her old midwife skills that, in the past, allowed her to deliver children. With that comes unemployment and rejection from her own village people. Her failure is paralleled by the *piemontesa*'s triumph. By appropriating the village people's semantics, she is able to establish herself as "the norm," and the village people are happy to acquire the continent's language and civility through her. Their happiness underlines their perception that civility and the language of power are to be found outside of Sicily. The normalization of the new law and new cultural practices created the consent that the new regime needed to survive.

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<sup>1</sup> As translation for Verga's story's title, I will use my own translation, "What is the King?," which is a literal translation of the Italian title. D. H. Lawrence's translation, "So Much for the King," is misleading because it interprets too much, by eliminating the question altogether. Instead, I think the title's question is paramount in explicating the story.

<sup>2</sup> Italian Christmas dessert similar to nougat.

<sup>3</sup> Starting from the eighteenth-century, philosophers such as Montesquieu, Kant, Beccaria, and Rousseau, to cite a few, looked at the power to give pardon with hostility because its discretionary power would go against the modern concept of constitutionality based on equality, legality, and the division of powers. The French constitution of 1791 eliminated that power altogether. Constitutions that came after 1791 often limited that power in one way or another (Piazza 10).

<sup>4</sup> See Matt. 17-6; Mark 6-33; and 8-25; Luke 5-8.

<sup>5</sup> In reality, the Savoy kingdom never had a real constitution, not even after the unification. In 1848, King Charles Albert promulgated a statute, known as the Albertine Statute, freely based on the French *Chartes* of 1814. The *Chartes* was granted by Luis XVIII during the Restoration without being voted by a constitutional assembly and for that reason was known as "*octroyèe*" (Martucci 345). Although the Albertine Statute was *octroyèe* in nature, in 1851 Prime Minister Massimo D'Azeglio ratified the autonomy of the Courts from the executive (art. 69) in order to

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guarantee the courts' independence from the king's influence, as it happened during the period of the Restoration. As I will explain later, art. 69 greatly limited the king's power to pardon (Piazza 11).

<sup>6</sup> On the May 11, 1860, General Giuseppe Garibaldi and his red-shirt army of the thousand volunteers landed at Marsala, and "from the very beginning, the whole Sicily (was) with them" (Macry *Unità* 57). Sicilians joined Garibaldi's army because of their old rivalry toward Naples and because Garibaldi promised the peasants the land of the *demanio* ("Crown Land"). After fighting his way through the island, "miraculously" defeating the 30,000-troop-Bourbon army, Garibaldi was ready to cross the sea to go to Calabria on August 18 (Lupo, *L'unificazione* 53).

<sup>7</sup> The choral voice is a *modus narrandi* typical of *verismo* writers, such as Pirandello and Verga, whose intent was that of giving a more realistic account of the story they were narrating (Rössner 314).

<sup>8</sup> Taxes were raised in the South to pay off Italy's public debt due to the liberation wars (Mangione, Morreale 73).

<sup>9</sup> As Garibaldi was fighting through Sicily in an attempt to save his crown, Bourbon king Francis II reluctantly granted a constitution to appease the liberal intellectuals, who had been plotting and creating resistance against his absolute monarchy. His effort, though, was not well received by his subjects, who did not trust him, leaving him only one last card to play: an alliance with the Savoy monarchy (Petracone, "Cavour" 106). With this last hope, he sent a delegation, led by Giovanni Manna and Antonio Winspeare, to Turin to negotiate. First and foremost, the alliance was meant to be an agreement between "the two Italian crowns aiming at confirming and assuring the independence of the Peninsula against any foreign attack." Other objectives included: "a trade and custom agreement; the standardization of the two kingdoms' weights, measures and coins; a unified postal service, a unified railroad system, in other words, all that could help the fusion of the two countries' interests" (115). Cavour, as the Savoy's prime minister, was worried about this alliance. Being aware of the Piedmontese's hostility toward the Bourbon delegation, Manna communicated back to Naples: "in Turin, before we were only detested. Now even if that feeling has not waned, we are also despised because of all the shameful military defeats in Sicily. We are also despised for our fear of Garibaldi moving upward in our kingdom." Cavour thus rejected the Bourbon proposal of an alliance and decided to annex that kingdom, after defeating it militarily. On the October 21, 1860, the Bourbon kingdom was annexed to the Savoy kingdom through a plebiscite (122).

<sup>10</sup> Unlike modern referenda, the plebiscite (a political/legal legacy of the Napoleonic regime) was a consultation established by the government to obtain an explicit approval to measures, dictated from above, that would irreversibly modify the State's structure and territory. Citizens, who had the right to vote, were asked to give or deny their approval by choosing *sì* ("yes") or *no* ("no") on a pre-printed ballot paper to be publically inserted into an urn. Since the plebiscite's function was to transform a presumed consensus into an explicit one, the majority of *sì* votes were "assured" by the government. The government had many ways to assure that the result of the plebiscite would be in its favor: from basically covering the walls of public and private edifices with huge *sì* to explicitly threatening politically adversarial newspapers, and, in case the editors would not collaborate, wrecking their printing machines and material. Editors were threatened even with the closure of their newspapers, and journalists were arrested. Moreover, during the polling period, the National Guard soldiers were patrolling streets, squares, coffee shops, taverns, and any public forum. In the polling centers—which in the South were often in churches or in public squares—in order to cast his vote, each voter had to walk through two intimidating lines of the National Guard soldiers standing at rest with their bayonets showing. Furthermore, to be politically effective the plebiscite needed to have a vast majority of consensus (of at least 95 percent), since it needed to demonstrate that the totality of the population agreed with the government (in Sicily, *sì* votes reached 99 percent). The insignificant number of *no* was used as a guarantee of an acceptable degree of freedom in the popular consultation and, thus, the regularity and legitimacy of the plebiscite was assured, especially in the eyes of other European countries (Martucci 248-49).

<sup>11</sup> In Sicily, votes were sold for two *scudi* (Bourbon currency) on the black market, and, in general, a heightened state of confusion regarding the administration and the meaning of the vote was reported. One of the main reasons for the confusion was a decree, enacted just one week before the plebiscite on October 15 1860, stating that: "the dictator Garibaldi declares that the kingdom of the Two Sicilies is an integral part of Italy and he will deposit his dictatorship in the hands of the King." This decree was negatively commented on by Bourbon General Casella who presented his protest to European governments, since with that decree "no freedom was left to the people to show their opinion." His complaint was echoed by the English ambassador in Sicily, Elliot, who said that the Neapolitans "would have

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preferred to decide by themselves on their own future. Instead, with their own votes of the 21 (October 1860), they simply ratified the transference of the kingdom to King Victor Emanuel II, as already decreed by the dictator” (Martucci 255-56).

<sup>12</sup> It is important to explain that “masses” meant not only the “masses” of the industrial workers, in the strictest Marxist sense, but also the “rural masses.” Marxist intellectual Antonio Gramsci envisioned an alliance between factory workers in the North and the peasants in the South to bring to completion the *Risorgimento*’s revolution: “capitalism exploits the workers directly in the factories and the peasants in the State territory. Only the working class, by wrenching away the economic and political power from the capitalists and bankers, can solve the central problem of Italian, national life, the Southern Question” (*Disgregazione* 114). Due to Gramsci’s prominence in the Italian political discourse, “masses” came to signify both the “masses of workers” and the “masses of peasants,” in other words, the proletarians. It is also important to keep in mind that the first Marxist revolution took place in Russia, which had a totally pre-industrial economy. In that country, the peasants were, indeed, the proletarian masses. Both Palmiro Togliatti and Gramsci had very close relations with the Soviet Union. Gramsci’s wife, Julia Schucht, was actually from there.

<sup>13</sup> Verga had considerable success as a writer in the years 1870-1890, when he became one of the great masters of *verismo*, the Italian version of the artistic movement known as “realism.” His popularity, though, declined significantly at the beginning of the twentieth century, when leftist intellectuals, like Antonio Gramsci and Giuseppe Bottai, harshly criticized his writings’ ideology, defining him “neither as a socialist nor as a democrat only a *crispino*” (“*crispino*” means someone who agrees with the politics of the Sicilian Crispi. Although Francesco Crispi started his political career as a republic democrat, he then changed, becoming a monarchic, conservative imperialist. As prime minister in 1893, he gave orders to the army to suppress in blood a socialist-based political movement the *Fasci Siciliani*) (Madrigani 171). After World War II and when Palmiro Togliatti (secretary of the Italian Communist Party) was trying to create his own party’s political culture, Verga was “rediscovered” by Marxist theorists. These latter saw him as a possible representative and voice of the “Italian people” within the formation and creation of the Italian national-popular culture. Neorealist artists were particularly attracted to his art, and Luchino Visconti adapted one of Verga’s novels, *I Malavoglia*, (*The House by the Medlar Tree*) to the screen with the title *La terra trema* (*The Earth Shakes*). In the years to follow, no unanimous verdict was ever found to judge his art’s ideology (Madrigani 161-62).

<sup>14</sup> The term *galantuomo* (“gentleman”) was used to mark people belonging to the social class of landowners, merchants, and professionals. They were the representatives of the *classe notarile*, that is, of the class of the notables. My definition of social class goes along the lines of Marx’s description as one determined by the individual’s role, position, and relation to others within a specific mode of economic production.

<sup>15</sup> In nineteenth century Europe, populism became a powerful tool for writers interested in the production of a national literature, and who also wanted to explore the issues related to political and ideological hegemony. Due to the real necessity to organize a national culture within the political and social structures of the new nationality, some bourgeois intellectuals focused their ideological, political, and literary interests on the masses. Russia was most likely the country where populism found the most fertile soil and, thus, there the myth of the nation joined the myth of the peasants as depository of the grand Russian values of universal justice and spiritual, as well as material, socialism (Asor Rosa 21-22). At the end of the nineteenth century, Italian intellectuals were very deeply influenced by Russian literature and its humanitarian populism. However, due to Italian writers’ more aristocratic and conservative literary vocation, their populism became highly paternalistic and conservative (Asor Rosa 29-30).

<sup>16</sup> It is important to keep in mind that before the unification there were approximately 13 different Latin-derived, Italic languages spoken in the peninsula. After the unification, the Tuscan “version” of Italian was chosen due to the artistic and political importance of Dante’s *The Divine Comedy*, written in Tuscan, the *Lingua vulgaris* (“People’s language”)(Richardson 60).

<sup>17</sup> In the Italy of *Risorgimento*, German was also the language of the Austrian invaders.

<sup>18</sup> On the March 17, 1861, the kingdom of Italy came finally into existence, and the Savoy king became the king of Italy with the name of Victor Emmanuel II, establishing the Savoy dynasty as the national monarchy. In order to underline that the kingdom of Italy was indeed a product of the Savoy monarchy’s ambitions and war efforts, the



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king refused to change his name to Victor Emmanuel I, as it would have been logical to do; thus, the kingdom of Italy begins its life with “the new king being already ‘second’” (Martucci 5).

<sup>19</sup> By cultural practices, I mean a set of behaviors that are produced and shared within a certain social group, and that consequently reflect the ideology of that specific group. Cultural practices are not fixed, but rather they are fluid and always assimilating new elements from outside of the group. These practices constitute the “culture” of members of that specific social group, who appropriate them to make sense out of reality (Brantlinger 71).

<sup>20</sup> It is important also to keep in mind that Pirandello earned a Ph.D. in Philology at the University of Bonn in 1890. Residing in Germany allowed him to both come in contact with great German philosophers, such as Nietzsche and Lipps, and to immerse himself into German philosophy, especially Hegel’s and Schopenhauer’s (Costa 3).

<sup>21</sup> Turin was Italy’s Capital until 1864, when Florence became the capital. In 1871, Rome became Italy’s last and final capital.

<sup>22</sup> The Calabrian-style hat had a feather on top.

<sup>23</sup> In order to satisfy this point, a great number of institutions for higher education were set up, mainly in the North of Italy. Although the study of humanities was not disregarded, Cavour’s intent was to give a great impetus to the teaching of scientific and technical studies that would be the backbone of the nation’s economy (Laicata 90)

<sup>24</sup> Only twenty years after the unification, in 1881, Milan was able to host the prestigious industrial Expo, which brought over one million visitors to Milan (Lacaita 97). In 1862, Turin hosted the Museum of Industry; Venice, the *Scuola superior di commercio*, (“School of Economics”); Genova, the *Scuola navale* (“Naval Academy”); Padova, an Engineering School; and Milan, the *Scuola superiore di agricoltura* (“School of Agrarian Studies”). In the South, the University of Palermo hosted, for the first time, an Engineering School (the University of Naples already had one) and Caltanissetta, the *Scuola mineraria* (“School of Mining”) (Lacaita 93).

<sup>25</sup> Hall’s definition of “ultimate signifier” is that which gives meaning to and validates cultural practices (*The Floating Signifier*).

<sup>26</sup> Influenced by Lipps’s *Komik und Humor* in 1908, Pirandello wrote an essay, *On Humor*, which would be seminal for his poetics and aesthetics. In that essay, he separated the comic element from the humorist. The comic was based on the “awareness of the contrary” and laughter followed it almost instinctively; whereas humor was based on the “sentiment of the contrary,” which stemmed from the viewer’s reflections on the comic. To illustrate the difference, Pirandello gave the example of an old lady who tried to appear still young by wearing make-up and clothing that would hide her age. Her looks did not match the person. The viewer became aware of the contrary (between the person and her looks) and the result was comic. However, if the viewer found out that the old woman behaved that way to try to keep her younger husband, s/he felt empathy for that woman. Through that reflection, s/he arrived to the “sentiment of the contrary,” which was the realm of humor. So that humor is an empathetic reflection on the real motives of a comic behavior, which is a behavior that goes contrary to what is expected (Guarna 86).

<sup>27</sup> In Italian, nineteenth-century left is referred to as the “Historic Left” to distinguish it from the Marxist left of the twentieth century.

<sup>28</sup> Pirandello’s son, Stefano, in a letter to Gaspare Giudice (Pirandello’s biographer) wrote: “Pirandello knew that politics is driven by dominant, material interests. He knew that, in practice, Giolitti decreed the colonial subjugation of the *Mezzogiorno*, and for that he hated him” (Providenti 80).

## Chapter 2

### Resistance to Race Discourse

#### Introduction

The second chapter deals mainly with the creation of both the so-called “Southern Question” and a descriptive and prescriptive race discourse in Italy and Europe. As liberalism did not hold the promise of rescuing the South from its putative social and economic backwardness, the accusatory finger pointed to the inferiority of Southerners’ race, premised on different “stigmata of otherness” as described by Balibar (see Introduction), inscribed on their culture and their bodies. Lombroso and other positivist scientists linked criminal tendency and behavior to atavistic, physical traits apparently found in southern people. The fabrication of a southern inferior race was also a convenient scapegoat to justify the Historical Left’s victory in the 1876 election. Moreover, the South became the *locus* on which stereotypical prejudices could be dumped, thus freeing the national race from them.

I analyze two short stories in this chapter: “*Il capretto nero*” (“The Black Baby Goat”) by Luigi Pirandello in the first part and, in the second part, “*Libertà*” (“Freedom”) by Giovanni Verga, and Florestano Vancini’s film, *Bronte: cronaca di un massacro che i libri di storia non hanno mai raccontato* (*Bronte: Chronicle of a Massacre History Books Never Reported*) (1972). For a point of comparison in the second part, I also make use of Benedetto Radice’s essay *Nino Bixio a Bronte* (*Nino Bixio in Bronte*), which chronicles the historical events that took place in Bronte in August 1860. In “The Black Baby Goat,” Pirandello—by appropriating Bergson’s idea of time duration and by using irony, humor, and comical effects—is able to resist the articulation of the descriptive and prescriptive race discourse so prevalent in the Europe in his time. Like Bergson, Pirandello takes issue with, and ultimately debunks, Victorian Age rationalism, which

engendered Social Darwinism and the phony science of eugenics. Simultaneously, he accuse Italian Northerners of having an invested interest in portraying Sicilians as “Otherness.”

The second part of chapter two deals with the historical events that took place in Bronte in August 1860. This episode dates back to Garibaldi’s landing at Marsala and his promulgation of the June 2 edict that allocated the use of the common lands to the Sicilian peasants. The *galantuomini*’s firm resistance to Garibaldi’s edict sparked the peasantry to begin a bloodthirsty rebellion (Radice 44). As the peasants, encouraged by Garibaldi’s promise, rose in arms against the *galantuomini*, these latter refused to support Garibaldi’s revolution. Garibaldi then gave orders to quell the rebellion. In Bronte, the general, Nino Bixio, carried this mission to completion with the help of his firing squad. After shooting five men, Bixio had the rest of the peasants (thirty-seven in total) sent to a prison in Catania, where they awaited trial for three years. Every single peasant was then found guilty and sent back to prison for life (Radice 55). Because of gaps present in his narration of these historical events, Verga has been highly criticized by recent scholars. For instance, Verga never reveals the identity of the *garibaldino* general, Nino Bixio, who sentenced the five men to death by firing squad without a proper trial. Even the trial is totally absent from Verga’s version of the events.

In order to fill in Verga’s gaps, I bring Radice’s essay into my discussion. I then construct my analyses using Verga’s short story, Radice’s chronicle, and Vancini’s film to highlight the disastrous outcomes of Garibaldi’s broken promise to the peasants. Vancini’s film also points to the deep incomprehension between northern and southern *garibaldini*, even as they fought together to create the nation. Imbued with the rhetoric of a rampant race discourse that constructed Southerners as wild, uncivilized, and thus needing to be tamed, the northern *garibaldini* ended up amplifying that discourse, thus helping to create the foundation of the

cultural divide between the North and South (Petraccone “Nord” 512). This cultural divide has since been the site of a race discourse still active in Italy today, and at the same time, the *locus*, where the agrarian elite was able to manipulate and maneuver a weak central government for its own gains and to the detriment of the rural masses.

Supported by Michel Rössner’s postcolonial reading of *Verismo*, I underline Verga’s subaltern position within a cultural, intellectual, and economic structure, dominated by northern aesthetic taste and publishers, as well as by a prescriptive race discourse that forced him to shift between resisting and inhabiting the hegemonic national discourse. I further contend that Verga’s subaltern position is the main reason for the gaps in his narration.

### **England vs. Sicily in Pirandello’s “The Black Baby Goat”**

Pirandello’s short story was published in 1913 and, along with “Mimma,” is part of the collection *Novelle per un anno*. The story centers on an improbable friendship between the Sicilian Pirandello and Mr. Charles Trockley, the English vice-counsel in Agrigento, who is taking care of Miss Ethel, “daughter of Sir W. H. Holloway, extremely rich and powerful peer of the realm of England,” while she is vacationing in Sicily (41). During her visit, Miss Ethel decides to buy a little black baby goat that she leaves behind when she goes back home. After six months, at Miss Ethel’s request, Mr. Trockley sends her baby goat back to her, which is no longer a kid but a smelly beast. Sir W. H. Holloway takes offence to what Mr. Trockley did to his daughter and sends him an offensive letter. Mr. Trockley, then, turns to Pirandello for advice. As the story unfolds, Pirandello is able to cast sizable doubt on the Victorian Age’s faith in reason and science as the ultimate episteme that would guarantee unlimited progress and wealth for all.

This Age's limitations are instead brought to the fore in order to resist, using humor and irony, its ideology and its articulation of a very descriptive and prescriptive race discourse. Race has often been invoked to justify colonialism in the world, and in Italy, the racialization of the Southerners was instrumental to validating what Pirandello denounced as *Mezzogiorno's* colonization (Providenti 80). Pirandello's story begins with the introduction of Mr. Charles Trockley:

Without any doubt, Mr. Charles Trockley is right. Actually, I am willing to admit that Mr. Charles Trockley can never be wrong because he and reason are one and the same. Each move, each glance, each word of Mr. Charles Trockley is so rigidly precise, so thought through and certain that everybody must recognize Mr. Charles Trockley cannot, in any way possible or for any possible reason, be wrong. (40)

Indeed, Mr. Charles Trockley is the most emblematic representative of Victorian Age rationalism. He is rational to the point of being reason itself; thus, he can never be wrong. However, it is impossible not to detect a subtle (and maybe not so subtle) sardonic irony in Pirandello's words. The irony is first conveyed through the rhetorical device of repetition.

Pirandello repeats "Mr. Charles Trockley" four times, "each" three times, "possible" twice, and "wrong" twice. His description is structured in a repetitive and climatic fashion with true Pindaric tones. Pirandello constructs the absoluteness of Mr. Charles Trockley's rightfulness through the circumlocutions: "without any doubt," "in any way possible," and "for any possible reason." In rhetoric, repetition is used to dramatize, but in the above paragraph, repetition is so overdone that it cannot be taken seriously and becomes ironic. The irony is also arguably strengthened by the reader's own empirical, intellectual awareness that erring is not only part of

life but also part of any scientific knowledge acquired through the experimental method, which is itself based on trial and error.

In his essay *On Humor*, the philologist Pirandello painstakingly differentiates irony from humor through a meticulous literary analysis of two chivalric works: Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* and Cervantes's *Don Quijote*. In his conclusion, he claims that Cervantes uses humor because his title character truly believes in the chivalric world he created for himself. Thus, his reader will laugh at his misfortunes while simultaneously identifying with him and being moved by his tragic-comic existence. For Pirandello, humor resides precisely in the ability to elicit sympathy from the readers (75-76). Instead, Ariosto makes great use of irony because he detaches himself from the chivalric world he describes by underlining its limits and limitations:

As a rhetorical figure, irony involves a deception that is absolutely contrary to the nature of genuine humor. It is true that this rhetorical device implies a contradiction, but only an apparent one between *what is said and what is meant*... The Self, the only true reality, Hegel explained, can laugh at the vain appearance of the universe; since it creates this appearance, it can also abolish it. The Self can choose not to take its own creation seriously, hence the irony.... Eventually romantic irony could even be derived from the rhetorical irony, though not without some strain: in the latter case, one should not take what is said seriously, while in the former case, one can choose not to take seriously what is done. (5-7, italics mine)

For Pirandello, irony is a deceptive, rhetorical tool through which a writer's words contradict the reality they create. Pirandello then further differentiates between rhetorical and romantic irony.

In the first, the reader is asked not to take the written words seriously since they do not correspond to reality. In the second, the writer chooses not to believe in his own creation, thus abolishing it. I contend that Pirandello's ironic description of Mr. Trockley's rationalism falls into the second category. His irony does not just deconstruct the idea that someone may always be right; rather, it eradicates the idea that rationalism must have a privileged epistemological position in the realm of knowledge. It follows that faith in reason should be questioned, at least according to Pirandello.

By giving away revealing biographic data, Pirandello introduces himself as the story's narrator. Since it is very atypical for Pirandello to insert himself in his own creation, we must assume that he is invested in this story in a particular (political) way, which becomes his *j'accuse* of race discourse and southern colonization. His veiled political criticism makes it unavoidable that he be one of the story's protagonists, especially since it is through his final laugh that he declares his victory. Pirandello introduces himself alongside Mr. Trockley through a series of binary oppositions:

He and I were born in the same year, the same month, and almost on the same day. He was born in England; I was born in Sicily. Today, the 15<sup>th</sup> of June, he turns forty-eight, and I will turn forty-eight on the 28th. Now how old will we be next year on our birthdays? Mr. Trockley has absolutely no doubt. We both will be one year older, which is forty-nine. But is it possible to say that Mr. Trockley is wrong? Time does not go by in the same way for everyone. In one day, or even one hour, my body could get damaged more than his would in ten years, thanks to his rigorous discipline. Due to my life's deplorable disorder, in one year I could wear out my body more than he would in his whole life-time. My body, weaker

and less fit than his, has aged in forty-eight years in a way that his will not age in sixty years. (40)

Many are the differences that the Sicilian Pirandello draws between himself and the Englishman Mr. Trockley: their birthplaces, their lifestyles, and above all, their understanding and conceptualization of time.

Whereas Mr. Trockley has a mechanistic concept of time, meaning that time passes at the same rate for everyone, the narrator believes that the velocity of time is individual: “time does not pass in the same way for everyone.” Their different concepts of time allow Pirandello to contrast Mr. Trockley’s Englishness with his own “Sicilianness.” On the one hand, we have the English time of science, technology, industry, and commerce measured by the formula  $T = S/V$ . This is also the time that, on July 1, 1913 (the year the story was published), was synchronized by sending the first world time signal from the Eiffel Tower in Paris. Time’s synchronization was very important for trade, which was becoming more globalized, thus requiring precise schedules for the delivery of raw materials and goods from one country to another (Benet 17).

It is precisely this mechanistic concept of merchant time that turned England into an efficient, advanced, and civilized superpower. On the other hand, Sicilian time is measured according to the narrator’s individual life, which he himself describes as being in a state of “deplorable disorder,” having to deal “with a weaker and less fit body,” and not being used to the “rigorous discipline” exemplified by his English counterpart (Pirandello 40). In the above passage, two elements are particularly pertinent to my discussion: Henri Bergson’s philosophical conceptualization of the duration of time and Pirandello’s playfully ironic acceptance and perpetuation of Sicilians’ stereotypical representations.



Bergson's philosophy of the duration of time is an attempt to fight back against science and its mechanistic and deterministic interpretation of human behavior. According to Bergson, science can measure, study, and make predictions about the external world that is governed by logical and natural laws; however, "if we extend scientific modes of thinking to ourselves, we become like things. If we try to measure and count our feelings to explain and predict our motives and actions, we will be transformed into automatons – without freedom, without beauty, without passion, and without dreams. We will become mere phantoms of ourselves" (qtd. in Guerlac 42).

What is at stake for Bergson is the freedom of the individual; he does not associate this freedom with reason and cognition but rather with the intuition of duration, which is in fact closer to dreaming than to knowing (Guerlac 43). Bergson contrasts "the English school [that] tries, in fact, to reduce relations of extensity to more or less complex relations of the succession of time ..." (*Time* 101) with his idea of the duration of time. He states:

We can thus conceive of succession without distinction and think of it as a mutual penetration, an inter-connection and organization of elements, each one of which represents the whole and cannot be distinguished or isolated.... Note that the mental image thus shaped implies the perception, no longer successive, but simultaneous, of a *before* and *after*. (*Time* 101)

Bergson asserts that mechanistic time is really the equivalent of space, and he intends to separate time from space by eliminating the idea that we live our experiences in a linear form (*Time* 99). If time is severed from space, then velocity is no longer an objective value determined by its relationship to time and space. Consequently, there is no way to know how quickly or slowly Mr.

Trockley's and Pirandello's existences will pass by, hence Pirandello's unwillingness to state that the following year both he and Mr. Trockley would be one year older.

Going back to Bergson's criticism of the "English school," I want to underline that the real issue for him was Herbert Spencer's social Darwinism, which is based on the idea that evolution is a succession of stages. In Spencer's *Synthetic Philosophy*, evolutionary adaptation "presupposes the associationist<sup>1</sup> premise of the correspondence of mental features to physical ones," especially the measurements of the skull. This intersection is thereafter extended from the individual to the race: "such results of repeated occurrences accumulate in the *succession* of individuals; the effects of associations are supposed to be transmitted as modifications of the nervous system" (qtd. in Guerlac 27, italics mine). Eventually, social Darwinist scientists created taxonomies dividing and classifying inferior and superior races, even developing the theory that inferior races might still be in earlier stages of evolution, representing living examples of the ancestors of civilized and superior races (Eldridge 163). Spencer's social Darwinism was soon appropriated by John Stuart Mill, who recommended that the not-yet-civilized races "be governed by the civilized until the former are sufficiently developed to assume self-direction," thus justifying English imperialism (qtd. in Goldberg 19). Bergson seems to suggest that both the colonized and the colonizers are sub-products of English, mechanistic time, while his conceptualization of time as duration would dissolve the phony scientific justification for colonization's existence.

The second important element to my discussion logically derives from the first: the stereotypical representations of Italians as inferior to northern Europeans. These representations already began to take shape in the middle of the seventeenth century, as Italy's political and economic prestige abated. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, European views of

Italy underscored its increasing decadence, corruption, and weakness, as well as its political and moral passivity (Moe 15). As Nelson Moe reports: “the tendency to denigrate contemporary Italy and Italians had become commonplace in the culture of Western Europe by the mid-1700s and would continue well into the next century” (15). Foreigners would tend to contrast Italy’s past glories, natural beauty, and Mediterranean climate with its more recent human failings.

Montesquieu’s *Spirit of the Laws* (1748) arguably dealt the most powerful and damaging blow to the image of Italy and Italians.

In his treatise, Montesquieu asserts that climate influences a population’s character so that “in northern climates, you shall find peoples who have few vices [and] a sufficient number of virtues....” (qtd. in Moe 24). Based on this reasoning, it is no wonder that Mr. Trockley’s body is not suffering from any of the narrator’s “deplorable disorder[s].” To exemplify how climate affects the national character, Montesquieu focuses precisely on the differences between England and Italy:

In cold countries, one will have little sensitivity to pleasure; one will have more of it in temperate countries; in hot countries, sensitivity will be extreme.... I have seen operas in England and in Italy: they are the same plays with the same actors, but the music produces such different effects in the people of the two nations that it seems inconceivable—the one so calm and the other so transported. (qtd. in Moe 25)

English calmness is contrasted to the Italian tendency to be “transported” by their high “sensitivity” to pleasure that is passion, which is the opposite of reason.

England and Italy became emblematic representatives of two different worlds: the rational and modern world of England and the passion-driven and backward world of Italy.

Montesquieu's dichotomies between northern and southern Europeans' national characters (and between the civilizations of England and Italy) informed many nineteenth century European writings. Soon, Italians' perceived moral, physical, and intellectual degradation vis-à-vis English fortitude became a well exploited *topos* in European literature. So, for instance, Madam Staël contrasted Italians' "indolence" to the English "love of order and public prosperity,"<sup>2</sup> for Anne Jameson, the Italians were "dirty, demoralized, degraded, and unprincipled" because they lacked the English "modern achievements"<sup>3</sup> (Moe 18-19).

During the *Risorgimento*, Italians fought to create an independent and free Italian state that could enjoy Europe's acceptance and recognition, so those Italian stereotypes somehow had to be deflected. They were soon redirected toward the Southerners, who became Italy's "Otherness" (Moe 85). Many of the narratives of that time testify to a sense of awe concerning the South's history and a sense of disgust regarding its present state, especially when compared to other, more prosperous Italian regions. So, for instance, the Tuscan historian Francesco Forti describes Sicily as a land "celebrated since ancient times ... so favored by nature [that it] should be one of the most prosperous kingdoms of Europe, yet it currently finds itself in conditions I would describe as almost dismal." It is his harsh judgment of Sicily and the South that makes him state: "Italy ends at Gargliano"<sup>4</sup> (Moe 88-89).<sup>5</sup>

As John Dickie writes: "the South was one of nineteenth-century patriotic culture's most important fund of images of alterity. The barbarous, the primitive, the violent, the irrational, the feminine, the African: these and other values ... were repeatedly located in the Mezzogiorno as foils to definitions of Italy" (1). The Italian national identity came to be constructed in opposition to those characteristics, which came to be perceived as naturally southern. Among the characteristics perceived as naturally southern, Pirandello points to his "deplorable disorder" that

he contrasts with Mr. Trockley's "rigorous discipline." Mr. Trockley's life is marked by rigor and discipline, which are the indispensable foremothers of order.

Zygmunt Bauman defines modernity "as a time when order—of the world, of the human habitat, of the human self, and of the connections between all three—is reflected upon." He reports how "Hobbes understood that a world in flux was natural and that order must be created to restrain what was natural.... Order was coming to be understood as ... manifestly political and social... Order became to be a matter of power, a matter of will, force, and calculation" (5). The modern twin of order is chaos, or as Pirandello puts it, "deplorable disorder," and it is against this negativity ("the denial of what order strives for") that order constitutes itself (Bauman 7). "Rigorous discipline" and "deplorable disorder" are thus part of modernity's dichotomies.

As I wrote before, one of modernity's main aims was to classify and, consequently, segregate, since classification "consists of the acts of inclusion and exclusion. Each act of naming splits the world into two: entities that answer to the name all the rest that do not" (Bauman 2). "Rigorous discipline" answers to the name "modern," while "deplorable disorder" does not. Here it is important to underline the difference between my position on Pirandello's ironic description of his own "deplorable disorder" and Pirandello's idea of chaos, as presented by Robert Dobronski's article "Re-Writing Sicily: Postmodern Perspective" (261). In my discussion, I equate Pirandello's idea of "deplorable disorder" to chaos in order to contrast it to modernity's idea of order as a "matter of power, will, force, and calculation," to use Bauman's words. I contend that for Pirandello, the idea of order very often turned out to be oppressively discriminatory for those who, like the Sicilians, were imagined to live outside of its boundaries. In contrast, Dombrowski reports that Pirandello believed that modernity engendered what he personally conceived as chaos, defined "not only as physical disorder but also a negative,

existential way of living in, or at the edge of, the abyss” (261). Whereas according to Dombroski, Pirandello’s idea of chaos is the anguish-filled awareness of the failures and the shattering of the old system, as well as the total absence of a new one. In my discussion, “deplorable disorder” is, conversely, used as an ironic “reappropriation” technique, which I explain in detail in the next paragraph.

Italian Southerners’ inability to embrace rigorous discipline, due to their “weaker and less fit bod[ies],” had become a *topos* for many *meridionalisti* as well.<sup>6</sup> It is in opposition to this representation that Pirandello appropriates this stereotype through irony. To better explain Pirandello’s appropriation of southern weakness and southern race representations, I will bring Michael Harris’s viewpoint into my discussion. Harris argues that there are three different strategies to resist being conceptualized as “Otherness”:

*Inversion* - turning a sign or trope inside out or upside down to disrupt its meaning and impact. Related to this is *contextualization*: the Duchampian notion of putting a urinal in a gallery to transform it into a sculpture. Third, there is the idea of *reappropriation*: taking a weapon used against you, making it your own, and thereby controlling it and preventing it from doing further harm. (192)

Reappropriation is often predicated on irony, Pirandello’s cherished weapon in this story. One of the ways to control “the weapon used against you” is to look ironically at the weapon and transform it into something that can be ridiculed. This is exactly what Pirandello is doing. By debunking the Victorian Age’s faith in reason, he deconstructs the idea of modernity being based on rigor, discipline, and order. This ideological move allows him to reappropriate the stereotypical representations of Southerners as a weak race and ridicule these portrayals.

The story continues, focusing even more on the English Mr. Trockley and his relationship to Sicily:

Mr. Charles Trockley has been vice-consul in Girgenti for twenty-two years. For twenty-two years, he has taken a brisk walk each day at dawn from the city on the hill to the ruins of the majestic and sublime Akragas temples.... Far below flows the Akragas River that Pindar glorified as being full of flocks. Even today, some goats climb up the stony riverbed.... The goat keeper, dozing off like an Arab on the temple's worn-out steps, plays some sad tunes with his flageolet made of cane. Mr. Charles Trockley has always considered the goats' intrusion into the temples a horrible profanation. Accordingly, he has formally reported it many times to the temple guardians, but to no avail. The guardians have always smiled at him indulgently, shrugging their shoulders. With great indignation, Mr. Charles Trockley has complained about these smiles and shrugs, even to me when I have accompanied him on his walks. When he finds compatriots at that archeological site, he draws their attention with unabated indignation to the profanation of those goats sleeping in the temples. (41-42)

Mr. Trockley's healthy, active, and modern life contrasts with Sicily's ancient ruins and its glorious past, as well as with its poetic primitiveness, characterized by the presence of the goats and the goat keeper playing his flageolet. I will go back to clarify the purpose of the presence of the Arab-like shepherd among the ruins later in my discussion.

Here, I want to focus on the many binary oppositions between Mr. Trockley and Sicily: activity/idleness, modern/ancient, and human/no-human. No civilized country would have goats roaming among national archeological treasures because modern civilization means order.

Above all, in no civilized country would a guardian, a civil servant, have refused to act upon a formal complaint. Not only do the guardians show total indulgence concerning the goats roaming in the temples, they even “shrug their shoulders,” which in Italy signifies indifference toward the problem at hand. Mr. Trockley’s high degree of irritation (marked by the words “intrusion,” “horrible profanation,” and “indignation”) makes his opinion of Sicily’s lack of civilization quite clear.

To fully understand Pirandello’s ironic use of all the trappings of the nineteenth century’s stereotypical constructions of Sicily, I need to introduce the concept of the “picturesque.” English writer Anna Jameson was one of the first to use the adjective “picturesque” to describe Italy’s rich past and lack of modern civilization:

Civilization, cleanliness, and comfort are excellent things, but they are sworn enemies of the picturesque: they have banished it gradually from our villages ... but in Italy the picturesque is everywhere in every form; it meets us at every turn. In village and country, all times and seasons, the commonest object of everyday life here becomes picturesque. (qtd. in Moe 19)

Between the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, as Moe argues, northern Europeans’ views of Italy alternated between open denunciations of its backwardness and exaltations of its “picturesqueness.” In the former case, Italy was compared to northern countries and found to be inferior. In the latter case, Italy’s decadence and backwardness “offered the bourgeoisie 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” (Moe 17). In other words, Italy’s “Otherness” could be aesthetically dominated and possessed by the “tourist gaze,” thus underlining its subjugated and subservient position vis-à-vis Europe.



Mr. Trockley is the first to encounter the picturesque on his daily walks to the Akragas Temples “already glorified by Pindar,” where he cannot help but be disgusted by their present decadence marked by the “intrusion” of the “profaning goats.” Then, Mr. Trockley’s compatriots and Miss Ethel Holloway also have a chance to interact with it, but their reactions differ greatly from Mr. Trockley’s. Miss Ethel, “daughter of Sir W. H. Holloway, extremely rich and powerful peer of the realm of England,” is seemingly in Sicily under the care of Mr. Trockley, who is functioning as her tour guide. It is in this function that we find him and Miss Ethel visiting the temples:

Truly not all English visitors share his indignation. Many visitors relish the goats’ sleep among the ruins and find certain poetry in the slumber of those goats in the temples, left alone in the middle of forgotten fields.... No one was happier or more awe-struck by the goats than the young and vibrant Miss Ethel last April. She came to Sicily and to Girgenti to visit the marvelous remnants of the ancient Doric city. Seduced by the beauty of the countryside, with wild almond trees in full bloom, and restored by the African sea’s breeze, she decided to remain longer than her original plan of spending a single day at the Hôtel des Temples.... While Mr. Trockley was giving her important archeological information ... she turned her back on him and started running after a little black baby goat. (41-42)

While for Mr. Trockley, Sicily’s picturesqueness was limited to its artistic and archeological beauty, for many English tourists, and definitely for Miss Ethel, the picturesque comprised both the archeological remnants and the primitiveness of the countryside. Mr. Trockley’s compatriots found “certain poetry in the slumber of those goats in the temple ... in the middle of forgotten fields.” The countryside and country living are brought to the fore by the presence of the goats in

the temples, and the goat keeper “dozing like an Arab on the worn-out steps of the temple, and playing ... his flageolet made of cane.”

His “Arabic” sleepiness in the ancient ruins and his playing an instrument made of cane places him completely in the past, creating a strong contrast with the English Miss Ethel’s youthful and vibrant being, which situates her in the modern present. Moreover, the image of the sleeping goat-keeper resonates with Johann Wolfgang Goethe’s definition of Italy as a “land of the past ... where everything sleeps” (Moe 16). Italy’s sleepiness and lack of motion are palpable elements of its backwardness, since motion is one of the major characteristics of modernity, as suggested by the invention of the steamboat, the train, and the Lumiere brothers’ creation of the “moving image.”

Italy’s construction as a “sleeping” country was soon deflected onto the South; it became the land of “sloth and macaroni,” as reported by the statesman Luigi Carlo Farini, one of Cavour’s close friends and collaborators (qtd. in Moe 175). Consequently, the idleness of the shepherd and the apathy and indifference of the temple guardians have a representative function since, as Vito Teti informs us: “with national unification and positivist anthropology, idleness, apathy, and indifference become the typical characteristics of the Southerners” (*La razza* 97). Furthermore, the shepherd is reported to be “like an Arab,” and a few lines above, we read about “the almond trees in full bloom, and restored by the African sea’s breeze.” These images of Africa and the Orient create a backdrop for the representation of a Sicily that positivist anthropologists were intent on creating. Pirandello continues to ironically construct Sicily as the site of “Otherness,” evoking many stereotypical descriptions of Sicilians as Bedouins “with skullcaps on their heads and with muskets across their saddles shouting, ‘*Viva Cecilia! Viva la Taglia!*’” (Wong 21).<sup>7</sup> Arguably, Africa is evoked also by the black color of the baby goat Miss

Ethel runs after wanting to “possess” it, and she “purchases” it in the end. Finally, Miss Ethel’s travels conjure images of the Orient too: after her sojourn in Sicily, she will go to “Greece, from there to Egypt, and from there to India” (43). Miss Ethel’s itinerary seems to have the intention of acquainting her with Africa and the Orient, and Sicily seems to be the natural first step of her trip.

Miss Ethel keeps running after the little kid, and she finally decides to buy it, to Mr. Trockley’s surprise and disgust: “That day I was with Mr. Trockley. If I rejoiced seeing that little, happy Miss Ethel running after the baby goat and wanting to buy it, I was very aware of how hard that was for Mr. Trockley. – You want to buy the baby goat? – Yes, yes buy it. Buy it right away” (42). Being reason itself, Mr. Trockley tries hard to make her see reason, but to no avail. This demonstrates that she does not even have even “a smidgen of that solid reason that, with serious gravity, governs each act, step, and word of Mr. Charles Trockley” (43). However, before leaving Girgenti to continue on her trip south and eastward, she entrusts the baby goat to the manager of the *Hotel des Temples*. After eleven months of travelling, she finally arrives back in London safe and sound and, missing her little black baby goat, writes to Mr. Trockley to have it sent to London.

After many adventures, Mr. Trockley finally finds The Black Baby Goat, which has become a “horrible, big, smelly, and horned beast with a reddish fleece encrusted with excrement and mud.” Nonetheless, Mr. Trockley sends the beast to Miss Ethel “feeling certain to have scrupulously fulfilled his duty, not so much to the unreasonable Miss Ethel but to her father” (45). Sir W. H. Holloway, though, does not seem to have appreciated Mr. Trockley’s efforts and sends him a letter “full of heavy insults for the affront he dared commit to his daughter by sending her that dirty and horrible beast” (45). Hurt by Sir Holloway’s harsh words, Mr.

Trockley goes to Pirandello for comfort and advice: “what should I have done, in your opinion?”

(46) Pirandello does not hesitate to give him a piece of his mind:

I would not want to seem as unreasonable to you as the young lady from your far away country. Yet, if I had been you, Mr. Trockley, do you know what would I have done? I would have told Miss Ethel Holloway that her little, cute baby goat had died out of pure desire for her kisses and hugs. I would have then bought another little, shiny black baby goat similar to the one she had bought last April and sent it to her. I would have been certain that Miss Ethel Holloway thought that her cute kid had remained the same in those eleven months. (46)

While giving his advice, Pirandello fakes a certain degree of caution and fear of being considered as unreasonable as Miss Ethel in the eyes of his esteemed friend.

His *captatio benevolentiae*'s deceptive intent is to demonstrate that Mr. Trockley's behavior was actually as unreasonable as Miss Ethel's. In Pirandello's opinion, Mr. Trockley should have switched from his English, mechanistic concept of time to Bergson's idea of time as duration, where time is severed from space and, thus, from velocity. By doing that, he would have understood that for the “unreasonable” Miss Ethel her little, black baby goat would not have aged. Hence the necessary substitution of the animal to give her the same sensation she had in Sicily. According to Bergson, there are two different ways by which the past can survive the present, which is what memory is for. One is the motor memory, or memory of the body, that is automatic (Guerlac 126). The second kind of memory is what Bergson calls the memory of imagination, “which is immediately perfect; time can add nothing without denaturing it; it will conserve its place and its date for memory” (qtd. in Guerlac 125). This memory can see someone's past experiences in all their concreteness, including “their contour, their color, and

their place in time.” It operates spontaneously and is imprinted in one’s memory right away (Guerlac 127).

Sir Holloway’s and Mr. Trockley’s misunderstanding originated in the different ways Mr. Trockley and Miss Ethel live their past experiences. Miss Ethel’s recollection of the past is based on the memory of imagination; in contrast, Mr. Trockley is totally and hopelessly anchored to the automatic conception of time and memory. Here I think it is important to bring to light the parallel between Mr. Trockley’s concept of personal memory as a succession of past events and his country’s conceptualization of historical memory as a succession of stages or ages of civilizations culminating with the Victorian Age, its imperialism, and its race discourse. As Bergson seems to alert us, the concept of automatic memory reinforced and fed into England’s notion of historical memory.

Being anchored to memory as a distinct succession of time, Mr. Trockley couldn’t see past the fact that eleven months had passed, while Miss Ethel did not believe that her little baby goat would have grown and changed. The story’s subtle humor stems precisely from Mr. Trockley’s inability to understand that reason and rationality cannot be the only possible values of human experiences. Writing about the impossibility of assigning objective value to our experiences in the world, Pirandello states:

All phenomena either are illusory, or their reasons are inexplicable and escape us. Our knowledge of the world and of ourselves totally lacks the objective value that we usually presume to attribute to it. This objective value of reality is a continuous illusory fabrication. Shall we then witness the struggle between illusion, which also insinuates itself everywhere and builds things up in its own

way, and humoristic reflection, which disassembles those constructions one by one? (*Humor* 132)

Miss Ethel's memory of her little, un-aging black baby goat is as much an illusion as Mr. Trockley's absolute rationalism. It is then up to the reader to reflect, in a humoristic way, on these illusory fabrications and "disassemble them one by one." Since Miss Ethel is just a child, the irrationality of her behavior is justified; meanwhile, Mr. Trockley's inability to comprehend Miss Ethel's unreasonable behavior becomes the butt of the reader's humoristic reflection.

Mr. Holloway's insulting letter is the apex of the climatic deconstruction of Mr. Trockley's *persona* and the highest point of his debacle. The letter works as poetic justice; finally the overly self-assured Mr. Trockley is defeated. His pure rationality at long last shows some fundamental cracks. Dejected, he looks to the Sicilian Pirandello for comfort and advice. Here Pirandello switches from irony to humor, or "humoristic reflection." For Pirandello, humor ultimately deals with compassion: "The humorist writer will disassemble the construction but not solely to laugh at it, and instead of feeling disdain, he will rather, in his laughter, feel compassion" (*Humor* 132). It is with deep compassion for his friend's distress that Pirandello explains his mistake and the "irrationality" of his reasoning. However, with the very last sentence of the story, Pirandello's irony reemerges, abolishing what he created with his own words: "This event shows that Miss Ethel Holloway is the most unreasonable creature in this world, and that reason is, as always, on your side." With this sentence, he wants to warn his reader that even if reason is on Mr. Trockley's side, that does not necessarily make him right. Acting with reason is not equivalent to being right. This last sentence transcends Mr. Trockley's mistake and acquires historical significance. The Victorian Age's rationalism was no guarantee that the "right thing" was always done, especially when it came to race discourse.

In Italy, a cultural and intellectual resistance to race discourse existed from the very beginning of the unification, and Napoleone Colajanni,<sup>8</sup> Gaetano Salvemini,<sup>9</sup> and Ettore Ciccotti<sup>10</sup> were its most illustrious and belligerent representatives. It is important to also mention the work of a group of intellectuals from Catanzaro, Calabria, who published the journal *Il Pensiero Contemporaneo (Contemporary Thought)*, starting in 1899. The journal, whose editor was Antonio Renda, became a forum for positivist and anti-positivist writings on race and, more generally, the “Southern Question.” Their intellectual resistance was inscribed in scholarly essays, mostly aimed at deconstructing Niceforo’s and Lombroso’s allegations of Southerners’ inferiority.

It is with Luigi Capuana that the resistance to race discourse entered the fictional world of literature in 1897. Capuana’s story “*Il primo Maggio del dottor Piccottini*” (“Dr. Piccottini’s May 1st”) dialogues with Pirandello’s story inasmuch as they both deconstruct the Victorian Age’s faith in reason and science, with a great dose of humor. In the story, Dr. Piccottini is very concerned about the future of the human race, which is presumably destined to unavoidable regression, unless something drastic is done right away. In an attempt to save humanity, he forges a doctrine and praxis of human eugenics, *Love Conscriptio*n. His insane project provides for scientifically controlled human reproduction that would be denied to men not possessing the necessary characteristics to improve the species. Dr. Piccottini has a beautiful daughter destined to be his first test subject. She is to marry a man simply because he is deemed to possess those physical characteristics considered valuable to saving the human race. The arranged marriage was set to take place on May 1, 1866. Yet on that day, the young and beautiful daughter runs away with a man of her choosing.

Naturally the date May 1, 1866 is highly significant because it was on this day that the government implemented the *corso forzoso*, (enforced course).<sup>11</sup> Capuana is sarcastically comparing Dr. Piccottini's eugenics-based plan, *Love Conscription*, to the Minister of the Treasury's *corso forzoso*, since both systems tend to regulate a type of conversion (Allen 89). In the case of *corso forzoso*, the conversion was from currency to gold, and in the case of love conscription, from love to progenies. Moreover, the title does not mention the year: "Dr. Piccottini's May 1st." Historically, May 1<sup>st</sup> is an important day. After the riots of May 1, 1867 when thousands of factory workers took to the streets of Chicago asking for better working conditions, it has become a day of acknowledgment and celebration of workers and their power (Jentz "Eight Hour Movement"). The story's title underscores the failure of eugenics, since one of its aims was the control of the increasingly visible and powerful masses through genetics.

The absurdity of their ideology is what makes Dr. Piccottini and Mr. Trockley comic characters, mostly due to the ignorance of their own intellectual and cultural limits. While explaining the mechanisms of the comic element of people and their laughter, Bergson points to the comic character's ignorance as one of its sources: "To realize this more fully, it need only be noted that a comic character is generally comic in proportion to his ignorance of himself" (*Laughter* 16). In both stories, the comic element stems from the characters' inability to make sense of a world that cannot be ordered and categorized according to their own standards. Consequently, the world where the comic character lives and acts collides with that of his readers. This collision creates in the reader what Pirandello defines as a "perception of the contrary," which has a comic, not humorous, effect. As I wrote earlier, humor elicits compassion for Pirandello, while comic effects elicit disdain (Guarna 86). Consequently, Pirandello wants his readers to have disdain for his character, Mr. Trockley. The reader's laughter would be caused by



what Thomas Hobbes described as “a sudden access of self-esteem,” as the reader perceives his superiority in comparison to the characters. Hobbes defined this kind of laughter as “laughter of self-glory,” which is also Pirandello’s laughter in his final comparison of himself to Mr. Trockley (Monro 84).

What is the meaning of Pirandello’s “laughter of self-glory,” though? By the time Pirandello wrote this short story in 1913, a new revolution had taken hold of the scientific world, overthrowing previous assumptions and deeply changing European culture and society. Planck’s quantum concept of the discontinuity of energy (1899) denied Newton’s continuity in all of nature’s causal relationships. Planck’s theory was further expanded by Albert Einstein’s theory of relativity (1905), refuting the idea that space and time are universal constants remaining the same everywhere for everyone (Heyck 207). In the 1880s, nationalism became the political answer to the failure of the liberal policies that caused the depression of the 1870s. To come out of this economic depression, European countries adopted stiff protectionist policies to shelter domestic industry and agriculture. Protectionism resulted in competition among nations and in a new brand of national imperialism, through which European countries sought to establish new markets (Heyck 217). From 1885, European imperialism, fueled by nationalism and new economic demands, kept growing and creating tensions and divisions within Europe that eventually lead to the First World War (Heyck 230). Pirandello’s unrelenting, ironic, and comic deconstruction of Mr. Trockley’s and the Victorian Age’s rationalism and faith in progress is premised on their visible failures.

Another question still remains unanswered: Why does Pirandello bring the Englishman Mr. Trockley into his story? After all, Capuana was able to criticize the Victorian Age’s eugenics without the need of a confrontation with the English. I would argue that Pirandello, just like

Bergson, ultimately takes issue with the “English school” because the newly united Italy enthusiastically accepted it as the model to follow, instead of discarding it. Cavour had a deep admiration for English industrial and technical achievements “which remind us of the Romans’ projects” (Rosario 452). He also admired their efficiency and managerial abilities: “The English are the best at team work. They discuss without fighting. They have the highest respect for each individual’s opinion.... The English talk less than any other people, but do infinitely more” (qtd. in Rosario 452). After his long stay in England in 1835, Cavour was inspired to follow their example: “We have a general need to improve (in the Savoy kingdom); we need to improve our prisons, reform our schools and our charitable institutions.... I have no doubt that we can do much to improve humanity if we follow the English nation’s spirit of perseverance and organization” (Rosario 452- 53).

Going back home, Cavour worked hard to install the “English nation’s spirit” in his own land. He was successful enough that in 1897, the positivist physiologist Angelo Mosso wrote: “People in northern Italy are not dissimilar from the Anglo-Saxon race” (qtd. in Teti, *La razza* 122). Moreover, England was in favor of the Savoy’s annexation of the South (Macry 80), and Garibaldi enjoyed status and fame in England (Beales 186-87). Garibaldi was also a hero in Pirandello’s family. His parents embraced the ideals of the Masonic and *Garibaldina* left, represented in Sicily by Francesco Crispi. However, Pirandello witnessed the betrayal and defeat of those ideals at the hands of the moderate liberals, who took charge of Italy’s unification (Providenti 13). His bitter reflections on his generation’s frustrated expectations of what Italy should have been are condensed in his novel *I vecchi e i giovani* (*The Old and The Young*). The novel was published in 1911, only two years before the publication of this story and one year after the publication of Benedetto Radice’s *Nino Bixio a Bronte* (*Nino Bixio in Bronte*). I will

talk more in detail about that essay in the second half of this chapter; for now I simply wish to demonstrate the high degree of English meddling in Sicilian political affairs, and how many Sicilian intellectuals resented it. In Bronte, Garibaldi, the dictator, ordered the brutal repression of a peasant revolt, and Radice comments on this historical fact with the following words:

The English consul overwhelmed the dictator with messages asking for a swift and effective repression. In those supreme moments, men and their lives do not matter, and everything is sacrificed for the achievement of a goal. Consequently, those victims were sacrificed, as part of a political game, to the representative of a foreign country, which is, unfortunately, too boldly proud and self-righteous.

(122)

It is impossible to think that Pirandello, an intellectual very much concerned with his Sicily and its condition in the new Italy, did not read nor was influenced by Radice's groundbreaking essay. Radice's words, implicating England for the unjust and ruthless repression in Bronte, may have resonated in Pirandello's mind and directed his comic attacks on that country.

## **Conclusion**

By appropriating Bergson's conceptualization of time duration, Pirandello is able to demonstrate the limits of French positivism's and the Victorian Age's faith in reason and progress, both premised on a mechanist idea of time. With his ironically veiled criticism, the race discourse prevalent in Europe at that time falls under attack because linked to a mechanist concept of time. Through fabricated prescriptive and descriptive taxonomies, populations came to be separated in categories of superior and inferior races due to their presumed stages of biological development. Due to Italy's prolonged decline in political and economic power, Italians were "boxed" in the "inferior category of people" lacking those qualities present in their

English counterparts that made England into a modern state. Soon northern Europeans transformed Italy's perceived un-modernity into a site of the "picturesque," conjured by Italy's rich past and natural beauty on the one hand and its present lack of modern civilization on the other.

Italy then became reduced to that which could be aesthetically possessed by the tourists' gaze, further emphasizing its political position within Europe. As Italian Northerners began fighting for Italy's independence and acceptance into Europe, those qualities that made Italians un-modern were deflected onto the Southerners who became the target of Italy's national discourse on race. The creation of an "Otherness" that evoked images of the barbarous, the primitive, the irrational, and of men's feminization were all rhetorical strategies used to justify Sicily's colonization. Pirandello uses irony, humor, and comic effects to dismantle, piece-by-piece, the Victorian Age's ideology and faith in reason as a privileged epistemic instrument, embodied in Mr. Trockley. At the onset of the twentieth century, it became clear that the Victorian Age's trust in and reliance on science and technology had been misplaced since they did not turn out to be the West's *panacea*.

**Italian Unification's Blind Spot: Verga's "*Libertà*" ("Freedom") and Vancini's *Bronte:***

***Cronaca di un massacro che i libri di storia non hanno mai raccontato (Bronte: Chronicle of a Massacre History Books Never Reported) (1972)***

In 1883, Verga wrote a very short story about a deplorable historic incident that took place in the little village of Bronte, near Mount Etna, during Garibaldi's revolution in Sicily. The story describes how Garibaldi's revolution, along with his promise of more fair land distribution, indirectly incited a crowd of hungry and desperate peasants to rebel against the oppressing nobles of that town. In their atavistic thirst for social justice, the peasants took over Bronte and

viciously axed the *galantuomini* down (Radice 44). Their bloody revenge was ruthlessly repressed by a general leading an army of *garibaldini*.<sup>12</sup> Although I will explore the meaning of both the peasants' rioting and the unjustified violence of their repression, my interest also lies in issues on which the story and the film are silent and the reasons for that silence. My analysis starts with Verga and his difficult political positioning as a Sicilian writer working in Milan during Italian post-unification. I will then move to Vancini's criticism of the *Risorgimento*'s shortcomings and the race discourse that informed many of the political and military actions in pre- and post-unified Italy.

The story begins with a description of the peasants' ferocious reaction to the declaration of Sicily's liberation from the Bourbon regime and Garibaldi's edict of June 2, which abolished the flour tax and recognized the peasants' right to the common lands (Radice 44):

They hung the tricolor kerchief from the bell tower, sounded the alarm using the bells, and began to shout in the square, "Hail to freedom!" Like the sea in the thick of a storm, the crowd foamed and swayed before the rich men's club, in front of the city hall, and on the steps of the church—a sea of white caps. Axes and sickles glistened in the sun. Then, they burst into an alley. "You first, Baron, who had people whipped and lashed by your field watchmen.... You, priest of the devil, who sucked our souls out of us. You, wealthy pig, who cannot even run away, so fat you are with the blood of the poor. You, cop, who brought to justice only the poor because they did not own anything." (Verga, *She-Wolf* 206)

In this opening scene, we have some of the most important elements of the story, such as the hanging of a three-color scarf, which represents the Italian flag and, thus, Garibaldi's fight for liberation that would presumably lead to the end of the peasants' oppression. The hoisting of the

flag is followed by the peasants' shout for freedom. The following lines explain what the peasants meant by freedom: no more abuse at the hands of the powerful, who are then systematically axed down. First they kill the Baron, then the priest, the wealthy man, and finally the policeman, who are the respective representatives of the aristocracy, the church, the upper class, and the law. Like a foaming sea, the peasants took hold of the town's public places: the public square, the rich men's club, the church, and the city hall. Garibaldi's edicts made them believe in his revolution and in their right to fight for what they considered their own—the common lands—hence their appropriation of the public spaces that were sites of power.

The story refers to a real historical fact that Verga very accurately purged of any political references. Many historians and intellectuals, such as Salvatore Lupo and Leonardo Sciascia, have criticized Verga's choice. In his article "Tra centro e periferia" ("Between Center and Margins"), Lupo observes that Verga's interest in the event seems to reside mostly in the representation of the violent collisions of uncontrollable forces that, according to Verga, seem to be at the heart of any rural society:

For Verga, Bronte represents the emblematic place where the daily struggles of class relations explode. The explosion lasts only for a moment and confirms the inescapable destiny of the protagonists who, in the end, find themselves in the same unequal yet functional relationships, as in the Mennea Agrippa's apologue.  
(15)

Sciascia seems unable to forgive Verga for his many mystifications in the retelling of the historical incident: "his art's mystifications ... coincide with his mystifications of the *Risorgimento*. His *Crispian* and monarchic attitude (read: political conservatism) led him to a radical *omertà*<sup>13</sup> in the name and for the sake of the nation, including that part of the nation that

actually lost” (*Nino* 17, 19). Lupo’s comment on Verga’s gaps is much less negative as he refers to Verga’s “honesty of intent” (15). However, Lupo ultimately reads Verga’s silences as his intent to de-politicize the historical facts (“Tra centro” 13).<sup>14</sup> Both Lupo and Sciascia compare the veracity of Verga’s story (or lack thereof) to Benedetto Radice’s essay *Nino Bixio a Bronte* (*Nino Bixio in Bronte*), which both consider to be exhaustive in its research scope and accurate in its rendition of the event (Lupo, “Tra centro” 13; Sciascia, *Nino* 15).<sup>15</sup>

In addition to these illustrious explanations, I would like to suggest another. Verga’s silences might be due to a very practical and prosaic reason: the impossibility in 1883 of publishing a story about a national hero’s despicable, ruthless, and illegal actions. Nino Bixio, who not only landed at Marsala with Garibaldi but also came from his region and spoke his language<sup>16</sup> was too big of a hero to be dethroned by a Sicilian like Verga. Moreover, Verga, a writer, needed to be published, hence his need to be cautious in presenting his island’s agony in the process of unification. As Michael Rössner reports:

From Verga to de Roberto, Sicilian writers communicated to their fellow Italians the reality of their island. But it is obvious that their *verità* (*verismo*) was a ‘truth’ prepared and communicated in a hybrid world: the editorial centers (Florence, Milan, and Turin) were outside of Sicily. The majority of readers (and especially the readers the writers aimed at) were located in the modern urban centers of the North.<sup>17</sup>... In fact, in Italian *Verismo*, dominated by Sicilian authors (Capuana, Verga, de Roberto), and with its choosing of French models (Zola) created a literature that depicted Sicilian reality for the needs and expectations of a Milanese public. We can see a situation where literary communication is easily analyzable using instruments of postcolonial theory. (312)

Rössner's convincing argument allows for the possibility to read Verga as the subaltern voice that can speak only within the paradigms of the dominant national discourse.

Stuart Hall reminds us that hegemony works through ideology mostly by "inserting the subordinate into the key institutions and structures which support the power and social authority of the dominant order. It is above all in these structures and relations that a subordinate lives out its subordination" ("Cultural" 39). Moving into his "hybrid world," that is, living his subordination in a dominant culture, Verga had no choice but represent the historical event according to the needs and expectations of a Milanese public. He had to insert himself into the structures that supported the dominant culture's power; otherwise he would not have survived financially. Expanding on this concept, Michel Foucault reminds us that where there is power there is always resistance, which is never outside of power but rather works within it. Moreover, Foucault denies that there is "one single locus or Great Refusal" (*History* 96). Rather, resistance, like power, works through a multiplicity of points creating a plurality of resistances and "producing cleavages in a society that shift about, fracturing unities and effecting regroupings, furrowing across individuals themselves, cutting them up and remolding them, marking off irreducible regions in them and in their bodies and minds" (*History* 96). Foucault's expansion focuses on the "effects" of resistance within a certain power structure and/or hegemonic discourse. He states that resistance, as a counter-hegemonic force, produces fractions not only within a society but also even in individuals themselves. The latter are then re-molded and recreated into new agents. As a consequence, not only is hegemony never monolithic, but the individual's agency is also always shifting, adapting, and resisting.

Karl Marx already brought to light the complex interplay of structure and agency in his essay *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: "men make their own history, but they do not make



them as they please; they do not make them under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past” (qtd. in Rosaldo 105). To that I would add that “men make their history” within power structures that are often oppressive. Verga had to come to terms with and even adapt to Italy’s power structures post-unification, if he wanted to survive financially. Consequently, Verga’s agency is also shifting and adapting, while, at the same time, inhabiting and resisting the national hegemonic discourse. Above all, he knew that any negative writing about Italy’s unification and its heroes would have been particularly hazardous since history is always written by the winners. Expanding on this latter idea, Michel de Certeau observes that: “the historiographical institution is inscribed within a complex that permits only one kind of production and prohibits others.... It makes certain research possible.... But it makes others impossible.... This combination of permission and interdiction is doubtlessly the blind spot of historical research” (*Writing* 68). According to de Certeau, “the historiographical institution” allows the production of only one version of any particular historical event, and all the others must be suppressed.

Radice informs us that the same thing happened concerning the Bronte event. Although at the beginning a Bourbon version of the facts existed alongside a liberal version, liberal historians have outnumbered the others and “have been the most widely read and believed because they were the first to write about it, shedding a negative light over the village of Bronte” (Radice 128). In their intent to support and shed a positive light on Garibaldi’s revolution, the hegemonic liberal versions tended to amplify the peasants’ animal brutality, marked by “the raping of women and nuns, severing of children ... cutting of breasts” (Radice 128). This narrative was used to justify Garibaldi’s harsh orders and glorify the *garibaldini*’s actions. Even Sciascia reports: “The testimonials written by the *garibaldini*—together with the myth of Garibaldi, his

“red shirts,” and his revolution in Sicily—had a negative effect on the truth about the historical event that took place in Bronte in 1860” (*Nino* 15). All of the liberal versions that Radice is referring to were written between 1862 and 1910 (128), and it is only logical to think that Verga read the books written before 1883 and understood what he was up against while writing his account of the event.

Having established my intent of reading this story through the postcolonial lens, I want to go back to Radice’s essay, which I will use almost as a counter-text.<sup>18</sup> Unlike Verga, Radice starts his essay with Garibaldi’s proclamation on May 14, 1860 in Salemi:

Sicilians! I am leading an army of brave people who came to this island with only one voice shouting, “Sicily!”... Take up arms! Only a traitor or a coward will refuse to fight. Do not be discouraged for not having weapons. We will have guns. For the moment, use anything as a weapon and be ready to strike ... Take up arms! Sicily will show how a united people’s will can free a country from its oppressors. (36)

Garibaldi is inciting Sicilians to do exactly what the peasants did in Bronte. They rose up and fought against their oppressors. Rightly, Radice comments on the dictator’s proclamation with the following words: “The people saw Garibaldi as their liberator from the Bourbon tyranny and from the harsher tyranny of destitution. Impatiently, they were expecting the elimination of the flour tax and the division of the common lands already promised by the Bourbon king and by Garibaldi’s edict of June 2nd” (44). The Sicilian Francesco Crispi, who landed at Marsala with Garibaldi and was well aware of his island’s political tensions, convinced him to promise lands to the peasants to gain their support in his fight against the Bourbon army (Macry, “Miti” 83).

Garibaldi's miraculous victory would have been impossible without the support of these bands of peasants.

According to John Davis, the peasants' insurrection represented a real threat to the Bourbon army because they made it impossible for the Bourbon forces to secure their lines of communication across the island. Fearing an insurrection to their rear, the Bourbon army had to withdraw quickly eastwards to the Straits in order to protect their line of retreat. However, as the peasants began making their claims on contested lands, they directly threatened the interests of Sicilian landowners, whose support was paramount for the success of the dictator's expedition (*Conflict* 51). The landowners soon took up arms to defend their lands and privileges.

Consequently, rural insurrections often became wars between the oppressed peasants and their oppressors, the aristocratic landowners and the notables of the villages. Violent and bloody insurgencies broke up in many villages, like Corleone, Valledlunga, Maletto, and Nicosia. In Alcara Li Fusi, Biancavilla, and Bronte, the riots were particularly violent. Faced with the risk of a civil war, Crispi and Garibaldi decided to support the landowners and crush these insurrections in blood, thus restating the power of the land aristocracy and the *galantuomini* (Cucinotta 176).

Verga describes the repression in his story:

The day after they heard that the General—the one who made people tremble—was on the way to village to do justice. They could see the red shirts of the soldiers slowly climbing up the ravine.... The General had straw carried into the church and put his boys to sleep, just like a good father. In the morning before dawn, if they did not get up at the sound of the bugle, he rode into the church on horseback swearing like a Turk. He was that kind of a man. And he quickly ordered five or six of them shot ... the first ones to be caught. (*She-wolf* 212-13)

As the general arrives at Bronte, he puts his men to sleep in the church, “like a good father.” The image of “the good father” clashes with the general’s order to shoot five men without a due trial, the morning after his arrival. His goodness does not spread outside of his inner circle of mostly northern soldiers. The sleeping in the church and the general’s blaspheming “like a Turk” are very important elements to my discussion, and I will return to them later.

Here, I want to focus on the shooting of five men without a proper trial. Actually, according to Radice, Bixio had the five men tried by a military tribunal before having them shot. Nevertheless, Radice does not hesitate to describe the trial as sloppy and maybe even illegal: “since he [Bixio] thought that the trial was going too slowly, he accused the tribunal members of being lazy and threatened them” (111). Moreover, Radice reports that Bixio considered his duty in Bronte to be “very annoying since he longed to be in the battle as much as at a party. He was very sad to have missed the battle at Milazzo and afraid that the dictator would not call him to cross the Straits in his usual place of honor. Consequently, he feared the length of the trial” (113). Bixio arrives at Bronte on August 6, and on August 9 he leaves to crush an insurgency in Regalbuto, another small village in the proximity. Radice records that leaving at dusk, Bixio “gives order to the tribunal members to be fast in delivering a harsh punishment.” As one of his letters testifies, on August 8<sup>th</sup>, he had already made up his mind, “in the letter ... Bixio asked the tribunal members to sentence the five [men] to death” (115).

Verga eliminates the trial completely. Naturally, this is one of his major “mystifications,” as Sciascia defines them. The reason for this mystification, according to Sciascia, resides in Verga’s unwillingness “to represent Bixio in all his hypocrisy. Instead, he represented him as a quick-tempered and choleric man, as the legend describes him” (*Nino* 19). Although I cannot probe or judge Verga’s intent, I contend that the text allows for a different reading from

Sciascia's. It seems to me that the scene of Bixio ordering the shooting of five men without a trial sheds a shadow of illegality on Bixio's actions and lends illegality and hypocrisy to Garibaldi's revolution. Precisely three days before Bixio's arrival at Bronte on August 3, the Piedmontese constitution, the *statuto albertino*, was extended to Sicily (Riall, *Sicily* 90). Consequently, had Bixio acted as Verga wrote, his action would have been illegal, according to the constitution of the state for which he was fighting. It would thus seem that Bixio is not only described as "a quick-tempered, choleric man" but also as an unscrupulous and unlawful villain. The Prime Minister Massimo d'Azeglio gave great independence to the courts (see Chapter 1), and not even the king had the right to deliver a death sentence without a due trial, hence the historical necessity for Bixio to have at least a mock one. Moreover, Bixio's violence stands out as much (if not more) as the peasants'. Unlike the peasants, he was supposed to be *super partes*, bringing an order sanctioned by the law in Bronte, a responsibility that the peasants clearly did not have. In Verga's description, Bixio seems to have a natural tendency for irrational behavior, violence, and criminality, considered to be as some of the hallmarks of the inferior race, according to the anthropologists of the Italian School of Positivist Criminology founded by Lombroso (Wong 47).

Verga is thus skillfully turning the positivist criminologists' rhetoric, which constructed Southerners as inferior because of their inherently violent nature, against the northern Bixio, ultimately demonstrating its fallacy. This rhetorical operation is particularly important because Bixio is infamously known as the author of one of the most quoted examples of writing that created Southerners as racial "Otherness." In a letter to his wife, he wrote: "In short, this is a country that should be destroyed or at least depopulated and its inhabitants sent to Africa to become civilized" (Mignone 185). As early as 1876, Lombroso published *L'uomo delinquente*

(*The Delinquent Man*), in which he links atavistic physical characteristics to criminal actions, demonstrating that “race served as an essential element to the etiology of deviancy in the South” (Wong 48). In his essay *In Calabria*, Lombroso describes Calabria’s men as “choleric, proud, hot-headed, stubborn, fearless, inclined to dominate the others to the point of being overbearing, and longing for fighting” (qtd. in Teti, *La razza* 59). Upon reading Lombroso’s description, one has to wonder whether Bixio might have been from Calabria instead of the northern Savoy state. In the story, the personality traits that Lombroso considered typical of Calabria’s men seem to be deflected northward. Naturally, Verga’s rendition of Bixio could not be informed by Lombroso’s *In Calabria*, as it was published fifteen years after Verga’s story. Neither can I assert that Verga read Lombroso’s *L’uomo delinquente*. Yet I contend that, as a Sicilian intellectual, he must have been very aware of the construction of a race, on which all the national shortcomings within the unified Italy had been very conveniently attached. Claudia Petraccone, among others, observes how the conceptualization of the two highly different cultures, the civilized North and the barbaric South, started even before the landing of the *garibaldini* in Sicily. The North-South divide contributed to many of the northern politicians’ and intellectuals’ prejudices toward the *Meridione*, ultimately influencing the course of their actions (“Nord” 512-13). With the landing of Garibaldi in Sicily, the anti-Southerners propaganda continued, fueled by individual and personal letters written by liberal politicians to their families.<sup>19</sup> Petraccone underlines the individuality and subjectivity of these first letters and contrasts them with the collective experiences of the democrat *garibaldini*, who landed at Marsala with the idea of freeing the South from its Bourbon oppressor. But their patriotic enthusiasm was soon squashed by a reality that was too different from theirs to be fully comprehended (Petraccone, “Nord” 512). Their

negative experiences were reported in books that amplified the South's "black legend" all over Italy and Europe (Petracone, "Nord" 515).<sup>20</sup>

When in 1876 the Historical Left's victory in Parliament was assured by southern votes, moderate liberals such as Sidney Sonnino, Pasquale Villari, and Leopoldo Franchetti worried that the barbaric South might taint the new state. It is in these years that Villari published his *Lettere meridionali*, while the Parliament sent Sonnino and Franchetti to Sicily to survey its state of affairs (Petracone, "Nord" 530).

In 1876, they published the results of their survey in *La Sicilia in 1876 (Sicily in 1876)*, theorizing that, although Sicily must be part of the Italian kingdom, its civilization must disappear:

The coexistence of the Sicilian civilization with that of central and northern Italy's is incompatible with the prosperity of the nation.... Hence, one of the two civilizations must disappear.... We believe that no Sicilian of average intelligence can wonder which of the two must give in to the other. Certainly, the social conditions in Central and Northern Italy leave a lot to desire; however, they belong to a higher state of civilization than those in Sicily. (qtd. in Petracone, "Nord" 529)

This was the cultural climate in which Verga lived and produced his literary work. He lived in a culture that constructed his own island and people as inferior, primitive, and backward to the point of being dangerous for Italy's progress, and thus in need of elimination.

As Shail Mayaram states: "official memory is available to us as the histories associated with the state formations. The question is how to bring the marginalized into representation when they exist only as the stigmatized other in these texts?" He suggests that narratives of resistance

“construct and reconstruct identity and social being, and they also order the past through broken histories” (3). What I find seductive in Mayaram’s quote is the idea that narratives of resistance create and recreate not only identities, but also that “they order the past through broken histories.” It follows that history narrated from the margins is never linear and whole, which means that it has gaps, just like Verga’s story.

Ultimately, according to Mayaram, resistance deals with memory and imagination. Marginalized individuals are able to engage in struggles thanks to the relative autonomy of their memory:

The role of imagination suggests how memory is not a representation of the past but a *re-presentation*. Within the world of their own culture, they re-present their own history. It follows a pattern that departs from the conventional, historical work that is written and that organizes time chronologically.... Human memory interprets, classifies, evaluates, and organizes. Even the ability to forget is an integral part of memory. (Mayaram 3, 14)

What Mayaram suggests is that narratives of resistance inevitably present history under a cloak created by both memory and imagination. Imagination is needed, I would argue, to fill in those gaps where silence is required. Hence, the importance of forgetting and the ability to not mention that which cannot and should not be mentioned, which is the technique Verga uses by “re-presenting” Bronte’s historical events.

However, Nelson Moe acutely observes that Verga actually contributed, to a certain extent, to the propagation of the myth of the two civilizations:

[Verga’s] fiction is animated by a sustained interest in the problem of the picturesque Sicily. Verga discovered the powerful symbolic charge that rural



Sicily had for the Italian Bourgeoisie while working in the Milanese orbit... The realistic revolution in his art, known as *verismo*, is partly enabled, however, by the bleak, anti-picturesque vision that he found in Franchetti and Sonnino's *La Sicilia* in 1876. From that point on, Verga's work offers a nuanced exploration of the many faces of southern difference, from the dismal ... to the folkloric and picturesque.... Thus Verga articulates that elementary contrast between the "peace and quiet" of Sicily and the hustle and bustle of Milan that would constitute the basis of his geographical poetry in the following years. (250-51, 253)

Moe correctly demonstrates that some of Verga's representations of Sicily did not challenge the national discourse, rather they foregrounded Sicily's picturesque-ness and dismalness, especially when compared to Milan's modernity's "hustle and bustle." Moe's comments then seem to deny any postcolonial reading of Verga's literary work. How then can Rössner's and my own postcolonial readings be reconciled with that of Moe?

To answer this question, I turn to Raymond Williams who, borrowing Gramsci's idea, reminds us that hegemony always brings with it—and almost generates—its own counter-hegemony. Consequently, Williams reports: "hegemony never passively exists as a form of dominance. It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended and modified. It is also continually resisted, altered, and challenged by pressures not at all its own" (112). It follows that hegemony, although dominant by its own nature, is never total or exclusive; rather it includes opposite and alternative forms of politics and culture that can coexist within one society. Thus Williams concludes:

The reality of cultural processes must then always include the efforts and the contributions of those who are in one way or another outside or at the edge of the terms of the specific hegemony.... It can be persuasively argued that all, or nearly all, initiatives and contributions, even when they take on manifestly alternative or oppositional forms, are in practice tied to the hegemonic: that the dominant culture, so to say, at once produces and limits its own forms of counter-culture. (113-14)

Following Williams's idea, we can assert that Verga's postcolonial stance can be read and understood only within the hegemonic national discourse. In other words, Verga is able to produce a counter-cultural discourse in some of his works, while at the same time embracing the hegemonic national narrative.

Going back to the general in Verga's story, it is highly significant that he is described as bringing hay into the church while using profanities: "The General had straw carried into the church and put his boys to sleep, just like a good father. In the morning before dawn, if they did not get up at the sound of the bugle, he rode into the church on horseback swearing like a Turk." (323). This description strips Bixio of any vestige of Christianity. In Italy at that time, Christianity was the benchmark of humanness, separating human beings from animals. Even today in colloquial Italian, the expression *comportati da cristiano* ("behave like a Christian") is an invitation not to behave according to Christian precepts but rather to conduct oneself with civility. Civility was, of course, the cornerstone of orderly, educated, and polite civil society conceived of by nineteenth-century liberalism (Williams 13). By comparing him to a Turk, Verga is denying Bixio the civility that supposedly marked the northern race as superior, according to the racial discourse and writings so prevalent in Italy at that time.

Verga's comparison of Bixio to a Turk takes on a deeper meaning when accompanied by the use of the word "Turk" in his story "What is the King?" Whereas in "What is the King?" the epithet "Turk" is used by the *Piemontesi* to "orientalize" Orazio, *Cosimo's* son, in this story Verga uses it to send it back to the deliverer. Furthermore, I would argue that in describing the general "like a Turk," Verga's intentionality comes to the surface. To explain what I mean by "Verga's intentionality," I turn to Paul Ricour's idea of *re-enactment*. Ricour states: "the duty of the historian is the re-effectuation of the past in the present." The re-effectuation, or *re-enactment*, defines "the historical aim as such—the task of *rethinking* and not of reliving what has once been thought—by calling thought the inside of the event and by including in it the entire field of the motives for action" (347). Although Verga is not a historian, he deals with precise historical facts, hence his duty to re-enact Bixio's actions and discern his motives for readers. Nevertheless, by portraying Bixio's lack of humanity, he is already leading his readers to judge him and his actions as a product of his "orientalized" being.

Thus my contention is that Verga's intentionality is twofold. On the one hand, he creates in Bixio an "Otherness" already used to describe and delegitimize the Southerners; on the other hand, the incivility and illegality of Bixio's actions become representative of the new state's illegitimacy. As Davis observes:

The legitimacy of the new state was also widely and openly challenged. These challenges were the more damaging because they did not only come from 'outsiders', from anarchists, socialists, or other 'subversive' quarters, but also from within the elites. It was a Catholic Senator, a man above reproach, for example, who dismissively contrasted 'legal Italy' as a mere bureaucratic artifact to 'real Italy' ... [constituted by] reliance on arbitrary methods and the frequent

violation of the rule of law [which] was as much a consequence of political as administrative uncertainty.” (*Conflict* 11-12)

What Davis’s quote alarmingly detects and points out is the ease with which the new state relied on illegal means to achieve its goals, thus the contrast between “legal Italy” and “real Italy.” Undoubtedly, such illegal actions and maneuvering were due to the structural uncertainty and weakness of the new state’s political and administrative institutions. Because of its congenital weakness, the Italian central government learned to give in to local power holders in Sicily, and in the South in general, creating politics of patronage and clientage (Pezzino 53).

As Lupo and Sciascia noted, the trial is not the only major gap in Verga’s account. Bixio’s name is actually never mentioned, as Verga reports only of “the general, the one who made people tremble.” I would contend, though, that Verga’s description of the “general” leaves a very visible trace of whom and what he represented. Writing about historical time, Ricour writes that:

A trace is a vestige left by the passage of a human being.... The important point here about the trace is its double status which refers to two heterogeneous temporal levels. On the first level, the physical, the trace as a substitute must be a *mark* left by something.... As a physical entity, the trace is something of the present. Traces of the past exist now: they are remnants to the extent that they are *still* there, while the past context of the trace—people, institution, actions, passion—no longer exists.... On a second level, the noetic, there is a trace only for one who can appreciate the mark as a present sign of an absent thing, or better yet, as the present vestige of a passage that no longer exists. A trace is then a present thing that stands for (*vaut*) an absent past. (345)

Ricour's quote is clearly referring to Edmund Husserl's differentiation between the noematic and the noetic. Very simplistically, we can say that the noetic is that which perceives and the noematic is that which is perceived (Husserl 216-17). Bixio and his actions are the trace that was left in Bronte. On the first level, the physical (the noematic), they left a substantial mark on the bodies of the people they shot. The dead bodies then are the remnant that is "*still* there" that is in the Italian history even if the people involved in the Bronte event are no longer there. On the second level, the noetic that is that which perceives the reality, Bixio's actions stand for the Sicilian masses' lack of trust toward any Italian political institution, including the government. The peasantry's faith that the new kingdom was actually on their side becomes "a passage that exists no longer." De Certeau describes historical discourse as that which "forces the silent body to speak" (*Writing* 3). During the event in Bronte, the "silent body," by which de Certeau means the "social body," acquires the eerie physicality of the gunshot corpses. Whether they were shot after a mock trial or no trial at all is insignificant. What matters most is that those people's lives could and should have been spared; as Sciascia comments: "that injustice was visible even to the people who committed it" (*Nino* 16). My contention is that even if Verga does not mention Bixio's name, his trace on the historical story is so strong and the depiction of the shot bodies so eloquent that Verga's accusation of Bixio stands on strong ground. Once again, the story conveys the idea that Bixio, by acting on his racism, inflicts an injustice, ironically becoming the embodiment of lawlessness, disorder, and inferiority.

After the erratic shooting of the five men, Bixio sends the rest of the rioters to Catania to be tried. The trial lasted three years:

They made them stand one by one. "What is your name?" And each one stated his first name, last name, and what he had done. The lawyers, in wide loose sleeves

were busied, jabbering, gesturing in excitement, foaming at the mouth, quickly wiping themselves with a white handkerchief, and then sniffing up a pinch of snuff. The [*galantuomini*] judges dozed behind the lenses of their glasses, which froze your heart. In front were seated twelve rich men [*galantuomini*] who were tired and bored, yawning and scratching their beard or prattling... The judges left the room, and the convicted, pale and with eyes locked on the door, waited for them. (Verga, *She-Wolf* 215)

Having the *galantuomini* as judges for the convicted obviously makes us doubt that honesty and justice were at the core of the trial. The defense lawyers are described as “busied, jabbering” and “foaming at their mouths”; the *galantuomini* are “bored;” and the judges “dozed” and thus, one would imagine, are not paying attention to what they are called to do, which is to ensure justice for all. The trial’s total insignificance and *ennui* become an allegory of History’s indifference towards that event, its historical meaning, and its memory, as the title of Vancini’s film suggests. The trial continues, “as the judges came in... the charcoal man, as they were handcuffing him again, stammered: - Where are you taking me? To jail? Why? I did not even get one square foot of land! And they said there was freedom! (Verga, *She-Wolf* 216). The story ends dramatically with the charcoal man’s arrest and his total confusion about what happened in court. His questions, left unanswered by the judges and by his own trial, assume historical significance. If Garibaldi brought freedom to Sicily, why was he chained and imprisoned? If Garibaldi gave the peasants the common lands to share among themselves, why did he not get even a square foot of them? Even more importantly, if Garibaldi recognized the peasants’ right to the common lands—what the charcoal man calls “freedom”—why was the possession of even one square foot of them considered to be a crime punishable by prison time?

These historical questions bring us to Florestano Vancini's film, *Bronte: Chronicle of a Massacre History Books Never Reported* (1972).<sup>21</sup> Unlike Radice's and Verga's accounts, Vancini starts with the question of land. The very first scene shows the beating of a man and his son at the hands of some *gabellotto*.<sup>22</sup> Father and son alike are beaten because they were caught cutting down some wood from trees in the common lands. To fully understand this scene, I need to explain the complex situation regarding the common lands in Sicily. During the *Ancien Règime*, the agrarian order in Sicily was one of "narrow and self-duplicating economic circuits that revolved around satisfying local demand." Localized economic circuits privileged cities toward which landed revenues, public revenues, and feudal taxes were drawn, to the detriments of rural *comuni* (villages) (Davis, *Conflict* 29). Rural villages had juridical identities since they constituted the primary unit of civil administration. As such, they were endowed with common lands to meet the peasants' needs for survival and the cost of local administration. Villages were also subjected to taxes that were to be paid to lay and ecclesiastic feudatories and to the king. The common lands that were either property of the Crown (*beni demaniali*) or that belonged to a particular Village (*beni comunali*) had been eroded by lay and ecclesiastic feudatories' usurpations and enclosures, especially during the second half on the eighteenth century (Davis, *Conflict* 41-42). During the Napoleon occupation, French rulers looked for support from the propertied and wealthy classes, creating what is generally described as the regime of notables. This class was created to curb the power of land aristocracy, which was stripped of its feudal privileges and power, except in Sicily.

In Sicily, the relationship between the land aristocracy, the Bourbon king, and the rural villages had never been easy. The powerful, arrogant Sicilian land-aristocrats had been challenging the Bourbon king's central power since the second half of the eighteenth century.

Naturally, their behavior greatly annoyed the king who began “to encourage the *comuni* [villages] to bring suits against the neighboring feudatories for usurpations of common lands ... [over time,] such actions heightened the *comuni*’s awareness of both their collective identities and collective rights.” As a result, the villages revived old institutions such the parliament and the village assembly that had fallen into disuse (Davis, *Conflict* 44). In Bronte, the situation was a little more complex, since in 1849 King Ferdinand IV donated the *ducea di Bronte* (Bronte Duchy) to Admiral Nelson and his heirs, for his military support in quelling the 1848 uprising in Sicily. Furthermore, the notables were divided into two parties: the *comunisti* (communists) who were for the peasants’ right to access the common lands and the *ducali* (for the Duchy) who were against it (Radice 47-9). The *comunisti*’s leader was the enlightened liberal lawyer Nicolò Lombardo, and Vancini gives him central role in his film. Verga, on the contrary, does not even mention him, although he is one of the five people executed by Bixio’s platoon.

Going back to the film’s opening scene, the father and son were beaten because they were collecting wood in the common lands within the Nelson’s Duchy.<sup>23</sup> Garibaldi’s edict of June 2 gave the right to the peasants to access those lands, hence in theory, the father and son were not breaking any law.<sup>24</sup> In practice, though, Nelson’s heir, Franco Thoves, did not recognize that right and sent his men to teach them a lesson. In Vancini’s film, Garibaldi’s edict is the fulcrum of the Bronte’s tragedy. In the film’s second scene, as the peasants are rioting in the village streets, they shout about their right to the lands, *Vogliamo le terre*, “We want the lands.” After this first confrontation in the village of Bronte, the camera takes us to the countryside, where some peasants meet Lombardo coming from a talk in Catania with the new governor, appointed by Garibaldi. Although Lombardo is highly skeptical of Sicilian men of power and their chameleonic nature, “in our land the devil can become a friar, and a friar the



devil,” he believes that Garibaldi’s revolution is bringing a real change: “Garibaldi brought the revolution, and we are part of it: I, you, and all of us ... all those who want a real change. If the revolution says that the common lands must be shared among the peasants, all those who are preventing it are traitors to the revolution and to the revolution’s law.”

Above all, Lombardo invites the peasants to stay calm and not engage in any violence. As his declaration to the peasants demonstrates, he had faith in the “liberal revolution” through which Sicily would be freed from the oppression of the Bourbons as well as the land aristocracy and its supporters. He believed that the law was finally actually on the peasants’ side, and that any action had to be taken within its boundaries. His trust in Garibaldi’s edicts made him challenge the *ducale*, notable Luca Cesare’s conviction that Garibaldi was only using the peasants for his own gain. Lombardo’s political position is contrasted on the right by Cesare’s words and stance about the revolution, and on the left by Gasparazzo, the charcoal man. Gasparazzo incites the Bronte peasants to violence, presenting it as the only way to achieve freedom and to become Italians: *Viva l’Italia! Viva la libertà, Morte ai sorci!* “Long live Italy! Long live freedom! Death to the rats!” As Gasparazzo and his men run through the village shouting, killing, stealing, and destroying, Lombardo is physically static, using his words as a vehicle

to bring justice to Bronte: “Peace ... the injustices will be repaid, the culprits will be punished by the law.... Garibaldi’s law is the people’s law and will be implemented in name of this flag that stands for freedom, peace, and justice.” Gasparazzo instead keeps egging on his people not to trust a *cappeddu* (“galantuomo,” see Introduction) to bring justice to the peasants.

The film dramatizes the contrast between these two political leaders. On the one hand, we have the charcoal man, Gasparazzo, who does not trust any *cappeddu*, not even Lombardo, and

rightly so, one may add at the end of the film. On the other hand, we have the “enlightened,” liberal Lombardo who turns out to have been duped by his unequivocal trust in Garibaldi’s words and revolution. The two characters are totally antithetical and will not find a common ground or a synthesis; if they had, Italian history might have been different. Instead, Gasparazzo decides to leave the fight and to go back to the mountains, as the Sicilian colonel Poulet brings order to Bronte without any violence. The following day, upon arriving at Bronte, Bixio does not hide his repugnance toward Sicily and Sicilians. He insults the surviving *galantuomini* for not defending themselves from the rioting scum. Then he addresses Thovez, communicating all his disgust for them: “if it weren’t for you, Sir, for the commitment that Garibaldi took with your country’s representative, I would let these good people slaughter these *galantuomini*. They are just a bunch of cowards.” Then Bixio proceeds to set up a military tribunal headed by a northern lawyer with the rank of major, with the order to “give a swift example.” Nonetheless, during the trial, the men in the town, even the *ducali*, refuse to give up the names of the people involved in the rioting. Actually, the *ducali galantuomini* go out of their way to defend Lombardo as one of the most esteemed lawyers in town. Then, the wives of the victims are brought in, and they make the accusations that will bring Lombardo and four more men in front of the firing squad.

Just like Radice, Vancini points to the English intervention in Bronte’s affairs as the main reason for Garibaldi sending Bixio to crush the revolt. It is only logical to think that Vancini knew Radice’s essay since Sciascia was one of the playwrights and their intent was to create a *film-denuncia* (“exposé”) (Micaluzzi 85). Vancini was particularly interested and invested in making the film as historical as possible, and that dictated many of his aesthetic choices. Naturally, Visconti’s rendition of Giuseppe Tommasi’s *The Leopard* (1962) was the first film representation of the *Risorgimento* in Sicily. Unlike Visconti’s choice of the operatic style to

make an ironic parody of it (Dalle Vacche 134),<sup>25</sup> Vancini uses a documentary style highly influenced by Dziga Vertov's notion of the "Kin-eye," "an eye that, placed in the middle of a crowd, is better suited than the human one to explore the chaos of the visual phenomena that fill the space" (Orsitto 249).<sup>26</sup>

Even aesthetically, Vancini is interested in representing the chaotic collapse of Garibaldi's revolution and its painful and disastrous results. Like Verga, Vancini's intentionality is quite obvious: the de-legitimization of Italy's unification by Garibaldi and his red shirts. At the heart of Vancini's cinematic work is the connection between personal and historical memories, as he states:

Memory is fundamental. Any human being has the ability to know and find out what happened before his/her existence. Our past is paramount to understanding today's reality and its problems. Studying history is fundamental for any human being's mental and social formation and the way s/he relates to others. (qtd.in Gambetti 77)

Vancini indicates that the only way to understand our present is to have a good knowledge of our historical past. This would explain why so many of his films are, in fact, historical and "are narrated with honesty, candor, and a great sense of morality," and they are always on the side of history's underdogs (Gambetti 9, 77).

Accordingly, his historical films are intrinsically *exposés*. His film on Bronte is no different, and I will outline its genesis to demonstrate its highly revisionist, even subversive, nature. As early as 1960, Vancini started writing the script for a film based on Verga's short story with the title *La libertà* (*Freedom*). Vancini reports that Verga's silences were what set him to begin his historical research that ultimately led him to Radice's book (Gambetti 49). As he

starts writing the script, he hires Sciascia to help him with the “Sicilianness” of the subject matter, since Vancini is originally from Ferrara (see fig. 2). In 1961, Vancini is ready to start shooting when the producer, Dino De Laurentiis, imposes two American actors, Kirk Douglas and Frank Sinatra in the main roles, and the deal is off. It is not until 1971 that RAI (Italian Public Radio and Television) decides to make Vancini’s script into a three-episode show with the title, *I fatti di Bronte (Bronte’s Events)*. However, once the three episodes are done, RAI refuses to broadcast them, suggesting Vancini make a film out of them. In 1972, the film comes out with the title, *Bronte: cronaca di un massacro che i libri di storia non hanno mai raccontato*. Reviews from both the left and the right were pretty harsh, and it was well received only by a small section of highly educated viewers (Gambetti 73, 78). Many years later, during the time the socialist Bettino Craxi was prime minister (1986-1987), the RAI broadcasts the film, but very late at night and with a very ambiguous introduction to mitigate the film’s message. Craxi was, after all, one of Garibaldi’s most faithful fans and an obsessive collector of his paraphernalia. RAI never broadcasted *I fatti di Bronte* (Gambetti 78).

What I find intriguing and distressing is that even in the late 1980s when Craxi was prime minister, Bixio’s massacre at Bronte was still a top-secret subject that RAI—which has been controlled by the government since its inception—was hesitant to broadcast, to say the least. Another important factor is that the original script of the film by Vancini is coeval with Visconti’s film. *Bronte*, however, came out ten years later, thus the film’s representation of “today’s reality and its problems” reflects a ten-year range of Italian history, political ideologies, and cinema aesthetics, unlike *The Leopard*. Rightly, Carlo Testa places Vancini within the directors belonging to what he defines as *Cinema politico*, (political cinema). This group of

directors worked through the 1960s and 1970s, and their films acted as “a type of public forum where the nation’s most pressing issues could, and would, be aired” (51).

These were years of intense political conflicts, due mostly to Italian democracy’s insufficient level of maturity, and it was common for these directors to look back to Italy’s history in order to understand and represent its present problems (Testa 50). The North/South divide became a well-exploited topos to explore both the causes of the South’s criminal organizations and of Italy’s “dualism” (Wood 142). Undoubtedly, the North/South divide is central both in Visconti’s *The Leopard* and in Vancini’s *Bronte*. However, in Visconti’s film, the peasantry is completely absent since his intent is to show the alliance between the northern bourgeoisie, the southern land aristocracy, and the *galantuomini*. Vancini, in contrast, gives center stage to the peasants’ plight, which was more syntonic with the cinematic climate and culture of the 70s, characterized also by a recuperation of Italy’s rural past (Wood 143). Nonetheless, both directors point to the *Risorgimento*’s shortcomings.

Vancini’s ideological position toward the *Risorgimento* and its shortcomings comes powerfully to the forefront through Lombardo’s defense in front of the military tribunal. During his defense, Lombardo compares the trial’s quickness, haphazardness, and arbitrariness to the *ex-abrupto* verdict of the Viceroy’s time.<sup>27</sup> This was a time when the South was a vice-kingdom under the Spanish monarchy’s absolute power and liberals like Lombardo fought hard in 1848 and 1860 to have an Italian constitutional state that would abolish such power. The trial by the military tribunal demonstrated that their hopes and desires were not met by Garibaldi’s revolution: “we received an *ex-abrupto* verdict in 1860, when in Sicily the Viceroys were no longer in power. Garibaldi is now in power in the name of freedom.” By comparing Garibaldi’s

power to that of the viceroys, Lombardo is underlining not only the lack of democracy in the trial and in the revolution, but also the “foreignness” of Garibaldi’s political actions.

Moreover, the people who represented the “new Sicily and new Italy” acted unconstitutionally and illegally, committing two horrible injustices: “within the historical injustice against this people, there is this injustice against us.” Lombardo’s words can be read on two different levels and on two different temporal plans. On one level, “the historical injustice against this people” may signify the injustice committed against the Bronte people on those specific and historical days. On another level that sentence may signify the injustice perpetrated against the Sicilians as a people by Garibaldi’s arrival in 1860. This injustice would be historical because it continued throughout history. Thus, Lombardo’s words about the historical injustice would acquire an almost prophetic tone. At the heart of Vancini’s denunciation of the *Risorgimento*’s shortcomings is Gramsci’s idea of the *Risorgimento* as a failed revolution.<sup>28</sup> After all, the revolution did not happen in Bronte as in the rest of Sicily, because the democrats Crispi and Garibaldi did not have the vision, the ability, or as Luca Cesare cynically states, the interest to truly carry out a real, agrarian reform.

Besides the collapse of Garibaldi’s revolution, the film also highlights the lack of understating between Bixio and the Sicilians, and their impossibility to communicate effectively. Fulvio Orsitto detects an element of ethnicity in the film that makes it impossible for Bixio and Poulet to have a dialogue, even if they are both aristocratic, military men: “in Vancini’s film, incomprehension is also analyzed along ethnic lines” (249). Yet I would argue that, more than ethnicity, we can detect the workings and consequences of a race discourse that, as Petraccone signaled, had started even before the landing at Marsala. Karla Holloway makes the following distinction between ethnicity and race:

Race is an identity that is conferred.... Race is a simplistic, political distinction that can support stereotypes and prejudices. Ethnicity, on the other hand, evolves through complex associations of linguistic, national, cultural, and historical identities that affirm all the shifting forces and hierarchies of modern life, but it is also continuously affirmed, created, and embraced by those who are ethnic. It is an issue of agency. Ethnicity is a self-determined and defined construction. (106)

According to Holloway, agency is the most important difference between ethnicity and race. Ethnicity is self-conferred, thus the individual freely decides to belong to a group. Race is instead conferred, and in this case, the individual cannot choose the group he/she belongs to. More importantly, race can support stereotypes and prejudices, which means that “ethnicity” becomes “race” when it is conferred and used to discriminate, denying specific groups’ access to power. In other words, “Sicilian” determines someone’s ethnicity; however, when it is used to mark someone as inferior, creating an “otherness,” it becomes race. In the film, Poulet’s choice to be Italian is so strong that he is willing to die for it. However, Bixio does not treat him as his equal; after scolding him for not having arrested anyone in Bronte, he states: “your passivity and condescendence toward this scum are intolerable. Your Sicilianness is not enough to excuse your inaction.” Clearly for Bixio, Poulet’s Sicilian ethnicity was already a huge handicap making him *a priori* into an inferior officer.

Bixio’s discriminatory and prejudicial remarks transform Poulet’s ethnicity into race, as he is denied equality to the other officers in Garibaldi’s army. When Bixio gets frustrated with Poulet because he failed “to give a punitive lesson, especially to those who burned the property maps in the city hall,” he paternalistically reminds him: “we did not land in Sicily to give lands to the peasants ... but to create a united Italy.” Then, Bixio arrogantly hushes Poulet’s attempts

to explain the peasants' rights to those lands, thus underscoring his perceived sense of superiority vis-à-vis Poulet and the locals. Not only does he describe the people of the area as "primitive as much in their minds as in their way of praying" when assisting to a funeral ceremony, but he also insults Poulet calling him *minchione* (idiot). Furthermore, Bixio's reproaches evoke many of the typical rhetorical trappings through which southern identity was constructed. He defines him as passive, the opposite of active, and activity was the hallmark of progress and modernity.

Bixio's modernity is actualized in his constant movements: through Bronte, in the convent where he is staying, and throughout the countryside. Bixio actually walks to Bronte from the outskirts, where Thovez brought him with his coach. As Thovez tries to convince him to be dropped at Bronte, an annoyed Bixio answers: "I walked throughout all of Sicily." Here, de Certeau's words comparing walking to writing a text may be suggestive of Bixio's appropriation of Bronte's history (*Practice* 93). Moreover, Bixio's young, thin, muscular, and reactive body is definitely the body of someone who shakes things up. Poulet's body, on the contrary, is heavy, slow, and old, or "atavistic" as Lombroso defined the Southerners. Yet, Poulet was able to bring order without any shooting because he was willing and capable to communicate with the peasants. On the contrary, Bixio is portrayed as a man of action with no interest in communicating with local people because of his supposed primacy. The dialogue between Bixio and Poulet is not present in Radice's essay, substantializing Vancini's accusations of both the *Risorgimento*'s shortcomings and the race discourse.

Vancini's film once again diverges from Radici's account on another important point: the refusal of Bronte's men to give a testimony that would indict the five men on the bench. Radice instead reports: "Lombardo's enemies brought secret and open accusations to the tribunal. As Bourbon reactionaries, they pointed to them [the men on the bench] as responsible for the



killings and the stealing. Above all, Lombardo was the target of the accusers' anger and thirst for vengeance since he was the feared leader of the opposing party" (116). In Vancini's film, Lombardo does not have a party around him and acts alone. Yet, Radice even gives us the names of the *comunisti* in Bronte: the Lombardo brothers, Nicolò, the physician Placido, the Minissale brothers, Carmelo, Silvestro, and Dr. Luigi Saitta. The *comunisti* party did not have as many members as the *ducali* party, of course, which included "almost all the class of the notables" (49).

Why did Vancini opt for this conclusion, though? I would argue that Bronte's men's *omertà* stresses the "color line" between them and the Northerners, who came to try and convict them without understanding their world and culture.<sup>29</sup> Although I am aware of the use of the term "color line" in a totally different context than that of W.E.B. Du Bois, I argue that his conceptualization of a division between men due to cultural and racial prejudices works well even in this Sicilian context. As Orsitto observes, the division is present also in "the soundtrack of the film and in the proxemic patterns established in a number of the film's frames" (249). While the Sicilian *picciotti* (young men) sing serenades in a happy but disorderly fashion, the *piemontesi* soldiers arrive at Bronte singing "La Bella Gigogin" in a perfectly organized harmony. Orsitto notices that in these scenes the soundtrack is recorded only in Sicilian and Piedmontese dialects, further suggesting the division of the two peoples who, speaking different languages, can hardly understand each other (249). When Bixio gets frustrated with the *galatuomini*'s seeming recanting of their accusations, the English Thovez helps him out: "you see, a stranger can be a danger. That is why they do not speak. This is Sicily." As Sciascia has documented in many of his writings, Sicilians have a congenital mistrust of foreigners, who have colonized their island

for centuries (“Sicilia” 13). This may explain the *galantuomini*’s unwillingness to have “foreign” judges convicting their people.

At the end of the film, the deep incomprehensibility between the Sicilians and the Northerners is left unresolved. I would argue that this lack of synthesis between the two cultures and people represents the “residual” nature of Italy post-unification. Williams defines the residual as an element of the past that is still active in a cultural process as an effective element of the present “thus certain experiences, meanings and values ... are lived and practiced on the bases of the residue” (122). The historical and cultural distance and incomprehensibility between North and South are still an active element in contemporary Italian society. At the same time, many of the values Italians tend to attach to their current political and cultural experiences are still premised on this deep and un-dialectical divide. To that I would also add that the very nature of the “cultural residual” is what makes the *Risorgimento* still interesting and current today, as it was for Vancini in 1972. The cultural divide between North and South was not only the historical source of a race discourse in Italy. It also became the space where “a powerful and headstrong southern ‘dependence elite’ succeeded in influencing the evolution of the process of political and social modernization over the last two centuries by playing the weakness of the state against its own persistent autonomy” (Pezzino 56). By “dependence elite” Pezzino means a social class that uses up the resources brought to the region without generating any wealth, and he contrasts it with the ‘development elite’ that generates wealth and promotes the independent development of a region (Pezzino 58).

What is urgent for both Vancini and Radice is to report the workings of the agrarian elite that was able to create a complex system of mediations through which it could resist the central government of first the Bourbon and then of Italy.<sup>30</sup> This elite was able “to influence (the central

government), to manipulate its norms, to privilege relations with its peripheral agents, and exercise sway not only over the final outcomes, but also on the very approach to the process of modernization” and, I would add, to keep oppressing the rural masses (Pezzino 54). Sciascia defined these agrarian elite as the “*Borghese-mafiosa* class. This class used the *parlamentismo* (“Parliament procedure”), or at least the electoral machine as a way to grab those chances that the Bourbons did not offer and could not promise”(“Sicilia” 77). Even Sonnino in *Sicily in 1876* bitterly reports: “through our institutions ... we provided the oppressing class with better means to hide in legal forms the *de facto* oppression that already existed” (qtd. in Pezzino 50). This class’s persistent resistance toward the power and intrusion of the state in many areas, helped to keep the state weak in both administrative and political terms, especially after the 1876 election when the Historical Left, led by Agostino Depretis, won the election, thanks to the support of the southern elite. As Riall asserts: “Depretis traded control at the local level in the South in return for political support at the national level and in Parliament” (“Garibaldi” 153). To a certain extent in liberal Italy, the use and abuse of the police force in the South was due to an absence of alternative forms of effective administrative, political, and juridical regulations (Davis, *Conflict* 12).

## **Conclusion**

Two elements come to the forefront in both Verga’s and Vancini’s renditions of the tragic, historical events that took place in Bronte in August 1860: Garibaldi’s edict that provided for the sharing of the common lands among the peasants and Bixio’s totally dissonant and strident presence in Bronte. Bixio stands out as the stranger who cannot and does not want to apprehend Sicily’s complex reality. Instead, he acts out of his own prejudices rooted in the race discourse already present in Italy at the end of the eighteenth century. Garibaldi’s edict turned

out to be deceiving for the peasantry who did not receive what had been promised, although they took part in the revolution. Following Rössner's lead, I explicated Verga's story through a postcolonial lens that allowed me to present Verga as a subaltern voice resisting and inhabiting the dominant national discourse. The shift in Verga's agency between the two extremes was due to distinctive reasons: first, the political and cultural climate in Italy post-unification; second, his need to appeal to Northern publishers and readership; and third, Bixio's heroic position in national history.

Almost one hundred years later, Vancini brought Bronte's events to the screen to present the *Risorgimento*'s main shortcoming: the failed agrarian reform and the North/South divide. Vancini's exposé film was subversive enough that even in the 1980s, when Italy had a socialist Prime Minister, the Italian Public Broadcaster, RAI, was reluctant to show it. The film focuses on the "Southern Question" in light of a failed *Risorgimento* that caused division instead of unity in Italy. Garibaldi's men and Italy's post-unification government were not able to resolve the historical and cultural divide between North and South. This divide has been both the source of much of Italy's race discourse and the space for the agrarian élite to control a politically and administratively weak central government through politics of patronage, factionalism, and clientage for its own personal gain and to the detriment of the rural masses.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Bain's Associatiionist psychology set up to explain human behavior rationally, that is in terms of physical laws, thus reducing the mind to the brain (Guerlac 42).

<sup>2</sup> In *Corinne or Italy* (1807) (Moe 17).

<sup>3</sup> In *Diary of an Ennuyée* (1826) (Moe 18).

<sup>4</sup> Gargliano is a river that is halfway between Rome and Naples and which formerly separated the Papal State from the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies (Moe 87).

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<sup>5</sup> Northerners were not the only ones to deprecate southern backwardness. The topos of southern backwardness was actually reinforced and amplified by Southerners, exiled intellectuals who were living in the North. For instance, Giuseppe La Farina, one of Cavour's most important Sicilian collaborators president of the *Società Nazionale*, publishes a book, *Storia d'Italia dal 1815 al 1850 (History of Italy from 1815 to 1850)* describing the Bourbon Sicily as: "a permanent offense to civilization and Christianity" (qtd. in Barone 260). In 1932, Benedetto Croce in *Storia del Regno di Napoli (History of the Kingdom of Naples)* wrote about the devastating effects of Southern stereotypes created by the Southerners (Barone 261). Marta Petrusiewicz explores this issue at length in her essay, *Come il Meridione divenne una questione (How Meridione Became a Question)*. Giuseppe Barone rightly wonders about the negative impact that these Southern stereotypes had on Cavour and his notion of the Bourbon monarchy (262).

<sup>6</sup> Pasquale Villari wrote that the southern poor quality of water, air and living conditions was the main culprit of the weakening of the southern race (Wong 30). Alfredo Niceforo claimed that the lack of hygiene, urban organization and productive systems led to a miserable economy that negatively affected the southern race's physiology. A racial weakness that was characterized by the presence of peculiar traits: "in the cranium, in the power of the chest muscle, in the face, even in the beating of the pulse, in the coloration of the eyes and the hair" (Wong 64). It is important to notice that both Villari and Niceforo were Southerners: Villari was from Naples and Niceforo was Sicilian. Wong reports that: "some Southerners began to articulate the Northerners' *meridionalisti* discourse criticizing their native society and culture.... The dual-edged-ness of displacement and complicity illustrates how Orientalism can work within a country to reinforce the wider geopolitical and geo-cultural ambitions of great powers creating what Milica Bakic-Hayden refers to as 'nesting colonialism'" (6).

<sup>7</sup> Sicilians were described as shouting, "*Viva la Taglia*" because they supposedly misunderstood the Northerners' shout of "*Viva l'Italia!*" ("Go Italy!"). In their writings, Northerners often reported that many Sicilians believed that Taglia was Garibaldi's wife (Wong 161). Sicilians were reported also to shout "*Viva Cecilia*" instead of "*Viva Sicilia*." Naturally, these descriptions were aimed at portraying Sicilians as ignorant and backward people.

<sup>8</sup> Colajanni was born in Sicily in 1847 and was republican and federalist. In his writings, he denounces the Savoy monarchy's colonial politics toward the South and the power of the liberal elites of the North and South of Italy. His most notorious essay *Per la razza maledetta (In Favor of the Damned Race)* is a well-articulated response to Niceforo's writings that constructed Southerners as an inferior and violent race. Without denying the difference between the "two Italies", Colajanni points to the economic and social differences between the South and the North. The South's problems stem from the high rate of illiteracy, the feudal economy, and poor infrastructures. With great irony, he deconstructs the paradigms through which the positivist race discourse was articulated also demonstrating its inherent contradictions. Politically, he proposes the creation of a federation to overcome the North and South divide. Only a federation would have broken the centralized power of the North and its *piemontizzazione*. In his essay, *Settentrionali e Meridionali (Northerners and Southerners)* he openly criticizes the Northerners' colonial aim toward the South that created an "internal" colony not dissimilar from the colony that the Italian elites wanted to create in Africa (Teti, *La razza* 129-31).

<sup>9</sup> Salvemini was born near Naples in 1873. He was socialist and federalist who fought hard against the Giolitti governments first and then against Mussolini's Fascism, before emigrating to the United States. He criticized positivist writings about race asserting that: "race is constructed in history and it is history's effect, not its cause. It is transformed in history. Only shallow and obtuse thinkers can explain a country's history by the word race" (qtd. in Teti, *La razza* 212). Just like Colajanni, Salvemini points to the feudal economy and endemic social problems as the culprits for the South lagging behind the North. Problems that were aggravated by Italy's unification, carried out to the advantage of the northern and southern elites. As a socialist, he called for an alliance between the North's factory workers and the Southern peasants, an idea shared by Gramsci. Just like Gramsci, Salvemini lamented a lack of leadership among southern peasants and called for Northern socialists to fulfill that role. Since the Socialist Party dealt only with factory workers and factories were only in the North, the South did not have a strong socialist presence (Teti, *La razza* 213-15).

<sup>10</sup> Ciccotti was born in Calabria in 1863. Just like Colajanni and Salvemini (but also like Niceforo) he was a federalist and looked at Switzerland, where he had gone in exile after 1898, as an example for Italy to follow. As he stated: "each region can detect evil more effectively, has more interest in mending it, has better knowledge on how to mend it and at the lowest cost" (qtd. in Teti, *La razza* 217). Like Salvemini, he was a socialist who criticized Italy's unification as it did not create a "fusion" of the "two Italies," but rather a "welding" of the two. The

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unification favored the North's economy: "Those who talk about the 'State of Milan,' comparing it to the rest of Italy in order to demonstrate the superiority of the city and the region, make the mistake to think that Milan would have become what it is even without the unification" (qtd. in Teti, *La razza* 218). The only possible solution to the dire state of the *Meridione* was to embrace a socialist economic system: "Capitalism is the real and permanent reason for the *Meridione's* civil backwardness. Capitalism, based on competition and the inevitable exploitation of the economically weak by the economically strong, needs to be substituted with socialism. Socialism will change society's make-up transforming it from competitive to collaborative" (qtd. in Teti, *La razza* 173).

<sup>11</sup> Through this decree the government "forced" the un-convertibility of the Lira, the Italian currency, into gold. This monetary regulation had been used in Europe since Napoleon time, to curb the government's borrowing from the State Central Bank to pay off foreign debts (Allen 89).

<sup>12</sup> Volunteers who formed Garibaldi's army.

<sup>13</sup> The Mafia's code of silence.

<sup>14</sup> Lupo invites his readers to interpret Verga's position within his social class and the "modern" society: "with all its contradictions centered on the agrarian problem" that in the future, Verga argued, might cause: "the dissolution of the traditional society due to the impact of usury, the injustice of agrarian terms of agreement [between the peasants and the landowners] and the fiscal oppression" ("*Tra centro*" 13-14).

<sup>15</sup> Radice, native of Bronte, was only six-years old when the riot took place and he witnessed the whole event (32, 78). He graduated from the University of Catania in Law, but he preferred to teach. He taught in Bronte for a while, but then he moved to Rome and then Fiesole, in Tuscany. In 1903 he returned to Sicily where he met Verga, Luigi Capuana, Giovanni Gentile and Pirandello. In these years, he started to do research on Bronte. He published many essays on Sicilian history. He traveled extensively and died in 1931 (Sciascia, *Nino* 28). Verga was twenty-years old and he may have arrived at Bronte with the *Guardia Nazionale* which he had joined. Sciascia writes: "In the story, what stands out, besides Verga's great narrative style, is Verga's "optical experience" of it. Verga saw the event" (*Nino* 20).

<sup>16</sup> My reference to speaking the same language should not surprise since language varieties among the different regions were very marked. The language spoken "north of the line from La Spezia to Rimini... often diverged markedly in pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary from the standard"—the standard being the Tuscan variation spoken in Tuscany and Rome (Richardson, 64-65).

<sup>17</sup> In 1883, the illiteracy rate in Sicily was estimated at 84%. After the unification, literacy in Sicily (and more in general in the whole South) was improving, but slowly. In 1911, fifty years after the unification, Sicily's illiteracy rate was still 60% against the 13% rate of the Northern industrial triangle. Illiteracy was defined as the inability to read any word or letter even if some "illiterate" people could actually trace, with some difficulty, their names (Daniele and Malanima 26-27).

<sup>18</sup> I would say almost as an ur-text since Radice used and cross-referenced interviews, personal and official letters, Parliament and municipal documents.

<sup>19</sup> The most renowned epistolary examples are by Massimo d'Azeglio, Luigi Carlo Farini, Emilio and Giovanni Visconti Venosta, and Giuseppe Giusti. For instance, in a letter to Cavour, Farini described the South as Africa: "the Bedouins have a blooming civilization in comparison to these people... Even women kill; worst, they tie the *galantuomini* by their testicles and throw them in the streets" (qtd. in Petraccone, "Nord" 512).

<sup>20</sup> *Da Quarto a Voltorno* (1882) by Giuseppe Cesare Abba, *I Mille* by Giuseppe Bandi (1902) and *Il diario della spedizione dei Mille* by Ippolito Nievo (1962) (Petraccone, "Nord" 215).

<sup>21</sup> Petraccone convincingly argues that Franchetti's proposal to destroy the most backward civilization was certainly due to the political elections' result in 1874, when Depretis won thanks to the support of southern vote. That is racial differences were invoked precisely when the North's political power and domination were perceived as being at risk. Thus, Southerners' influence in political life came to be perceived as a threat to the new State since the Southerners

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until then had been considered incapable of exercising power at the national level. The fear was that the South could actually use its power to steer the country's political life and drag the whole country to its own low level of uncivilization (Petracone "Nord" 230).

<sup>22</sup> Native of Ferrara, Vancini (1926-2008) starts his career as journalist for the daily *Corriere del Po* (*Messenger of the Po*) and the weekly *La nuova scintilla* (*The New Spark*) for which he also wrote film reviews. In 1949, Vancini, together with Adolfo Baruffi, shot his first documentary, *Amanti senza fortuna* (*Unlucky Lovers*) (1949) on the impossible love between Parisina Malatesta and, her stepson, Ugo d'Este. He, then, shot many other short documentaries about his city and the Po region until 1960, when he shot his first feature film, *La lunga notte del '43* (*The long night of '43*) (1960). At the XXI Venice Film Festival, Vancini won the first prize for *La lunga notte del '43*, in the category "Frist Work." The film is a rendition of Giorgio Bassani's homonymous short story focusing on a massacre carried out by Fascist squads in the Este Castle on the November 15, 1943. From the very beginning of his career, Italy's history and its current social problems were at the core of his films. With the film *Le stagioni del nostro amore* (*The Seasons of Our Love*) (1966), Vancini deals with the Italian Left's political crisis of the 60s. *La violenza: Quinto potere* (*Violence: Fifth Power*) (1972) is his first film dealing with the economic and political power of the Mafia in Italy. In the same year, he shot *Bronte: cronaca di un massacro che i libri di storia non hanno mai raccontato*. The year after, with *Il delitto Matteotti* (*Matteotti Homicide*) (1973), Vancini tackled the story of the assassination of the socialist senator, Giacomo Matteotti, by Fascist squads. Not all his films deal with historical events, though, some of them focus on his characters' introspective analysis like *Un drama borghese* (*A Bourgeois Drama*) (1979). Vancini worked for the television as well, and in 1986 he completed the TV series *La Piovra* (*Octopus*) centered on the Mafia, which was a great success (Micalizzi 9-15).

<sup>23</sup> *Gabellotto* was an administrator of the properties of the "absentee landowner" who lived in the city instead of on his feud.

<sup>24</sup> Common lands provided the peasants with grazing land, arable land for crops, fish, game and nuts, wood and reeds for fuel and construction (Davis, *Conflict* 42).

<sup>25</sup> Angela Dalle Vacche and Marcia Landy define as "operatic" a register through which history can be narrated. The operatic is based on two different kinds of narration: the monumentalism and the antiquarianism. Monumentalism refers to the narration of history through rhetorical "monuments" which are pastiches of folkloric wisdom and commonsensical representations of patriotism, service, maternal sacrifice, paternal discipline and so forth. On the contrary, antiquarianism makes some historical events into fetishes. On the one hand, antiquarianism creates the illusion the narration of history is faithful to the events and, on the other hand, that the past is undoubtedly better than the present (Landy 112).

<sup>26</sup> Vertov defines the kino-eye in the following way: "The kino-eye lives and moves in time and space; it gathers and records impressions in a manner wholly different from that of the human eye. The position of our bodies while observing or our perception of a certain number of features of a visual phenomenon in a given instant are by no means obligatory limitations of the camera which, since it is perfected, perceives more and better. We cannot improve the making of our eye, but we can endlessly perfect the camera" (15).

<sup>27</sup> In the film Lombardo explains that the *ex abrupto* verdict allowed the indicted person to present his defense in one hour. After that the viceroy would deliver his sentence.

<sup>28</sup> Gramsci points to the radicals (that is the more democratic forces represented by Mazzini, Garibaldi, Pisacane, Ferrari and their followers) for the failure of the revolution. The revolution failed because the radicals were not able to create an alternative, organized, political force and counter discourse. They had little understating of the political forces opposing them and had no unified program. Above all, they failed to understand the importance of the southern rural masses. Thus, they did not play the card of the agrarian reform. To the concept of "failed revolution," Gramsci adds that of "passive revolution." Gramsci considered the *Risorgimento* as an uncompleted endeavor; hence his use of "passive revolution" to describe both essence and shortcomings of the liberal state. Gramsci believed that the moderate liberals, who were progressive in material terms and conservative in social terms, dominated Italian culture and created an alliance with the southern nobility as well as the professional and bureaucratic classes.

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Consequently, the Moderates became ‘hegemonic,’ constituting the dynamic element of the ‘passive revolution’ (Davis, *Gramsci* 14, 16).

<sup>29</sup> In his Essay *Of the Dawn of Freedom*, Du Bois writes: “The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line, – the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men” (9).

<sup>30</sup> The agrarian elite was formed by an alliance between the nobility and the agrarian bourgeois class that came into being throughout the eighteenth century and was composed of tenants, usurers, cattle-breeders and *gabellotti*. Unlike Gramsci’s idea of a monolithic and totalitarian “agrarian bloc,” this alliance was fluid and ready to create and break alliances based on patronages, clientage, and factionalism with the only purpose of preserving a certain degree of autonomy from the center. The creation of the *comuni* during the Restoration period gave this elite new economic and political ways to challenge the center from the periphery. After the unification, liberal governments used the middle class as the backbone of the constitutional state. However, the Sicilian agrarian elite did not go through a due process of “in depth-renewal;” consequently, in Sicily the bonds of clientage and factionalism remained predominant in the relationship between the periphery and the center. This was possible also because, unlike many other regions, Sicily had a very restricted electorate due to a very limiting property-based suffrage (Pezzino 43, 47-8).



## Chapter 3

### Emigration as Resistance, Exile, and Trauma

#### Introduction

As the title of this chapter suggests, I propose reading Sicilians' emigration through the critical paradigms created by Sciascia and Teti, as revealed in the dissertation's introduction. In other words, I read emigration as the ultimate form of resistance that, as such, becomes exile, as described by Berghahn and Stenberg: "a painful or punitive banishment from one's homeland and the trauma associated with the experience" (13). These paradigms are useful in examining Sicilians' displacement to the Americas, because they allow us to read and understand its many and different implications. In the first part of this chapter, I deal with Capuana's novel *Gli americani di Rabbato* (*Rabbato's Americans*) and Criale's film *Nuovomondo* (*Golden Door*) (2006). Capuana's novel presents emigration as a tale of success for the Sicilians who were willing to leave their island behind. Through their success story, Capuana intends to resist and debunk Italian criminal anthropologists' prejudicial claims about the inferiority of the Sicilian race, which were so prevalent in that time as to haunt the emigrants even in the New World. Consequently, he tells the story of Sicilians' ability to create a new, prosperous Italian-American community in New York. As Teti states, Southern Italians, coming from "the thousand Italies," learn to transcend their regionalism and acquire a sense of national unity, together with a hyphenated identity.

Conversely, in Crialese's film emigrants' success is neither shown nor guaranteed. For the hungry emigrants, America remains only a surreal dream of abundance. Crialese seems more interested in showing the human struggle in the "third time-space," which forces emigrants to negotiate and create alliances that cut through gender, class, and nationality. Above all, Crialese

depicts the border, with its power to examine, reject, and disperse people, in the name of the Anglo-Saxon race's purity. In the American rendition of the film, the title *Nuovomondo* is changed into *Golden Door*, a phrase taken from the sonnet inscribed on the Statue of Liberty's pedestal. In the sonnet, the Statue of Liberty addresses the "ancient lands," asking them to send her "your huddled masses yearning to breathe free. The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door." Evoking the rhetorical artificiality of the verses, the American title draws attention to the border and the irony of the sonnet's words, which clash with the golden door's exclusionary nature.

By 2006, the year the film came out, Italy had become the New World for thousands of non-Western immigrants who had been trying, with different degrees of success, to enter through its "golden door." Crialesse's emigration story thus becomes also the story of these new immigrants who, just like the Italians in the film, have to face exploitation, discrimination, prejudices, and a difficult assimilation into a new country. The film also represents emigration as the wound that separates those who leave from those who stay behind. The word "wound," "trauma" in Ancient Greek, brings us to Pirandello's short story, in which the characters' personal traumas become a metaphor for Sicily's historical traumas, rooted in Garibaldi's revolution. In Pirandello's story and the Taviani brothers' rendition of it in the film *Kaos* (*Chaos*) (1984), emigration is only the logical result of Sicily's historical traumas at the hands of a government that has neither the competence nor the political will to understand Sicily in all its complexities. However, contrary to Pirandello, who disavows emigration as a possible solution, the Tavianis show it as the only form of rehabilitation for those Sicilians who are willing to choose exile over their own island. The reason for the Tavianis' divergence can be found in the

Sicilian Mafia cartels' bloodiest war, during the years 1979-1986, when more than three thousand people were eliminated in Sicily, making emigration a luring and sensible alternative.

**“The Third Space” in Luigi Capuana’s *Gli americani di Rabbato (Rabbato’s Americans)* (1912) and Emanuele Crialese’s *Nuovomondo (Golden Door)* (2006)**

At first, comparing Capuana<sup>1</sup> and Crialese<sup>2</sup> may appear an improbable endeavor. Capuana’s realism is light-years distant from Crialese’s post-modernist film, just as their works stand almost one hundred years apart in time. However, my interest in these artists’ very different works lies in how they each deal with Italian emigrants’ rite of passage during the Great Wave of emigration in the years 1894-1920. By “rite of passage,” I mean the emigrants’ passing from their own home in Sicily to the entirely different world of the Americas. This passage was first and foremost physical, entailing the actual moving to a different place to live. Yet, along with the physical and material movement came also the emotional and cognitive passage from one reality to another and the consequent shifting of their own personal identities. I am particularly interested in analyzing two interconnected aspects that are present both in the novel and in the film. The first aspect is the articulation of a resistance to the racial discourse that taunted Italian Southerners even in the New World.

The second is the emigrants’ acquisition of a hybrid identity that, in Capuana’s novel, allows them to take on a new agency both in their own native home and in their new country. This newfound agency will eventually become the force behind a substantial economic improvement in Sicily and in the lives of its people. In Crialese’s film, in contrast, the New World is made up only of surreal images, never becoming a reality for the immigrants. Unlike Capuana, Crialese develops most of his narration on the steamship ferrying the emigrants across

the Atlantic Ocean. As an in-between space, the ship becomes the site of the formation of the emigrants' new hybrid identity.

Capuana's novel is the first in Italy to deal with the social, economic, and cultural aspects of Italian emigration to the Americas, showcasing the negative and positive changes it brought to the village of Rabbato<sup>3</sup> and its families (Barone 205). The story also takes its readers to New York, where emigrants from Rabbato were able to see themselves as Sicilians first and, then, as Italians for probably the first time. In the totally different urban reality of New York, they were similarly able to acquire a new Italian-American identity by creating a prosperous Italian-American community (Barone 206). In Capuana's rendition, Italian emigration is a tale of success, espousing Francesco Nitti's political-economic theory that emigration liberates the oppressed rural masses. The novel's plot is very simple: Stefano and Santi Lamanna immigrate to New York, where Santi finds a good job, while his brother gets involved with the Mafia's "Black Hand." Because of Santi's success, he is entrusted with the care of his much younger brother, Menu. Menu, the only one of the Lamanna brothers to have a fifth-grade diploma, becomes even more successful than his brother Santi. Thanks to the money Santi and Menu are able to make in America, they can buy land in Rabbato to support themselves and their family there. Stefano too, after almost losing his life, comes to his senses and decides to make a fresh and clean start in Rabbato, after his New York experience.

In his intellectual honesty, Capuana does not hide some of the problems and human costs inherent with emigration. Accordingly, he tells us about the breaking up of a Rabbato family, a repatriate's denouncement of oppressive American work conditions, and the presence of the "Black Hand" in the Italian-American communities, which engulfs Stefano Lamanna. However, the novel's intent seems to be that of underlining the positive changes that emigration was

bringing to Sicily at this time. In his attempt to narrate a story of Southerners' successes, and thus to resist and debunk the national discourse of their shortcomings, Capuana seems to fall short in problematizing Sicilian emigration. For instance, he leaves out the hardships of the trip itself, first to the port, on foot or in a rudimentary carriage, and then on the ship for almost three months, often financed through usury. The border's selecting, segregating, and oppressive power is not described in the novel either, nor is Sicilians' difficult integration in an American society that had labeled them already as "undesirable." As a result, he tends to create scenes that, at times, appear to be unrealistic and almost imaginary. Yet, his imaginary depictions are interesting precisely because of their power to create images.

As more recent historians have pointed out, America's lure was constructed on several images that satisfied many different emotional and psychological needs for Southern rural masses (Serra 17). Capuana's novel undoubtedly contributes to the creation of an image of America as the only possible location of escape for the destitute masses of peasants, ultimately demonstrating that the idea of creating "one Italy" was only rhetorical, to use Teti's words. My contention is that, even in his almost utopic and unproblematic depiction of Italian emigrants' experience, Capuana's novel is groundbreaking. The novel's significance lies in his ability to portray the psychological changes that slowly create a new identity in Sicilians on both sides of the ocean. After all, critics agree that Capuana's most personal and original contribution to his period's narrative is his profound psychological realism and his mastery in probing and analyzing the intricate reality of the human psyche (Davies 4). Although ideologically he was conservative and espoused the moderate liberalism of Italy's ruling class, his support for the new government was shaken by the Sicilian political reality that ensued from Italy's unification. Philosophically and aesthetically, he embraced *verismo*, becoming one of its most prominent

writers, and just as for Verga, his aesthetic choice brought him to study and analyze the life of the members of Sicily's most impoverished classes. His *verismo* was intertwined with his Hegelianism's teleological vision and understanding of history, which might be at the basis of his optimistic view of Sicilians' emigration (Davies 6).

The novel begins with a description of Rabbato's daily life through the vicissitudes of the Lamannas, the protagonist family. The family's members, all living together under the same roof, are the grandpa, Santi Lamanna, one of his daughters-in-law, Maricchia, and her three sons: Stefano, Santi, and Menu. Central to the Lamanna family is the house, which has grown with the family from "one room on top of the stable" to "a first floor with a stable with two mules, a room with the farming tools, and a pantry with the jar for the olive oil.... [An] adjacent building [was] bought to build two more rooms.... A second floor with three windows ... and a room...." (Capuana 5, 6). The house's enlargement and ameliorations, naturally, testify to the blessings of a growing family, two sons and two daughters, and of improved wealth. The Lamannas have no doubt in attributing both blessings to the spring arrival of the swallows to the roof of their house. As migratory birds, which leave Italy for Africa at the inception of winter and return in the spring, the swallows work well as a foreshadowing presence in a novel centered on Italian emigration. Just like the swallows, Italian emigrants tended to repatriate, and even to follow a migratory pattern of coming and going from America, which earned them the epithet of "birds of passage" (Caroli v).

In Rabbato, the homecoming of the emigrants, nicknamed *americani* by the locals, always stirs up curiosity, skepticism, and envy. At *Coda-pelata's* "bold tail" return, the village people gather around him to listen to his fabulous stories about America. Menu, still a boy of

seven and by far the youngest of the Lamannas, is among these people, and he is enchanted by *Coda-pelata*'s tales of riches, which he reports to his grandpa:

“Grandpa, do you know who came from America? *Coda-pelata*...

If you saw him, Grandpa, you couldn't recognize him. Happy, with a new suit, with a tie with a big gold pin on it. Fingers full of rings and shoes made of shiny leather; he looks like a *galantuomo*. He brought a lot of money.”

“Who gave him all this money?”

“I do not know. He says that in America everyone makes a lot of money. Only those who do not want to make money, do not have it.” (Capuana 8)

America had the power to transform *Coda-pelata* beyond recognition. He left as a barber—“You are Lamanna! I cut your hair two years ago,” he says to a stunned Menu—and came back looking “like a *galantuomo*.” This impressive transformation was possible because of American society's more pronounced class mobility, which allowed him to acquire a substantial wealth.

Although the search for a job was for many the main reason to leave, emigration also held a very important symbolic value, that of liberation from material needs and economic and social exploitation (Serra 12). America had come to be portrayed as *la terra della cuccagna*, “the land of plenty”—the land of fortune and abundance, wealth that was readily available to those who were willing to work for it. Above all, in the emigrants' minds and imaginations America was the land of hope and the future: “What is it that saves the man and keeps him from being ground under the hard power of necessity? The New World! Previously there was not escape; but now there is,” wrote the pick-and-shovel poet Pascal D'Angelo (qtd. in Serra 17). The power of persuasion created by these images was keenly exploited by the *emigrazionisti*, people who were

financially invested in the business of transporting emigrants to the other side of the Atlantic (Serra 16).

Menu's enthusiasm, though, is met by his grandpa's skepticism:

"And you believed him?... And the others who left, where are they?" Grandpa kept shaking his head in disbelief.

"He says that they are here and there. America is very big, Grandpa."

"Who saw his money?"

"He spends it with no care. He brought a gold watch to his father and gave two *lire* in alms to a poor man ..."

"They were fake."

"They were not, the grocer took them. The poor man said he wants to go to America too, so he can make good money by begging. But *Coda-pelata* said that *there* begging is not allowed. *There, one works and earns money.*" (Capuana 9, italics mine)

In the above passage, two elements are very important for my argument and serve as *leitmotifs* in the novel. The first element is Grandpa's attitude vis-à-vis the reality of America's abundance of work and wealth, so incredibly different from his experience of life in Rabbato. In his skepticism, he demands tangible proof of *Coda-pelata*'s wealth: "Who saw his money?" The other element is encapsulated in the statement "*There, one works and earns money,*" which creates a great contrast with Rabbato's social reality, as described by Stefano's words: "*Here* whoever does not work, eats, and whoever works, dies of hunger" (Capuana 11, italics mine). From the very beginning, the novel creates a tension between the reality of *there*, meaning America, and that of *here*, meaning Rabbato. Although America is described as the land of



abundance, wealth is guaranteed only to those who are willing to work. Unlike in Rabbato, or Sicily in general, wealth is thus equated to work, which means that *Coda-pelata* was able to succeed because of his work ethic.

The objective for Capuana here is to underline Southerners' ability and willingness to work to improve their lot, given the opportunity to do so, thus refuting the construction of Southerners as immorally lazy. Consequently, this story opposes the theories and writings of many criminal anthropologists and *meridionalisti* who voiced their fears and preoccupations about Southerners' emigration to foreign countries in very large numbers. Many of them worried about the bad impressions that Italians made abroad, and how that would reflect on the nation. Soon, Southerners' wretchedness and consequent emigration, often described as a plague and a contagious illness, became an embarrassment for the whole country (Wong 127). For instance, Fortunato wrote: "if across the Ocean, our countrymen are not loved enough, if they are still subjected...to the same evils they suffer in our country, then it is always a 'Southern problem' of Italy—bitter fruit of poverty and degeneration—so in the United States as among ourselves" (qtd. in Wong 126). In his *In Calabria*, Lombroso writes: "even if *shameful*, emigration has been a palliative for these poor communities, so much that now the richest, the happiest, the most hopeful, and civilized communities are those with the highest numbers of emigrants" (qtd. in Teti 275, italics mine). Clearly for Lombroso, communities move into a higher state of civilization, wealth, happiness, and hopefulness to the degree that their inhabitants are willing to emigrate; the more emigrants there are, the more civilized, hopeful, happy, and rich the communities will be. Villari also contributes to the polemics by writing about Italian emigrants' moral corruption in America because of their low social and economic status (Wong 133). Lastly, Sergi states that, of all the emigrants to America, Italians are "the poorest and live in the dirtiest and most

smelling districts of the cities, without even trying to lift themselves up from their meager living conditions. Why? Let the sociologists explain that to us, but let's not accuse the Americans for not letting them become rich and live decently" (qtd. in Teti 278). Even though Sergi writes about "Italians," Southern Italians are his clear referent, as they were the ones migrating to America *en masse* (Teti 273).

Going back to Capuana's work, I want to draw more attention to the binary opposition between *there* and *here*. After casting the "American spell" on Stefano and Santi, who decide to follow him to New York against their Grandpa's wishes, *Coda-pelata* pays a visit to Grandpa Santi to convince him to let them go:

As soon as I arrived in New York, I started working with a Neapolitan barber. I had a light and swift hand, and *there* everybody is in a hurry...After a while everyone wanted to be shaved by the Sicilian.... One day, a rich client, who had to wait longer than usual, says: "Why don't you open your own salon?" I asked: "Who is going to pay for it?" And he said: "Here, I lend you three hundred dollars. *Here* a *galantuomo* wouldn't even lend me 5 *lire*. *There* I was given the equivalent of one thousand and eight hundred *lire*. (Capuana 14, 15, italics mine)

The dialectical tension between *here* and *there* continues, creating the image of a land (there) that embraces and supports business spirit and enterprise as well as upward class-mobility, almost absent in Sicily at that time. Sicilians, *there*, have benefitted from its business climate and have been able to reach an affluence never experienced in their own land. *There*, a rich man is willing to invest on a Sicilian and his ability, knowing that both would profit. *There's* spirit is then contrasted with the meager and stingy spirit of *here's galantuomini*, lacking any interest in

developing the island's local economy by financially assisting and sustaining lower-class individuals' business initiatives.

The financial successes of Italian emigrants were recorded by Colajanni in his book *Latini e Anglo-Sassoni (Latins and Anglo-Saxons)*, published in 1906. In the chapter “Gli italiani delle colonie” (“Italians in the Colonies”), Colajanni aims to debunk the race discourse that haunted and taunted Southerners, even as they were immigrating to the Americas. To that end, he reports that the 200,000 Italians living in New York alone owned 10,000 shops for a value of 7 million dollars and 4,000 houses for a value of 20 million dollars. They had 15 million dollars saved in different banks and credit unions and owned more than 10 million dollars in personal goods in the richest parts of the city. He also noted that 636 Italians were registered in the list of house owners in the Borough of Manhattan, which meant that each had a personal worth of about 300 dollars (Teti, *La razza* 281). Colajanni's chapter's title, “Italians in the Colonies,” is highly significant for my discussion and needs some contextualization. First, it is important to highlight that the word “colony” needs to be read within the Ancient Greek historical tradition. The Devoto-Oli dictionary of the Italian language gives the following definition of the word colony: “a group of people moving from their mother country into another land, usually scarcely populated, to create permanent settlements.”

After Italy's colonial failures, Italian politicians, embarrassed by their country's poor performance in Ethiopia, came to question why Italy—with some six million Italians living abroad—did not have the largest colonies (Wong 119). Consequently, many politicians, like Nitti, urged the government to keep close ties with the emigrants who, through sharing of the same culture and language, would create Italian cultural colonies abroad. As the economist and senator Girolamo Boccardo contended: “If by colonies one intends not the possession nor the

domination of foreign lands but only the settlement of numerous swarms of compatriots in distant streets, Italy already has many and flourishing, on the Plata, in Bolivia, in Perù, in Brazil and everywhere else” (qtd. in Wong 138). Thus, emigration was seen as an effective tool of non-military colonization, through which Italy could extend its cultural and political influence beyond its national borders (Wong 139). To this end, the Italian government, aided by its consulates, defended and directed the study of the Italian national language abroad. This effort was a means to strengthen solidarity among immigrants as well as to create a national consciousness among the Italians who were living overseas (Wong 121).

Within this conceptualization of Italian emigration as a form of cultural colonization, *Coda-pelata*’s description of America’s lands’ abundance and availability is very telling:

“You should see.... When you travel by train through the countryside, the only thing you see are *prairie after prairie waiting for someone to work them....* They ask you, do you want land? First, *take it*, toil it, and then you will pay for it. *Breaking the ground* is hard and requires a lot of work ... but, then, you are the owner, if you have strong arms and want to work.” (Capuana 15, 17, italics mine)

The image of America’s land waiting to be worked, taken, and broken into is very evocative of the sixteenth-century European colonial discourse that represented the continent as a naked woman waiting, seductively half-lying on a hammock, for Amerigo Vespucci’s coming (Gallagher “America by Johannes Stradanus”). This erotic imaging of America, which persisted well into the nineteenth century, “as the first contact of European Self and American Other is indicative that America was produced for Europe as a passive vulnerable female waiting for her lover/conqueror”—or, I would add, for the diasporic Italian peasants (Gallagher “America by Johannes Stradanus”).

Even if marked by undeniable discrimination and hardships, the Italian diaspora created communities in the Americas that, in time, thrived, as demonstrated by Colajanni's data. These communities came together, transcending regionalism and the North-South divide, and created a new Italian-American identity for themselves. The creation of this identity was not a small feat, considering that for centuries Italians lived very separate lives, partially because of their history, Italy's landscape, and its endemic lack of roads. By using the words "Italian diaspora," I mean the dissemination of Italians into the world to create what Pnina Werbner describes as "a permanent condition of ethnic and communal living" (qtd. in Baldassar and Gabaccia 5). In these communities, or colonies, Italians learned to translate their culture into an American context, thus negotiating the meaning and limits of their own Italian-ness.

Homi Bhabha refers to the "translational transnational" as the process and condition of non-Western people's migrancy into Western national structures, which they displace, and by which they are displaced (*Location* 173). Bhabha affirms that:

All forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity which denies the essentialism of a prior given original or originary culture.... Hybridity to me is the "third space" which ... displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom.... The process of hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation. ("The Third" 211)

In other words, the "third space" is the site where non-Western and Western people and their cultures meet, thus creating a state of hybridity that, for both, denies any original essentialism. It is within this "third space" that new cultural and political initiatives can arise and be negotiated,

giving way to new meaning and representations of reality. I realize that, in Bhabha's description, the "third space" is the hybrid site where the ex-colonizing First World meets the ex-colonized Third World; thus, the Italian experience of emigration does not entirely fit into this paradigm. However, as Pasquale Verdicchio argues: "[Italian] emigration is part and parcel of the oppressive process of nation building, and as unrecognized postcolonials, Southern Italian immigrants to North America are among those groups that straddle the borders of nationalism, ethnicity, and race in a continuous identity flux" (98). Hence, Verdicchio's conceptualization of Southern Italians as ontologically postcolonial allows me to successfully apply Bhabha's articulation of the "third space" for my discussion.

In his novel, Capuana gives us a colorful description of "the identity flux" of the Sicilians living in New York's Little Italy. As Santi, *Coda-pelata*, Zi' Carta, Menu, and Don Pietro Ruffino, the tailor, are trying to reach a trattoria to celebrate Menu's new job at the bank, Don Pietro Ruffino guides them through Little Italy's streets. Through his words, Little Italy becomes the perfect image of Bhabha's "third space":

They arrive at Mulberry Street. "It is so clear we are in Little Italy," said the tailor with contempt, pointing to all the laundry hanging from the windows and the terraces. "One has the impression of no longer being in New York." As they were walking, the tailor would turn to Santi, or to *Coda-pelata* or Zi' Carta to report: "someone from Palermo, someone from Messina... two from Catania." He recognized them from their accents. "Trattoria Sicilia," the tailor read finally. (Capuana 100)

In Little Italy, Rabbato people live together with people from other parts of Sicily, probably for the very first time in their lives. In this "third space," they are able to merge their many and

different provincial realities into one Sicily—hence, the name of the trattoria, “Sicilia,” which includes all of them.

At the same time, though, they learn to perform in accordance with their American identity—which, as the hegemonic identity, is the one they must all come to terms with. Accordingly, the tailor feels disgusted by the Italians’ custom of hanging their clothes on their windows and terraces to dry. Clearly he perceives this custom as one that constrains their community to the liminal space, not being fully able to enjoy their American status: “One has the impression of no longer being in New York.” Moreover, the tailor’s words display what Dubois defined as “double consciousness,” which he describes as “a peculiar sensation, ... a sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in an amused contempt and pity” (2). By passing a negative comment on a traditional Italian practice, the tailor demonstrates his assumption of the American “eyes” and “tape,” by which he holds his own compatriots in contempt and pity.

Rabbato people do not acquire only a Sicilian awareness; they also acquire a national consciousness:

As soon as Zi’ Carta arrived at New York, he chose his job. He started selling oranges and lemons in the streets, calling people’s attention to his merchandise with his loud voice, as he did in Rabbato. Out of his mouth came funny words, incomprehensible to the children, the workers, and the nannies, who were his habitual clients. He would stand where, he knew, no policeman would bother him. Then, Zi’ Carta explains to Menu, “I bought a carriage from which I sold oranges from Sicily ... I ate only bread, onions, and cheese ... Then, I was able to buy a

little grocery store.... I repainted and cleaned it and, there on top, I put the portraits of our king and queen. (Capuana 75)

Zi' Carta's financial exploits are tangible. His business acumen and initiative as well as his work ethic allowed him to expand his economic enterprise and his wealth. His selling of oranges from Sicily and his shouting in the Sicilian dialect insert him into the New York vendors' market in a very new and original way, thus creating a new cultural practice.

His hybrid living ultimately gives him a new agency, allowing him, as Nitti hypothesized, to debunk the racial prejudices held against his people. Furthermore, in his new, cleaned, and repainted little shop, he hangs up the portraits of "our king and queen." His use of the possessive adjective "our" denotes a desire, will, and awareness of being part of the nation. The Sicilian-ness of Zi' Carta's oranges and shouts, as well as the Italian-ness of the sovereigns' portraits, crisscross Little Italy's American urban landscape. Pellegrino D'Acerno stresses the importance for emigrants to consent to being Italian, even while constructing their new American identity (xxxiii). When back in Rabbato with Santi, Menu hears Dr. Liardo calling him *americano*, he "proudly declares, 'American by name, but Sicilian, or actually Italian, always Italian'" (Capuana 113). This last scene perfectly captures Teti's observation that only in the Americas can emigrants from the one thousand Italies construct their own Italian-American identity, ultimately being able to transcend their regionalism and divisions, just like Menu.

Little Italy's Italians are not the only ones to acquire a hybrid identity and style of living, though. As Teti points out, emigration also ultimately changed those who remained behind, their living spaces, and their cultural practices (*Pietre* 22). The sorrowful and distressful waiting for news about and letters from those who left is the first change encountered in any village experiencing emigration (Teti, *Pietre* 11). After three long months, Menu brings home Stefano's



and Santi's first letter, causing great joy and excitement in the house. The letter, however, also creates apprehension in his grandpa, who anxiously asks him: "Would you be able to read it?" Grandpa Santi's anxiety is rooted in his realization that the communication between the two separated parts of his family is in the hands of his eight-year old grandson, now the only literate member of the family. This first letter, though, is followed by a year of silence, during which the grieving Maricchia, not fully understanding America's geographical immensity, goes to the house of any returned *americano*, asking the same question: "Did you see my sons in America?" (Capuana 40).

As Teti argues, in time the sense of nostalgia for the wholeness of fractured families is transformed from a paralyzing and delirious obsession to "hopes, memories, and narration that create a new identity" (*Pietre* 17). Writing about identity, Hall defines it "not as an essence, but as *positioning*," meaning that our identity is constantly produced by how we relate to our own personal histories ("Cultural Identity" 226). Maricchia and Grandpa Santi's positioning, in relation to emigration, changes as Santi is able to send money home, which they use to pay the debt for his and Stefano's trip to New York and to buy land. Thus, when Menu, after graduating from the fifth grade, decides to join his older brothers, Maricchia and Grandpa Santi accept his plan and let him depart with another Rabbato family.

As Grandpa Santi struggles to come to terms with his family's new reality of separation, he cannot help noticing how the *americani* in Rabbato are so different from the peasants that they were before emigrating:

Every time people came back to Rabbato from America, Grandpa Santi felt a growing satisfaction in seeing them almost transformed, having discarded all vestiges of the rough peasants they used to be. Almost all of them were self-

assured and proud of returning to Rabbato with a good amount of money, earned through work. They were clean. They spoke with assertiveness—and they had much to say—and took care of their businesses with a certain boldness, showing that they did not intend to be taken for a ride. (Capuana 60)

Here again, the great transformation happens through better-paid work, as Dr. Liardo comments to Grandpa Santi: “If peasants were well paid here, they would not leave for America” (Capuana 61). With more financial stability and a new-found awareness of their worth, the *americani* perform their activities with an assertiveness that ensures their voices are heard, even in places that traditionally kept them silent. As Giuseppe Barone reports, the *americani*’s new mentality and agency (highly influenced by the American “open society,” which was based on social and economic upward-mobility and the myth of the “self-made man”) generated a new dynamism and willingness to venture into private businesses that often boosted the local economy through innovation (213).

As the local economy improves, Rabbato’s urban plan undergoes deep transformations, and Dr. Liardo points them out to Grandpa Santi:

With American money, little by little, Rabbato is changing. As you may remember, here, there were two little huts made out of clay, and now there are two-story houses with balconies.... And look over there, more houses.... Here, Baccareddu opened a little café. There, Centonze’s wife and daughter opened a fabrics shop. Don Franco doesn’t like it because now he has competition.... Centonze goes to America and brings fabrics from there. Don Franco keeps saying that he brings only American overstock merchandise. So what? For people here, it is still a novelty and something they need. (Capuana 69, 70)

American money is transforming Rabbato and its economy. Shops are opening, and the nature of these particular businesses is very telling of an altered social reality. One is a café, which as a recreational place underlines that Rabbato people now have a little more money and time to spend in leisurely pastimes. The other is a sort of import-export shop, further evidencing the crisscrossing between the two continents.

After commenting on the village's and the church's ameliorations, the Rabbato pastor adds: "The faithful's generosity and charity are substituting for the government's stinginess. The money comes from far away, from America" (Capuana 69). The pastor's words highlight that Rabbato's economy has improved thanks to the remittance money coming from the Americas and the money the *americani* have invested locally. To those two sources, we must add a third one: exports of Sicilian foods to the Americas, which increased dramatically to satisfy the dietary needs of its citizens living there (Barone 215). These changes contrast with the government's minimal involvement in the economic development of the region. The contrast is even more dramatic and significant when considering that, in those years, southern emigrants' remittances amounted for more than half of Italy's balance of payments. With these extra revenues, the government was able to buy the raw materials necessary to sustain its industrial growth in Italy's northwestern region. The remittances also allowed the government to pay off its public debt, incurred during its disastrous colonial adventures, at an unexpectedly fast rate and to build reserves so as to stabilize the value of the *lira* in the international financial market (V. Castronovo 115).

Almost one hundred years after Capuana's rendition of Sicilian emigration to the New World, Crialesse takes up this theme as a subject for his film *Nuovomondo*. In Italian, *Nuovomondo* means "newworld." Crialesse links the adjective *nuovo* "new" and the noun *mondo*

“world” to create a new word that signifies a world that is not conceived as “new” merely when compared to Europe, the “old world.” Rather, *Nuovomondo* becomes a site per se, a utopia for the millions of immigrants that have poured into it since the nineteenth century. Crialese’s story, narrating Sicilian emigrants’ plight in entering America at the turn of the century, has as its referent the dramatic experience of millions of non-Western immigrants who have sought to enter Italy’s “golden door,” with differing degrees of success, in the last thirty years.

Immigration into Italy started at the end of the 1970s; yet only in 1986 did the Italian Parliament pass a law recognizing immigrant workers’ legal status (Cincinelli 101).

With few exceptions, such as *Pummarò (Tomato Sauce)* (1989) by Michele Placido, the cinema of the 1980s was not particularly interested in this new phenomenon. By 2005, though, it has captured the attention of both directors and producers, deeply affecting the Italian cinema production (Cincinelli 103). Italian migrant or diasporic films often narrate “stories of arrival and hope, of welcoming and rejection, of marginalization and integration, inspired by real events and Italian society’s contradictory attitude towards the immigrants” (Cincinelli 103).<sup>4</sup> Crialese’s film, released in 2006, is part of this *genre*, and its intent seems to be that of telling almost the “ur-story” of any emigration, with the oppressive power of the border, the human price, and the trauma it entails. Sandra Ponzanesi states that, in Italy, “films are intentionally made for a white Italian audience intrigued by the ‘other’ but not yet well equipped for its understanding” (qtd. in Bergahn and Sternberg 153).

This statement might explain Crialese’s choice of dealing with the historical event of Sicilian emigration as an acceptable *exemplum* for the Italian audience. Arguably, *Nuovomondo* might have worked as a steppingstone toward the making of *Terraferma (Dry Land)* (2011), which focuses, in contrast, on African immigrants’ struggle to make it to Sicily and their fears of

being deported or forced into a *centro di permanenza temporanea*, “a deportation center.” These centers were established in 1998 by the Turco-Napolitano decree and reinforced in 2002 by the Bossi-Fini decree, contemplating immediate deportation for all illegal immigrants (Cincinelli 105). The film’s postmodernity allows also for a pastiche of cinematographic styles, moving from a realistic and historically accurate representation of Sicilian emigrants’ trials and tribulations, in the ship and at Ellis Island, to the surreal images of the riches that are waiting for them in America. Through these surreal images, Crialese is able to show his characters’ unconscious desires, hopes, and dreams that, in the past as in the present, are the propelling force pushing emigrants to face the border’s repressive power.

Like Capuana, Crialese builds up his work on the tension between *here* and *there*, the old and the new world. However, Crialese’s film does not give any account of Sicilians’ lives *there*, which remains only a dream haunting the Mancuso family, the film’s protagonists. Unlike Capuana, who represents emigration as a tale of success, Crialese’s interest lies in portraying the sorrowful “splitting” of the southern emigrants between those who leave and those who stay behind—both of them creating a new hybrid identity. Bhabha defines the splitting of the colonial subject as “an intricate strategy of defense and differentiation; two contradictory and independent attitudes inhabit the *same place*” (“The Third”132). In my discussion, I want to explore Bhabha’s description of the colonial subject’s splitting by applying the image to the Sicilians as a people. In this new context, the emigrants’ “splitting” becomes “a strategy of defense” from their oppressive reality in their home villages and “of differentiation” between those who decide to migrate and those who decide not to. Because in post-unification Italy the *Mezzogiorno* is constructed, both politically and geographically, as a homogeneous region with its own

characteristics that prevent progress, it becomes the *place* that generates the two independent and contradictory attitudes of “defense” and “differentiation” portrayed in the film.

In *Golden Door*, Crialeso offers his spectators only a sketch of the protagonist family, contrary to Capuana, who describes his family in detail. We know it is made up of a widower father, Salvatore, his two sons, and his mother. We know nothing about their house, their occupation, or how and when Salvatore’s wife died. The characters’ significance lies in their testimonial power to the migration experience, which is a fragment of their lives. Consequently, they embody the passage from the Old to the New World, which entails their cognitive and epistemological transformation. As Martin Scorsese asserts in his introduction to *Golden Door*: “the film has a feeling of an epic journey, but it is seen through the perspective of the people who are making that journey. It is through their eyes, through their point of view.”

Thus, the story is told from the point of view of those who live marginalized, individual, and fragmented existences, similar to the lives of many others (Virga 73). As Anita Virga observes, the film displays characteristics that are typical of postcolonial cinema:

These are films that do not privilege a single history or central narrative. They move toward margins and space between, proliferating stories and identities, which become nomadic rather than teleological. What remains in this unframing of histories is a political commitment to visualizing what has been invisible, untold or discarded, opening the frame or creating those that are not finite or conclusive. To unframe histories is to undo official and dominator accounts that exclude or marginalize subjects, creating gender, racial, ethnic, and linguistic alterities. (Ponzanesi and Waller 12)

In *Golden Door*, the Mancusos' story is intertwined with other "nomadic" stories, like that of Rosa and Rita, and above all that of Lucy, an unusual, English, bourgeois woman travelling by herself in third-class. As with the Mancusos, the viewer gets to know only a fragment of her life, which, like that of the other characters, is "not finite or conclusive." As a woman, emigrating by herself with no money or passport, Lucy is a marginalized subject, despite her nationality and social class. Thus, the film represents the story of the characters' fragmented, nomadic, and peripheral existence as they are trying to enter the New World, by creating working alliances of solidarity among them.

Just like Capuana's novel, the film begins with images of *here* that craft a backdrop on which *there* is constructed in a binary opposition. The world of *here* is made up of ancient, superstitious beliefs, where magic and religion intersects and overlaps, as the Mancusos' names demonstrate. In Italian, Salvatore means "the one who saves," evoking Christ; his sons' names are Angelo (Angel) and Pietro (Peter, the rock on which Christ built His church). His mother's name is Fortunata (Lucky), and she is the village healer. In contrast, the world of *there* is mostly made of surreal images, like those in the three postcards that Rita and Rosa received from the *emigrazionista* Don Ercole, who found husbands for them in America. The postcards represent a giant hen, a huge onion on a wheelbarrow, and a money tree and are a reminder that America's strong lure was based on images of success and abundance.

In contrast to Capuana, though, who uses the images of abundance to build up his argument in favor of emigration, Crialesi draws attention to their artificiality and exploitative power. Upon looking at those pictures, Rita suffered a *schianto*, a "curse," which left her mute and with a serpent in her abdomen. The postcards give a representation of nature that, in its creative power, rivals God just like the serpent did in the Garden of Eden. As a result, Rita is

cursed, and Fortunata heals her by asking Pietro to destroy the pictures. Pietro, instead, shows them to his father and Angelo, as they reach a statue of Christ on top of a rocky hill, carrying stones in their mouths as sign of devotion. The reason for their personal sacrifice is to ask God for discernment on whether or not to leave for America. Salvatore takes the postcards as an unequivocal sign that they must leave. Those pictures' images of abundance and fortune linger in his subconscious, creating dreamlike images of America that will haunt him for the rest of the film. In these opening scenes, the postcards' surreal nature contrasts with Sicily's stony, unfruitful, and wind-stricken nature that is too old and no longer able to produce life, making emigration a logical and necessary step to take. This latter scene, portraying Sicily's dry and unfruitful soil, is a reminder that Sicily's land, just like its people, has been severely exploited through the centuries, to the point of becoming barren<sup>5</sup> (Armiero 239).

As Fortunata is reluctantly closing her house to leave with her son, she has a dramatic vision of Salvatore's identical twin, who left for America when Pietro was born. In her vision, Salvatore's twin brother is still a boy, and standing at the door he asks her: "Where are you going, Mom?" She answers: "I am coming to look for you, you renegade child! Your brother can no longer live without you." Then Salvatore as a child appears. Joining his brother, Salvatore reproaches him: "You left me alone. I want to see the new land too." The twin brother then turns to his mother: "The poor thing, can he come too?" Fortunata comforts him: "I am bringing him to you." Fortunata's role in the film is, thus, that of leading Salvatore to America to reunite him with his twin brother. As with Beatrix and Dante, she will lead Salvatore through an identity-formation journey, at the end of which, she will go back to Italy, while the rest of the family will try to make it in the new land.



Unlike Dante, though, for Salvatore salvation is not guaranteed, as the film ends at Ellis Island, Paradise's border. Margherita Heyer-Caput has already highlighted the Dantesque feeling of the Mancusos' journey in the steerage of a steamship with the allusive name of "Dante" (272). Moreover, in Latin etymology the names Beatrice ("Beatrix") and Fortunata have similar connotations; Beatrice means "the one who makes you *beatus*," that is, beatified or blessed, while Fortunata is "the one who makes you prosperous." After all, it is in the postcards that Fortunata takes away from Rita, that Salvatore finds the "sign" he was looking for to initiate the trip to America and find his luck. In this way, Fortunata makes sure he crosses the Atlantic to join his identical twin, in a country that presumably is more generous and plentiful than Sicily. I am particularly intrigued by the above scene because of the presence of Salvatore's identical twin, Salvatore's "double," as the one who emigrates, abandoning his family.

Yet, he is puzzled by and anxious about his mother's decision to leave, as if he felt deserted by her: "Where are you going, Mom?" Salvatore's twin's words seem to indicate the impossibility for those who leave to forget those who were left behind, and in their separation, the two parts keep haunting each other. The above conversation displays what Teti defines as the process of doubling that emigration necessary entails:

The doubles and shadows of those who left help define, in a problematic way, the identity of those who stayed behind. Notoriously, upon returning, emigrants often voiced their complaints and disappointments about the local reality, which bitterly angered those who remained. Besides the rhetoric of emigration as a tale of success, there is the rhetoric of those who stayed behind. The misunderstandings, between those who left and those who did not, are rooted in a false conception of identity as a monolithic, never-changing block of granite to be preserved or

“transferred,” in all its integrity, “purity” and “originality.” In reality, those who leave and those who stay desperately need each other, even if their relation is problematized by their mutual misunderstandings and warped images of each other; thus, for them life is always *elsewhere*. (*Pietre* 17, italics mine)

Unlike Capuana, Teti describes a friction, based on misunderstandings, between those who left and those who remained, even if their identities were eventually mutually modified. Whereas the returning emigrants, the *americani*, clung to their financial success and to their newly-acquired hybrid identity, those who remained held to their sense of original and pure identity. Ultimately, this non-dialectical divide gives them a perception not only of separation, but also of incompleteness, to which Fortunata’s words testify: “Your brother can no longer live without you.” Hence, Salvatore’s restlessness and his need to look for life “elsewhere.”

“Elsewhere,” in Derrida’s terminology, “means thought springing from the moment you cross a border,” as Derrida explains in the short film *Elsewhere* (1999). Elsewhere is thus the awareness of the emigrant’s displacement, which is both geographical and emotional, so much that “within yourself you have elsewhere, and that is what elsewhere means: elsewhere is here” (Derrida, *Elsewhere*). In other words, elsewhere is a trait that the emigrant takes on once s/he crosses the border and comes to terms with a new and different reality. Elsewhere, then, becomes a living condition of not belonging (neither *here* nor *there*), because belonging itself is displaced and deferred, just like any other representation of reality. Nonetheless, as Teti points out, elsewhere is a living condition also for those who stay behind, forever haunted by the images of the “beyond” as well as by the nostalgic search for their doubles.

In the film, the image of the emigrants’ “doubling” takes front stage in the scene when the steamship departs from the dock. In an astounding crane shot, the camera looks down upon

the third-class passengers as they are boarding and as their friends and relatives are gathered on the dock to see them off. The frame is made up of “a speechless, anonymous mass of dark heads, hats, and cloaks. Slowly, a schism on the diagonal appears on the right side and the crowd and the shot gradually split, a cell duplicating itself, with unseen gazes uniting for the last time those who embrace the unknown and those who cling to the known” (Hayer-Caput 278). Criales commented on this scene with the following words: “this image, this metaphor was my point of departure when I began to write my script. This moment should look as if the earth were dividing. The distance between ship and harbor is like a wound that opens up. A part of culture and tradition goes away, another part remains behind” (qtd. in Hayer-Caput 278). The people on the dock seem paralyzed by an over-powering force that they are unable to escape. Although their arrival at the dock was driven by their own free choice, either to stay or leave, their paralysis seems to indicate that ultimately their splitting was part of a larger design and that a (political) will bigger than theirs was at work.

The image of an open wound is a very powerful reminder of the North-South divide that, in the end, also caused the separation of Sicilians, who split like “a cell duplicating itself,” as happened to Salvatore and his identical twin. Although between 1881 and 1913 Italian industrial production increased by a staggering annual rate of 4.2%, during almost the same period (1901-1914), 28% of Italian Southerners emigrated to the Americas (Daniele, Malanima 72; Barone 201). Paradoxically, as I noted above, that increase in industrial production was sustained also by Southern workers’ remittance money, even if the South did not benefit from the government’s industrial development plans. In this separation, those who remained behind held to the idea of their identity being pure and original, or to what Lavie and Swedenburg refer to as identity-as-essence (13). In contrast, the diasporic Italians had to reach the border, which again, according to

Gloria Anzaldúa, is “an open wound where the Third World grates against the First and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to ... a border culture” (2-3).

In the border culture, diasporic people’s identities become hyphenated, or what Lavie and Swedenburg define as identity-as-conjuncture, combining two conjunct identities such as Italian-American (13). This cultural operation is not different from that of Fortunata’s, who leaves her house for the only purpose of reuniting her twin sons once again. As Lavie and Swedenburg note, “the hyphen becomes the third time-space”:

Borders and diasporas are phenomena that blow up—both enlarge and explode—the hyphen.... Avoiding the dual axes of migration between the distinct territorial entities, the hyphen becomes the third time-space. A sense of time created in the interstices between “non-synchronic fragments and essentialist nostalgia.” (16)

Thus, in their definition, Lavie and Swedenburg expand on Bhabha’s notion of “third space” to include also time. The hyphenated identity is created not only in space, but also through a diachronic development of time that forces the individual to move, fragment by fragment, from “essentialist nostalgia” to hybridity.

Like Capuana’s novel, Crialesi’s film explores the formation of emigrants’ unstable identity, no longer able to claim an originary authenticity and purity. This process, producing the shifting of their identities, takes place already in the steamship travelling between the two Atlantic coasts. Consequently, the ship, as the in-between space, becomes the border between two nations and continents as well as between the past and the present, the old and the new (Bhabha *Location* 1). Writing about the black diaspora, Paul Gilroy suggests that ships: “were the living means by which the points within that Atlantic world were joined. They were mobile

elements that stood for the shifting spaces in between the fixed places that they connected” (*Black* 16). What I find very suggestive in Gilroy’s words is the notion that the ships were “living means.” I would argue that the “living” refers to both the passengers, in their physicality, and the passengers’ cognitive growth, as the latter is an indispensable and constituting element of any form of life. Their cognitive development was determined by their forced, communal living experiences of resistance and adaptation. On the *Dante*, the passengers experience their growth first with what Bhabha describes as the “unhomeliness,” which is “the rite of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiation” (*Location* 9). In this unhomeliness condition, the borders between the private and the public, the home and the world, become imprecise and confused.

The steerage becomes the site where passengers learn to live their unhomeliness by trying to meet their biological needs in a totally unfamiliar reality. They sleep in bunkbeds, crammed together in an area too small to fit them all. Men must sleep separate from women, even if they are married. Secondly, the *Dante* passengers begin to acquire a national consciousness, probably for the first time. As Salvatore lies in his bunk bed, he introduces himself to the other men around him: “Salvatore Mancuso from Pietralia.” Here it is important to notice that the Italian word “pietra” means “stone”; hence, the word Pietralia brings back the image of the island’s stony and barren soil. The other men, who like Salvatore are lying in their own beds, follow Salvatore’s example. As he hears all the different places his comrades come from, he states: “I have never slept with so many foreigners.” But someone corrects him: “Foreigners? We are all Italians.” Furthermore, the passengers encounter modernity through Lucy who, belonging to a higher social class and to a more modern country, stands out among the other emigrants in the steerage. As Rita offers her some garlic, for its presumed health benefit, she turns it down, remarking that it smells bad. When Salvatore cuts one of her locks, “so we will always find each

other,” she declares her deep skepticism: “I do not believe in superstitions.” Moreover, it is Lucy who asks a surprised Salvatore to marry her, thus subverting the traditional roles. More importantly, and unlike Salvatore, she is literate and she is the one filling out the necessary marriage forms to get married at Ellis Island.

Going back to Gilroy’s definition of the “middle passage” ships, he construes them as cultural and political units, ultimately creating and defining modernity (*Black* 17). Mass migrations are also part of modernity and involve the trading of human beings as well. By placing Italian migration alongside the black diaspora, rooted in slavery, I do not intend to equalize the two experiences, which would be historically and ethically wrong. Rather, I merely want to bring the creation of the in-between space to bear on the modernity that, starting from the middle of the nineteenth century, sustained periods of mass migrations in the West and colonial expansion in the East (Bhabha *Location* 139). In Sicily, the trading of human beings was in the *galantuomini*’s hands, who created the “padrone system,”<sup>6</sup> involving many forms of abuse. Usury was probably the most heinous and prevalent form of exploitation; borrowing money this way was the only means for the rural masses to finance their trips, as their poverty kept them away from legitimate credit circuits. This abusive enterprise reached new peaks in 1901, when the government delegated to local authorities the complete administration of emigration: the issuing of passports and health certificates, the purchase and selling of properties as well as of tickets, and so forth. Then, the *galantuomini* were able to add phony taxes on each needed document and even to charge extra for expediency (Barone 209).

On the *Dante*, the *galantuomini*’s power is represented by the *emigrazionista* Don Ercole, who profits from finding wives for Italians living in the States. Don Ercole sees in Lucy the possibility for a profitable transaction, as she, as a woman, cannot enter the U.S. without a

husband. Nonetheless, Lucy turns down all his offers, even from rich men, having already decided to ask Salvatore to marry her. How can we make sense of Lucy's decision to marry Salvatore? To answer this question, I bring into my discussion Minh-ha Trinh's theorization that:

The hyphenated condition certainly does not limit itself to a duality between two cultural heritages. It leads, on the one hand, to an active ... consciousness of "root value" ... and on the other hand, to a heightened awareness of other "minority" sensitivities ... and of necessity for new alliances. (159)

The ship's in-between-ness provides a territory wherein new sensitivities to other minorities' oppressive status become grounds for the negotiation of differences based on class, gender, and nationality, triggering the creation of new alliances, like the one between Salvatore and Lucy. Lucy does not disavow the "root value" of her modern independence; however, she knows that to enter America she needs a husband, hence her alliance, through marriage, with Salvatore. Ultimately Lucy prefers Salvatore because, in his minority status, he cannot claim more than just an alliance with her—as she tells him: "I am not marrying you for love," making it clear that he is only a means to an end. Conversely, Don Ercole's men could claim more from her because of their higher social status. As Hayer-Caput observes, Lucy illuminates Salvatore, who misunderstands her name and calls her Luce, "light"; in turn, Salvatore "saves" her (272), thus creating a strong alliance.

At Ellis Island, emigrants acquire also the double-ness of their own consciousness, as described earlier in my discussion. Salvatore's double consciousness starts to emerge while he is taking his intelligence test, required by all immigrants arriving at Ellis Island in order to determine whether they are fit to cross the border. During his tests, he is asked:

“Pretend you are on a boat in the middle of a huge storm with two sacks: one is full of bread, the other of gold. Which sack would you throw out, to save your life?”

“Why should I throw one out? I cannot throw out gold. Bread? I would eat the bread and keep the gold. Yes, I would not throw out any sack.”

Salvatore’s answer underlines his totally different hermeneutics, rooted in harsh destitution that does not allow him even to imagine throwing anything away; hence, his answer is to keep both sacks. After giving his answer, he looks at the examiner and the translator with anxiety, mixed with obsequiousness, and asks a few times, “*E’ giusto?*” (“Is it right?”). While asking, Salvatore is trying to find an answer from the two men’s facial expressions. Not finding it, the look on his face becomes apprehensive, demonstrating that he no longer trusts his own cognitive and moral compass to navigate the new land he is about to enter. What was right *there*, in Sicily, may not be right *here*, and this is not just a matter of cultural relativism. It is a much deeper concern, because Salvatore, in his eager obsequiousness, recognizes that the man in front of him, who is writing down all his answers, will judge his decision-making process using his own “eye” and “tape.” It will be up to this man to decide whether Salvatore’s reasoning is right and thus to allow him to enter the Promised Land.

The Mancusos’ journey takes place later in time than that of the Lamannas, when America was no longer waiting to be “taken, broken into, and worked,” by Italian Southerners. Crialesse’s film takes us to the years after 1917, which is the year that the United States Congress passed the Immigration Act, “designed to deny access to those deemed unfit to mix with the Anglican race” (Hayer-Caput 274). The Immigration Act was the U.S. government’s first attempt to curtail immigration significantly. When that failed, the National Origins Quota Law



was passed to prevent immigration to the United States from Southern Europe, Asia, and Africa. This anti-immigration legislation was inspired by the principles of eugenics that Madison Grant had advocated in his influential book, *The Passing of the Great Race*, and whose overarching goal was the preservation of Anglo-Saxon genetic purity and economic strength (Hayer-Caput 274-75).

At Ellis Island, Lucy is the only representative of the Anglo-Saxon race and, as she easily completes her intelligence test, she confesses her surprise to her examiner:

“May I ask? I thought you were looking for illnesses and contagious diseases.”

“Unfortunately, it has been scientifically proven that lack of intelligence is genetically inherited, and it is, thus, contagious, in a way. We are preventing below-average intelligence people from mixing with our citizens.”

“What a modern vision!”

Lucy’s last comment significantly contrasts with her own condition as a single woman who is not allowed in the United States alone, thus forcing her to live with her double subalternity: as a woman and unmarried. As she utters “What a modern vision,” the non-diegetic Nina Simone song *Feelin’ Good* fills the scene. Sound is non-diegetic in a film when “it is represented as coming from a source outside the story world” (Bordwell and Thompson 279). As such, Simone’s song breaks into the story from the margins, representing her as an outsider both cinematically and socially. Her non-diegetic, lingering song and presence creates an ironic comment on the scene.

As Simone sings: “Fish in the sea, you know how I feel; river running free, you know how I feel; blossom on the tree, you know how I feel; it’s a new dawn, it’s a new day, it’s a new life for me, and I’m feelin’ good,” we see immigrants marching through the different levels of

the Ellis Island building under the guards' panoptical view. Thus, the contrasts multiply. The bucolic scene described by Simone's words ironically contrasts with the super-modern, grayish structure the immigrants walk through. By her own voice, Simone herself is brought into the film, as a black woman and civil rights activist, whose words "I'm feelin' good," may be read as ambivalent, as she herself would have never been able to cross this border. Arguably, Simone's presence also brings to the fore American racial discourse, where Italians' skin color, usually lighter than African-Americans', was no guarantee of admission amidst the privileged white race. Italians tended to occupy the in-between space of the two races, not fully white and not fully black, especially in the Southern states, where cases of the lynching of Italians were reported at the turn of the century (Wong 133).

When Lucy is medically examined in the infirmary, her fluency in the English language and her accent gives her away as an English woman. The examining nurse remarks: "It is highly unusual for an English woman to travel with Italians. You will be questioned about it." The nurse's observation is prescriptive rather than descriptive, underlining not so much the exceptionality of an Englishwoman traveling with Italians, as the impropriety of it. Thus the need for Ellis Island immigration officers to question Lucy. It is impossible not to think that, at the root of the nurse's uneasiness about the nationality of Lucy's travel companions is the fear of miscegenation: Italian blood forever tainting the Anglo-Saxon race's purity. The preservation of the Anglo-Saxon race's purity was actually the reason for testing the immigrants' intelligence, especially when it came to Italians, who were by then already considered to be "ignorant, criminals, illiterates, and all around undesirable" (Wong 121).

Unlike her son, Fortunata is not eager to please the examiner, and she openly challenges him and his epistemology. When called to sit at her intelligence test, she refuses to take it and asks the examiner:

“What do you want from us.”

“Us whom?”

“All of us, Christians, who come from the Old World.”

“We want to make sure that you folks from the Old World are fit to come to the New World.”

“Who do you think you are? God? Who can decide who is fit and who is not to enter your world.”

“If you want to enter our world, you must obey our rules; otherwise we will send you back home.”

Fortunata clearly refuses the exclusionary logic and rules proposed by the examiner. When she is threatened with repatriation, she falls silent for the first time, perhaps taking the threat as her only hope to go back to Sicily. As the Immigration Officers refuse entrance to Fortunata because she is “feeble of mind” and to Pietro because of his mutism, Salvatore is asked what he wants to do: go back with them or continue with the immigration process.

Then, Salvatore challenges the verdict, underscoring its irrationality:

I don’t understand. What is the problem? What trouble can they cause? With all this land that needs to be worked. If my son cannot talk, he cannot complain.

Much better for all of us! My mother talks too much, but I will not let her leave the house. We came so far, and now you want to separate us.

Fortunata, though, stops him just by looking into his eyes with an imploring expression in her face, without offering a word. At that point, Pietro speaks for the first time, reporting her wish to go back to her home and for them to stay. Fortunata's duty has come to completion; she has brought Salvatore to America, as promised to his twin brother, and has helped him to find a new prosperity, as suggested by her grandson's new-found ability to talk.

As Virga observes, Fortunata is the real point of resistance to Ellis Island's efficiently modern and aseptic authority. Through her, the film debunks its hierarchical system that privileged modernity's scientific discourse, supporting a eugenics-based race discrimination (77-78). Yet, appropriating Foucault's idea that resistance is always within power and expanding on it, Russ Castronovo writes that the border sets up a continually shifting interplay between suppression and resistance: "There is always some complicity between power and resistance" (203). Complicity implies that power and resistance work together for the same goal. Despite her resistance to Ellis Island's modernity, Fortunata eventually collaborates with the examiner's power of exclusion, which comes to fruition at the end. As Fortuna is repatriated, the Mancusos, Lucy, and the other immigrants, find themselves swimming in a river of milk.

To understand the river's symbolic significance, I turn to Dimitri Chimenti, who underscores how Crialese's films tend to be characterized by the intersection of two thematic elements. The first is the coming together of a "community that gets immunized by rejecting the alien agent," as in Fortunata's case (130). The second is the regeneration and rebirth process, which usually takes place in an aquatic space. The river of milk becomes that space for those who are allowed access to the New World, and the Mancusos and Lucy are no exceptions. As they swim in the milk, together with the other immigrants, Lucy takes the lead, as the others seem lost and unable to choose a direction. Lucy's gaze is, instead, fixed beyond the camera,

indicating a possible direction for everyone to take. Then, she comes out of our field of vision and everyone follows her (132). Watching Lucy's fixed gaze, beyond the camera, on something that is definitely leading her, one has the impression that the something might be "the lamp beside the golden door" that the Statue of Liberty "lifts" to "the wretched" arriving from "the ancient lands."

It would seem, thus, that the immigrants have successfully made it to their own regeneration and rebirth beyond Ellis Island's border. However, Simone's non-diegetic singing of *Sinnerman* seems to disavow that possibility not only by bringing her back to mind, as a black woman living under double oppression, but also by the song's desperate lyrics:

Oh, sinnerman, where are you gonna run to?... I run to the rock ... please hide me, Lord.... But the rock cried out, I cannot hide you ... so I run to the river, it was bleeding. I run to the sea, it was bleeding ... So I run to the river, it was boilin'. I run to the sea, it was boilin' ... So I run to the Lord, please hide me, Lord. Don't you see me prayin' ... But the Lord said, go to the devil ...

The last words, "but the Lord said, go to the devil," are the climax of the most atrociously physical and spiritual desolation in front of utter rejection, even from God. As the film ends with this powerful scene, I, as a viewer, find myself in agreement with Castronovo's theorization that too often any resistance to border oppression is only a momentary victory, followed by new national retrenchment, through which repressive powers can and do reaffirm themselves (204). Today's "sea tragedies," marked by hundreds of immigrants who almost weekly lose their lives trying to cross the Ionic Sea to reach the Italian coasts from Africa, are only a bitter reminder of the correctness and relevance of Castronovo's notion.

## Conclusion

Both Capuana and Crialese focus on the experience of Sicilian emigrants' journey to America during the Great Wave of immigration in the years 1894-1920. In both works, the protagonist families' stories are pushed forward by a tension between *here*, Sicily, and *there*, America. The novel frames Sicilians' success *there* in order to expose and resist much of the race discourse present in Italy at this time, which defined Italian Southerners as inferior and doomed to fail. In contrast, the film represents *there* only through surreal images that construct America as the land of plenty, which, though, cannot be reached because of the border's almost impenetrability. Accordingly, the film's ambiguous and surreal ending leaves the viewer doubting that the Mancusos' future will be plentiful or their emigration a tale of success, as it was for the Lamannas.

The film's postmodernity stresses the emigrants' fragmented lives and realities, not dissimilar from those who, since the 1980s, have been immigrating to Italy, where too often, only their material fragments, their clothing or corpses, come ashore. The harsh reality of the predicament for today's immigrants to Italy makes it impossible for Crialese to show emigration as a tale of success. Crialese focuses, thus, on the alliances through race, gender, and class that the Mancusos create in order to try to cross a segregating border. The border is one of the film's *fulcra*, and as such, it is the site where forces of inclusiveness and rejection, as well as oppression and resistance, take form, becoming a terrain that emigrants must learn to navigate. The border, though, is also the site of the wound that forever separates those who leave from those who do not, splitting them from their doubles. Sicilian emigrants' "doubling" experience entails their condition of constantly living "elsewhere," neither fully *here* nor fully *there*.

**Historical Traumas and Exile in Luigi Pirandello's "*L'altro figlio*" ("The Other Son") and the Taviani Brothers' *Kaos (Chaos)* (1984)**

Unlike Capuana, Pirandello represents emigration as historical trauma<sup>7</sup> rooted in Italy's unification by Garibaldi and his "Red Shirts." Historical traumas relate to particular historical events, involving losses of both the lives and the cultures of the affected people (LaCapra 49). Trauma narratives center on the reconstruction of and recuperation from the traumatic event through accounts of the traumatized, who need to tell their experiences in order to make them real both for them and for the community (Tal 137). In Pirandello's story, Farnia's new doctor sets out to discover Maragrazia's multiple personal traumas, which are embedded in Italy's history. As a trauma text, the story is a way to reconstruct and recover historical memories, which have been neglected or suppressed by post-unification Italian mainstream culture and rhetoric. Writing about historical trauma, Cathy Caruth states that the center of trauma's pathology lies in the patient's history.

Hence, trauma is a symptom rooted in the unconscious as well as in history, as Caruth states: "the traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess" (5). My contention is that the story "L'altro figlio" displays Pirandello's perception that post-unification, Sicilian rural masses were not allowed to entirely possess their own history. One of the main reasons a traumatized individual needs to tell her story is to take control of the past by creating her own version of the events, which is exactly what Pirandello sets out to do in his story (Tal 132). In order to "right" national history, Pirandello metaphorically inscribes post-unification Sicily's historical trauma in the personal traumas of the story's protagonist, Maragrazia, her husband, and her son, Rocco.

Pirandello's rhetorical move is a codified narrative strategy in trauma literature, as traditional languages cannot adequately convey the horror of the survivors' experiences, as Tal

comments: “As it is spoken by survivors, the traumatic experience is re-inscribed as metaphor” (16). I would contend that Pirandello’s choice of writing about Italy’s historical trauma through metaphors was also a necessary move because of post-unification Italy’s political and cultural climate, as I have already discussed (see Chapter 2). The story begins with a question: “Is Ninfarosa home?” Ninfarosa, or in English “Nymphrose,” is a fictitious and allusive name. In Greek mythology, nymphs are minor goddesses, famous for being perennially young, beautiful, and consequently the natural target of men’s and mythological creatures’ sexual desires. The name points to the woman’s young and provocative beauty “with dark hair and skin, with black, shining eyes, red lips and a svelte body radiating a content pride. On her full breasts, she had a red scarf and gold rings hanging on her ears” (Pirandello 928).

For Maragrazia, the person looking for her, though, Ninfarosa’s real seductive power is her literacy, her ability to write letters to Maragrazia’s sons in America. Just like Ninfarosa, the name Maragrazia is also fictitious and highly allusive to “Mala Grazia,” or in English “Evil Grace”—carrying an ominous fate. As Maragrazia drops herself down on the steps of Ninfarosa’s house to wait for her, the narrator describes her in detail:

The houses’ front steps are her natural seats ... there sitting down, she would fall asleep or would weep in silence.... She looked like a heap of greasy and dirty rags. Her clothes, always the same, winter or summer, were torn apart, colorless and drenched with her sweat’s smell and the street dirt. Her yellow face had a net of wrinkles, and her eyelids were bleeding due to her excessive weeping. Between her wrinkles and her eyelids, one could see her light eyes that seem far away and almost lost in a childhood without memories.... Often some flies would stick to her skin, but distracted by her sorrow, she did not even feel them. (Pirandello 926)



Maragrazia has lost the ability to take care of herself and, as a result, she has also lost all human traits, becoming a heap of dirt and grease on which flies become stuck. The reason for her state of despair and destitution is her sons' emigration to America: "It has been fourteen years since they left for America. They promised they would come back after four or five years, but they made money out there, especially the eldest. So they forgot about their old mother" (Pirandello 927).

Maragrazia cannot accept this separation, and every time a group of people from her own village, Farnia, leaves for America, "she follows the group for a while, looking in the eyes of the young emigrants, who are pretending to be happy to suffocate the commotion and numb the sorrow of the relatives who are accompanying them" (Pirandello 927). She scrutinizes them to see to whom she can entrust the letter that Ninfarosa has written for her. For fourteen years, Maragrazia has repeated the same actions: having Ninfarosa write a letter and, then, finding a person with whom to entrust its delivery. The letter that she dictates to Ninfarosa follows the same script: "Dear Sons, my eyes can no longer weep because they are burned with tears and wanting to see you for the very last time" (Pirandello 930) Her inability to take care of herself in any meaningful way, her being lost as if "in a childhood without memories," and her obsessively repetitive behavior in writing letters to her sons are all characteristics that point to trauma.

As Laurie Vickroy writes:

Trauma disrupts our notions of fixed personality traits and draws attention to reactive behavior. Often victims separate or dissociate themselves from physical and emotional self-awareness to avoid pain. Splitting off from one's body or awareness can reduce the victim's immediate sense of violation and help the person to endure and survive the situation. (*Reading 8*)

What I find intriguing here is the idea that a trauma survivor needs to split off from her own body or awareness—hence, Maragrazia’s apparent apathy about her filthy living conditions and the flies on her skin. In such splitting, the trauma survivor acts in a very similar way to the subaltern occupying the “third space.” Ultimately, trauma is an experience of displacement and dislocation as well, although with different results. Whereas in the “third space,” a new hybrid identity is created, in the case of a trauma, the splitting off of the personality leads only to “dysphoria and a numbness that takes the meaning out of life and makes it hard to relate to other people” (Tal 135).

In her traumatic experience and existence, due in part to her sons’ departure, Maragrazia becomes a metaphor for Sicily, the region most affected by emigration. Unlike the Pirandello story, where the plot develops over a few days and in many locations, in the Tavianis’ film rendition,<sup>8</sup> Maragrazia’s trauma is narrated only in one day and in one location: the dirt road that takes the new emigrants away by carriage. The Tavianis’ choice of the unity of place and time creates a tightened and pressing rhythm, dramatizing the epiphany of Maragrazia’s trauma and the doctor’s involvement in it. In these first scenes, however, the most significant difference between the text and the film lies in the script of the letter:

Dear Sons, it is your mother who, from this land of tears, is writing to you in your beautiful land of gold. Today, it is fourteen years since you departed, leaving me alone and waiting for you all this time. Next week, another group of wretched people will leave for America, and among them I will find a good Christian to entrust the letter.

By making a comparison between *here*, the land of tears, and *there*, the land of beauty and gold, the Tavianis are describing America as a viable and concrete form of escape for Sicilian emigrants.

As Millicent observes:

Politically, economically, and imaginatively, it is the “*terra d'oro*” (land of gold) that feeds and perpetuates the “*terra del pianto*” (the land of tears). Providing the alternative that then defines Sicily as its reactionary polar opposite ... emigration leaves Sicily's fields untended, her political system unreformed, and her collective fantasy alone to nurse its wounds. The “*terra di pianto*” and “*terra d'oro*” live in symbiosis, determining not only how the Sicilians envision their land but how those newly settled in America must sustain their half of the myth. (200)

Here again, America is constructed on the powerful image of a “land of gold,” not dissimilar in rhetoric from the surreal images of Crialesse's film, like that of the money tree. Rightly, Millicent observes that the two images “live in symbiosis,” with one needing the other to survive. The depiction of America as the “land of gold” is necessary above all for the people who left everything behind to cross the Atlantic. They need to keep that image alive, otherwise all their sacrifices would be useless. For the same reason, the emigrants are also as invested in perpetuating the oppositional image of Sicily as the “land of tears,” meaning a land of utter suffering.

In 1984, when the film was released, reference to Sicily as the “land of tears” had acquired a new meaning, as Sicily was at the time living through the most brutal, bloodiest, and most traumatizing of Mafia families' wars. During the years 1979-1986, the Corleonese family

singlehandedly transformed the Sicilian Mafia's structure from a multi-family criminal organization to a single-family one, by physically eliminating its competitors (Calabrò 23). In those years, Sicily witnessed a level of violence with no precedent; five hundred people were killed and five hundred went missing in Palermo alone, with approximately three thousand lost in the whole island.<sup>9</sup> The list of victims included not only *Mafiosi*, but also "clean" politicians, policemen, judges, and bystanders, the collateral damage in any war. Totò Riina, the ruthless head of the Corleoneses, described this war's victims with the following words: "They all became like tunas ... and we killed them ... there was a *mattanza* (killing of tuna)" (qtd. in Calabrò 12).

Hence, these years were named *gli anni della mattanza* "the years of the killings," which chronologically followed *gli anni di piombo*, "the leaden years" (1970-1980), when the Italian state found itself under siege by right- and left-wing terrorism. For those ten years, the state had to focus its attention and employ its time and resources on the terrorist front, leaving too much room for *Cosa Nostra* to operate. Only by the end of 1982 could the state start to organize its response to this new wave of violence, through special laws and special police corps. Even then, its response was hesitant and ambiguous, and because many of its politicians were also in bed with Mafia leaders, the war continued well into the early 1990s (Calabrò 119, 234). In the Tavianis' filmic rendition, Pirandello's Sicily is necessarily intertwined with the Sicily of "the years of the killings."

Going back to the story, we find Maragrazia, waiting for Ninfarosa to let her in her house while listening to neighbors talking about the next group of emigrants from Farnia, who are ready to leave the following day:

“Saro Scoma is leaving,” one woman was saying, “He is leaving his wife and three children.” “Vito Scordia,” another woman added, “is leaving five children and a pregnant wife.” “Is it true that Carmine Ronca,” a third woman inquired, “is going to take with him his twelve-year old son who has been working at the sulphur mine for some time now? Oh, goodness, at least he should leave the son with his mother; otherwise, how will she survive?” “What a disaster!” a fourth woman was lamenting. “Yesterday, I heard Nunzia Ligreci crying all night long! Her son just came back from serving in the army and now he wants to leave too!” Upon hearing this news, Maragrazia covered her mouth with her shawl, not to start weeping again. (Pirandello 927)

America is a distant yet extremely disruptive presence in the lives of Farnia’s people. Not only have Maragrazia’s sons abandoned their mother, almost all men in the village seem to be doing the same. Men are described as leaving their children and pregnant wives behind, without the financial means to survive.

Farnia has no *Coda-pelata*, recounting the New World’s wonders to the local people. Actually, Farnia has neither the presence of the *americani* nor their money, which in Capuana’s novel created affluence in the village. Conversely, in the film, America is described as a mistress one may spend some enjoyable time with, but never marry, as a father reminds his son who is getting ready to leave: “Play the man with women, but don’t marry a foreigner” (Millicent 202). America is represented as that which can be possessed for personal enjoyment, like the foreign women the father suggests his son “play the man” with, but it is not trustworthy enough to have an ever-lasting relationship. By gendering America as a female and constructing the emigrants as “the men,” the film, unlike the short story, is empowering Sicilian immigrants with the agency to

possess and enjoy the New World, further suggesting America's availability for their own personal use.

In the story, trauma is a collective experience, as the whole village is touched by it. America offers no redemption for the Sicilian rural masses. In Farnia, even the letters—which in Rabbato helped to keep people in touch despite the ocean between them—have only negative connotations:

“If I were king,” he said and spat, “if I were king, I would not let any letter arrive here, at Farnia, from there.”

“Well said, Jaco Spina!” one of the neighbors exclaimed. “And how would mothers and wives survive?”

The old man grumbled, spitting on the ground. “Their mothers have to work like servants, and their wives become old before they can see them again. Why don't they write about the problems they find there? They write only about the good things. Each letter works like a bait for these ignorant young people and takes them away. Where are the arms to work our lands? Only old people, women, and children live in Farnia now.” (Pirandello 928)

Jaco Spina claims that the letters are fraudulent and deceiving. Instead of delivering honest information about America, they seduce and steal young men from their families and their lands, which are suffering. Here, Pirandello espouses the theory of many *anti-emigrazionisti*, like Chimirri, who believed that emigration was the ultimate evidence of the government's failure in dealing with the South and the Southern Question. This failure eventually left SouthernSouthern lands deprived of the youth and the vigor needed to work them (Wong 118).

In the story, Maragrazia is the only person to send letters *there*, where her sons live. However, her letters too are a sham. Farnia's new doctor finds out that Ninfarosa has been writing only scribbles on the pieces of papers Maragrazia has brought her over the last fourteen years:

Wretched! Why did she cheat me like that! That is why my children never answered! Nothing! She never wrote anything. Do my sons know anything about my poor state? Do they know what I am doing for them? In all these years, I blamed them, Doctor. Instead it was her, the traitor. She made fun of me during all these years. How can she have betrayed me, a poor mother, like that?

(Pirandello 933)

The act of writing letters in Farnia is unreliable. It is a deceiving activity that defies its own purpose, which should be making communication possible.

The letters should have been the in-between space linking the separated families, where each other's needs and desires could have been expressed and hopefully met. Hence, Maragrazia's questions: "Do my sons know about my poor state? Don't they know what I am doing for them?" Maragrazia's final and agonizing question: "How can she have betrayed me, a poor mother, like that?" refers not only to Ninfarosa's betrayal, in not writing what she said she would, but to Maragrazia's own isolation, which came as a result of that betrayal. Her isolation, then, acquires historical significance, as it represents what Crialesse defines as "the wound that opens up" between those who leave and those who stay behind, never completely healing. Maragrazia's sons' unwillingness to write to their mother, then, further underscores the separation of the two parts of the family. As the emigrants make their homes in America, they may lose interest in keeping ties with a homeland that ultimately forced them into exile.

In the film, the wound bleeds more profusely, as the emigrants, walking on the dusty dirt road to the carriage that will take them away, realize that those are the last moments they can spend with their loved ones accompanying them, and some of them cannot stop weeping. When they find out that their departure is delayed by three hours, because of a broken wheel, one of them shouts in joy: “We still have three hours to spend together,” revealing the anguish that each one of them is carrying inside. It is during that time that the doctor tells Maragrazia about her letter: “They are only scribbles.” Although she is ridiculed by the others on account of the letter, she shouts out her own victory: “My sons never forgot me, Doctor! They did not write because they never received my letters.”

The mother’s torment, about her sons’ unawareness of her state and sacrifices, is transformed and redeemed, in the film, by the certainty that her sons’ love did not falter. However, in the film, her shout of joy alienates her even more from the others, who start making gestures with their hands, signaling her insanity. In Pirandello’s rendition, instead, Ninfarosa is the only one reporting her insanity, when she is confronted by the doctor’s reproach: “Do you really care for that crazy woman?” (Pirandello 936). In both versions, the doctor is motivated by the way Maragrazia is constructed as a madwoman to discover her real story. His human interest is naturally intertwined with his professional duty to probe her mind. In pursuing the truth about Maragrazia’ mental health, the doctor conducts interviews similar to medical anamnesis, through which the patient history is revealed (Millicent 195). However, in Maragrazia’s case, her personal anamnesis reveals the history of another patient: the newly formed Italy.

Both Pirandello and the Taviani brothers make the doctor into a very crucial character, as he is the one who corrects Ninfarosa’s wrongdoing. Pirandello describes the doctor as:



A young man who just came to Farnia but soon—people were speculating—would leave. His departure would not be due to his incompetence, but rather to the *galantuomini*'s dislike for him. In contrast, the poor took to love him right away. He looked very young, yet he was old in his wisdom and often stunned people with his insightful words. (Pirandello 932)

From Pirandello's description, we find out that the new doctor is young and not originally from Farnia; rather, he "just came to Farnia." The text does not give us more information about his geographical provenance. In the film, though, the doctor's accent clearly situates him outside of Sicily and the South, possibly from central Italy. Consequently, the doctor is removed from Maragrazia both in time and, at least in the film, in space. His temporal and spatial distancing is important in the narrative, because he becomes the witness to Maragrazia's secret trauma, taking place in a time and space appropriated by the national myth of Italy's unification. He is also described as particularly wise and insightful, and he is loved by the poor and hated by the *galantuomini*—which, I would contend, are all traits that make him into a reliable witness.

The doctor is moved by Maragrazia's situation of alienation, bordering on madness, and decides to dig into her mind and memory that have stored:

"Horrible things! Horrible things!" The old lady sighed, shaking her head,  
"Things you are too young to know, Doctor. Things you cannot even imagine. But I saw them, I saw them! ... You were not in God's mind yet. But I saw them with these eyes that have since cried tears of blood. Have you ever heard of Canebardo?" (Pirandello 941)

The doctor is taken aback by her words and briefly perplexed by the name "Canebardo," which, nonetheless, he is able to recognize and exclaims: "Garibaldi? What does he have to do with it?"

Here, it is important to notice that the fictitious name “Canebardo,” which Maragrazia in her supposed ignorance gives to Garibaldi, is made up of the words *cane*, “dog,” and *bardo*, “bard.” In Italian, the word *bardo* refers to a national poet who exalts his people’s aspirations and traditions. By concocting a name that evokes, at the same time, the idea of a dog and that of a patriotic poet, Pirandello is able to deal a harshly comic blow to Italy’s national hero.

Finally, Maragrazia tells him her story, and how it crossed with Garibaldi’s coming to Sicily and ordering the release of all prisoners from the jails:

And you can imagine what kind of scourge came to our lands. The worst thieves, the worst assassins, the wildest and bloodiest beasts, angered by years living in chains, flowed into our fields. Among them, there was Cola Camizzi, the most ferocious. He was the head of the band and killed people only for the fun of it, as if they were flies. (Pirandello 941)

Maragrazia recounts how the band of bandits would take men from the fields and force them to join in their most horrific actions. Her young husband was taken too, but after three days he was able to escape and return home. At home, though, he “could not speak. He was silent, sitting near the fire, always with his hands hidden under his jacket. He looked insane, with his eyes fixed on the ground. Then he said, ‘I am better off dead’” (Pirandello 942).

Her husband, Nino, is the first to be traumatized. In order to examine Pirandello’s representation of Nino’s trauma, I will use Lawrence Langer’s work describing the Holocaust victims’ need to adapt to new ethical categories in order to survive such an ordeal. Although we do not know exactly what the bandits forced him to do, we know that he must have done something horrible with his hands, which he keeps hiding under his jacket. In those three days, he had to repudiate his ethical categories of “good” and “evil,” “guilt” and “responsibility,” to be

able to commit whatever he was asked to, in order to survive. Nonetheless, once he was home again, he had to reacquire and live by his old moral categories. Whereas in those three days, his ability to suppress his sense of responsibility and guilt allowed him to sustain his life and spirit, in his house, their crushing weight was too much for him to bear, making him loathe his own life: “I am better off dead” (122-23).

As Langer asserts: “the survivor does not travel a road from the normal to the bizarre back to the normal, but from the normal to the bizarre back to a normalcy so permeated by the bizarre encounter with atrocity, that it can never be purified again. The two worlds haunt each other” (88). If Nino’s trauma is a metaphor for Sicily’s historical trauma, which event is it referring to? Naturally, no event in Italian history can be remotely compared to the atrocity of the Holocaust. However, what Pirandello is describing is a trauma resulting from the awareness of a forced complicity with an oppressive power that “destroys those *over* whom and *with* whom it seeks domination” (Vickroy, *Trauma* 167). The text points to Garibaldi’s indirect complicity with repressive, corrupt, and violent local power-holders who, once released from prison, were able to perpetrate the most atrocious violence on local people like Nino, who then “could not speak. He was silent.”

Pointedly, Kali Tal observes trauma victims’ inability to communicate their witnessed horrors through language, as the words of Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor, testify: “the word has deserted the meaning it was intended to convey—impossible to make them coincide... We all knew that we could never, never say what had to be said, that we could never express in words, coherent, intelligible words our experience of madness on an absolute scale” (qtd. in Tal 122). Nino is unable to articulate his horrific experience, involving not only his hands but also

his eyes, which he keeps on the ground in a sign of shame. After spending three days in this condition, on the fourth day, he leaves the house to go to work and never comes back.

In the film, as Maragrazia recounts her story to the doctor, the camera moves away from them to show us Garibaldi liberating a Sicilian village. He is easily recognizable by his iconic marks: his red shirt and a blue cloak (blue was the Savoy color), his blonde hair and beard. As he trots on his white horse on the background, he passes in front of a palace, easily recognizable as Donnafugata's in Luchino Visconti's *The Leopard* (Bonsaver 106). As he proceeds, a carriage full of *garibaldini* follows him, distributing rice to the village people who are coming out of their houses. As Garibaldi and his men leave the scene, we see a close up of Cola Camizzi, dressed in black on a black ox, going in the opposite direction. Marco Trupia, Camizzi's second in command, follows him on foot. As Bonsaver astutely observes, with this scene, the Tavianis are entering into a dialogical conversation with Visconti's retelling of the Italian *Risorgimento* as a failure, especially for the peasantry (106). This is definitely the moment in which the Tavianis' ideological reading of that historical time as well as their present time is heard loud and clear: Indeed, in Sicily, nothing has changed, as Tancredi prophesizes in *The Leopard*, and violence keeps hurting and traumatizing its people (Tommasi 28).

After Nino's disappearance, Maragrazia waits for a few days, then decides to go to the Montelusa palace, where she knows Cola Camizzi is staying, having scared the owners away. As she arrives at the gate, she starts knocking with a stone to make herself heard:

“Oh, what I saw!” At this point, Maragrazia got up on her feet, overcome with horror and with bloody and wide open eyes, she stretched one hand outwards, her fingers distorted by repugnance. Her voice failed her and she could not proceed. Then she said, “In their hands ... in their hands, those assassins.” She stopped

again. She looked like she was suffocating and started moving her hand as if she were throwing something. The doctor, shocked, asked, “What?” “They were playing ... they were playing bocce<sup>10</sup> with the heads of men, which were blackened by the dirt. They held the heads by their hair. And one of them was my husband’s. Cola had it in his hand, showing it to me. I screamed at the top of my lungs. Cola Camizzi tried to strangle me, but one of them jumped on him... then four and five did the same. They too were sick of his ferocious tyranny, and I had the satisfaction to see him killed by his own people under my eyes ...” The old lady fell on the chair exhausted, panting, and shaking. (Pirandello 943)

The doctor’s curiosity about her story makes her relive it once again. The horror she witnessed remained in her memory and, in reliving it, her body contorts in torment. The heads that the bandits are playing with belong to those men who refused to be part of an unlawful and oppressive power, like Nino.

In the film’s *bocce* scene, while some men are shown to be totally indifferent to the atrocity of that game, others cannot even raise their eyes up. This latter group of men has their backs turned away from the game, and their eyes implore pity and compassion from the viewers, the film’s intended interlocutor. Dominick LaCapra underscores the importance of empathy in historical trauma:

Opening one’s self to empathic unsettlement is ... a desirable affective dimension of inquiry which complements and supplements empirical research and analysis. Empathy is important in attempting to understand traumatic events and victims, and it may (I think, should) have stylistic effects in the way one discusses or addresses certain problems. It places in jeopardy fetishized and totalizing

narratives that deny the trauma that called them into existence by prematurely (re)turning to the pleasure principle, harmonizing events, and often recuperating the past in terms of uplifting messages or optimistic, self-serving scenarios. (78)

To fully understand historical traumas, the viewer must have an affective involvement, thus limiting the author's stylistic choices. In producing a devastatingly brutal scene like that of *bocce*, the Tavianis forced the viewers to disavow any recuperation of the past through uplifting or optimistic messages of national rhetoric. The *bocce* scene is central to Maragrazia's recounting of her trauma in the Tavianis' rendition. Voyeuristically, we become part of that scene's horror, to better empathize with those who, just like us, are forced to participate in that psychopathic drama.

However, Maragrazia's trauma does not stop at that. Marco Trupia, the man who first attacked Cola Camizzi, takes her by force and keeps her imprisoned for three months "after three months the police found him and locked him in prison, where he died some time later" (Pirandello 943). A woman's rape as a metaphor for the taking of land is a well-established *topos*, going back to the Romans' legend of the Sabine women's capture. In Maragrazia's story, though, her rape was not actualized by Garibaldi or one of his men; instead, a local brigand was the actual culprit. However, Marco Trupia was allowed to carry out his violence because of Garibaldi's order. Once again, the story brings to the fore the complicity of the two powers, the "revolutionary" and the local, acting to the detriment of the peasantry.

Here, it is important to notice the Tavianis' filmic choices and how they differ from Pirandello's. Unlike the *bocce* game, the film does not show Maragrazia's imprisonment, rape, and liberation, which are instead merely narrated by Maragrazia to the doctor. In Maragrazia's recounting, the events concerning the police's arrival, her liberation, and Marco Trupia's

incarceration are missing. Maragrazia states only: “after three months, they came to free me.” “They” is not specified. Consequently, there is no sense of judicial closure, as there is in the original story. Pirandello seems to convey that, after all, the Italian state at least has enough power to carry out justice, thereby inviting Sicilians not to maroon their own homeland by crossing the Atlantic towards America. By denying America as a concrete possibility for Sicilian masses to live with dignity and prosperity, he is left with only the choice of believing in the new national state, albeit very lukewarmly.

In contrast, the Tavianis seem not to share Pirandello’s trust in the government. In 1980, Piersanti Mattarella, Sicily’s governor, was gunned down while going to church with his wife. Mattarella, the older brother of today’s Italian president, was a “clean,” Christian-Democratic (Dc) politician who was intent on fighting *Cosa Nostra* and the politicians who were supporting it—first and foremost, Palermo’s mayor, Vito Cincimino (Dc). His death seemed to be linked to a deal between the Mafia leader, Stefano Bontade, and then-Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti (Dc) (Calabrò 60). In 1982, Sicilian and Communist *Deputato* (House Representative) Pio La Torre, who had been trying with little success to pass special laws in Parliament to deal with the Mafia, was also killed. A few months later, the same thing happened to his special appointee, General Carlo Alberto della Chiesa (Calabrò 114, 117, 119). The Italian State seemed unable and unwilling to effectively deal with *Cosa Nostra* and its oppressive power. This undoubtedly influenced the Tavianis’ skepticism about the government’s ability to deal with Sicily’s new and devastating problems, thus leading them to support Sicilian emigration as a safety valve for its people. As I will further demonstrate, the Taviani brothers’ stance on emigration is the point of most divergence from Pirandello’s.

In Pirandello's story, during the period of her imprisonment, Maragrazia becomes pregnant:

I swear, Doctor, that if I could have, I would have torn my womb in pieces. I felt like I was hatching a monster. I knew I could not have had him in my arms. Only the thought of nursing him made me scream like a madwoman. I almost died when he was born. My mother helped me and did not allow me to even see him. She took him to his relatives, who raised him.... Now, Doctor, I really cannot say that he is my son. (944)

Maragrazia's trauma has grown exponentially, from her husband's death and seeing his head used as *boccia* to her rape and feeling that a monster was growing inside her. How could she ever go back to a normalcy, even one "so permeated by the bizarre encounter with atrocity"? How can rehabilitation be possible?

In Genocide Studies, which deal with massive traumas, the ability to forgive the perpetrator is considered paramount for the victim's rehabilitation. Jennifer Vanderheyden points to the paradox of forgiveness, being at the heart of reconciliation even when confronted with the extreme evil of genocide, and asks: "How can forgiveness be possible, yet in many ways a requisite for reconciliation?" (2). Reverend Antoine Rutayisire, survivor of the Rwanda genocide, states that for him forgiveness was necessary "to give back humanity to the perpetrator," thus overcoming the trauma impasse (Vanderheyden 2). Even Nelson Mandela, who served twenty-seven long years in prison, adopted forgiveness as the cornerstone of his presidency and legacy in South Africa. Notoriously, upon leaving prison, he stated: "I knew that if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison" (qtd. in Vanderheyden 3).



However, Maragrazia cannot forgive Marco Trupia and thus is stuck in her metaphoric “prison,” having to live in a condition of liminality. Tal argues that the anthropological concept of liminality can be successfully applied in trauma studies, as the trauma survivor finds herself living between two disjunctive worlds: that of her traumatic event and that of her post-traumatic life (117). Not being able to forgive Marco Trupia, who is part of her trauma, Maragrazia cannot transition to her “post-liminality” state, which would include her acceptance of her son, Rocco Trupia. To help us understand Maragrazia’s inability to forgive the perpetrator of her series of traumas, I turn to Hannah Arendt’s conceptualization and definition of punishment and forgiveness, especially vis-à-vis “radical evil”:

The alternative to forgiveness, but by no means its opposite, is punishment, and both have in common that they attempt to put an end to something that without interference could go on endlessly. It is therefore quite significant, a structural element in the realm of human affairs, that men are unable to forgive what they cannot punish and that they are unable to punish what has turned out to be unforgivable. This is the true hallmark of those offenses which, since Kant, we call a “radical evil” and about whose nature so little is known, even to us who have been exposed to one of their rare outbursts on the public scene. All we know is that we can neither punish nor forgive such offenses and that they therefore transcend the realm of human affairs and the potentialities of human power, both of which they radically destroy wherever they make their appearance. (241)

According to Arendt’s words, Maragrazia, once confronted with extreme evil, has two possibilities to come to a closure: she can either forgive or she can punish her abuser.

Eventually, the law punishes Marco Trupia, and the fact that he dies in prison may make us hypothesize that divine punishment, in addition to human, was somehow carried out. However, Arendt's words seem to suggest that punishment must be performed by the victim, in order for her to overcome her trauma; otherwise, the evil committed becomes unforgivable. Moreover, Arendt points to the existence of some offenses that she defines as involving "radical evil... whose nature little is known." What we know, though, is that these offenses are unpunishable and unforgivable, because they go beyond the human ability to forgive or punish. How can Maragrazia forgive the killing of her already traumatized husband, the cruel mutilation of his body, and her three-month-long sexual abuse? What would a fit penalty be? How can an evil of such devastating proportions be measured and codified into a punishment? Maragrazia's inability to forgive her perpetrator impedes her acceptance of her son, Rocco, who becomes the last victim of the domino effect of Maragrazia's traumas.

The doctor tries to reason with her and asks her: "After all, what fault does your son have?" (Pirandello 944); without hesitating, she answers:

"None. He has no fault. When have I ever said anything negative about him?  
Never, Doctor. But what can I do, if I cannot even stand watching him from afar?  
He looks just like his father, Doctor. He has the same facial traits, the same body,  
even the same voice.... I start shaking as soon as I see him and cold sweat takes  
hold of my body! It's not me. It's my blood that turns him down. What can I do?"  
(Pirandello 944)

Although she admits that he has no fault, Rocco's resemblance to his father triggers Maragrazia's memories of her abuse, which she re-experiences every time she looks at him. She

is, thus, confronted with two irreconcilable demands: being a mother to him, or avoiding her traumatic memories.

Vickroy describes the difficult relationship between trauma and remembrance:

Fundamental to traumatic experience is that the past lingers unresolved, not remembered in a conventional sense, because it is not processed like nontraumatic information, either cognitively or emotionally. Because stress can change physiology, traumatic experiences are processed differently by the central nervous system. Traumatic “memories” appear in repetitive, intrusive forms of visualizations of the trauma scene, nightmares, or associated effects. Because traumatic memories are not affected by subsequent experiences, they are re-experienced without change. (*Trauma* 12)

By a cruel twist of nature, Rocco is for his mother “the past that lingers unresolved” and the “visualization of the trauma scene.” It is only human, and a matter of survival, for Maragrazia to avoid him. Nonetheless, her rejection results in his trauma of not being accepted by her. Rocco lives his life in exile from his own mother, who exiles him by sending him to live with his father’s relatives as soon as he is born. Maragrazia becomes for him the site of not belonging and not being able to feel the safety and security of the *heim*. She becomes his “elsewhere,” which displaces him physically and emotionally.

Pirandello and the Tavianis deal with Rocco’s trauma in two very different ways. In the story, the doctor decides to go and reproach him for not taking care of his mother. As he reaches his house, he meets his wife, his children, and his animals. Rocco is working on the land, fertilizing it, as one of his sons tells him. When questioned by the doctor about his behavior toward his mother, he explains:

I want to show you her nicely made bed. At the table, we always set a place for that old ... good woman. She is my mother, and I cannot call her in any other way. Ask my wife and children; they will tell how I told them to serve her and respect her as the Virgin Mary.... Why is she covering me with shame in front of everyone in village? God knows what they think of me.... I should not respect her as a mother because she has always been hard on me. Nonetheless, I have respect and affection for her. (Pirandello 939)

The above passage shows how Rocco has been able to work through his trauma and found coping mechanisms that have allowed him to move toward a state of closure and ego identity (LaCapra 22). Although he admits to her un-maternal behavior toward him, he has been able to move beyond that and forgive her: “I have respect and affection for her.” Consequently, in his house, he has a bed ready for her and a seat at the table. Moreover, he has a family, which he is able to support through his work.

The Taviani brothers, instead, show a different picture of him. As the emigrants are waiting for the wheel to be fixed and have calmed their laughter down after ridiculing Maragrazia, Ninfarosa points him out to the others, saying: “He brought his cows here, but there is no grass to graze. He brought them here because he knew she would be here. He follows her everywhere she goes.” As we hear her words, we see him milking a cow, pouring the milk in a bowl and bringing it to his mother. As Maragrazia sees him approaching her, she covers her face with her ragged shawl and turns her face away. Rocco, then, leaves the bowl on a rock, where the doctor, confused by her behavior, takes it and tries to have Maragrazia drink it, but to no avail.

The next scene shows Maragrazia sitting on the ground, with her back leaning on a wall of stones, telling the doctor her story. As she says: “He looks just like his father. What can I do

if, when I see him, I start shaking?” we hear Rocco weeping from behind the wall. Then, he starts sobbing hard and looks at his mother, who looks back at him, emotionless and un-empathic toward his sorrow. This scene is a powerful filmic representation of what Caruth defines as the “wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available”(4). The survivor’s cry addresses the perpetrator, asking her to have compassion on her victim (Caruth 2). However, in the case of Maragrazia, compassion is unattainable, because her trauma broke down any dimension of security. Thus, she employs and redirects all her energy toward defensive mechanisms that destroy any form of empathy (Vickroy, *Reading* 10-11).

After this encounter with her son, Maragrazia realizes the emigrants have already left without her letter and she starts to panic. The doctor reassures her, reminding her that another group will leave the following week: “We can give the letter to them. Are you sure you want to write that letter?” Maragrazia does not answer; she looks intently at Rocco, and he looks back at her, nodding his head as a sign of hopeful approval. Instead, Maragrazia, her facial expression displaying disgust, grabs a pumpkin nearby; she throws it at him in the typical *bocce* style and turns away from him. In the film, just like his mother, Rocco acts out of his trauma, not being able to work through it. He has no family around him and is not seen carrying out a productive life. For both son and mother, “the past returns and the future is blocked or fatalistically caught up in a melancholic loop.... Any duality ... of time (past, present and future) is experientially collapsed or productive only of aporias and double binds” (LaCapra 21). Whereas Pirandello wants to show the possibility that Rocco, the new generation born from the rape of Sicily, will be able to work through his trauma, the Tavianis seem to disavow that chance. The new generation is unable to work through it, because Sicily’s violence has not abated, and therefore the future is

unattainable or “blocked.” Emigration is thus the only possible rehabilitation from a history of violence.

Why did Pirandello use trauma as a literary strategy for his story, though? I would argue that Pirandello has two reasons to choose it as a narrative tactic. The first reason lies in the nature of the traumatic experience, which exists as a story needing to be told in order to become real. Accordingly, the listener to the narrative of a psychic trauma finds himself in a unique situation, as he is recording something that has yet to be made:

Massive trauma precludes its registration; the observing and recording mechanisms are temporarily knocked out.... The victim’s narrative—the very process of bearing witness to massive trauma—does indeed begin with someone who testifies to an absence, to an event that has not yet come into existence, in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality of its occurrence.... The emergence of the narrative which is being listened to—and heard—is, therefore, the process and the place wherein the cognizance, the “knowing” of the event is given birth to. The listener, therefore, is a party to the creation of knowledge *de novo*. The testimony to the trauma thus includes its hearer, who is, so to speak, the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time. (Laub 57)

In other words, although Maragrazia lived her trauma in her body and mind, her psyche did not register it. As Vickroy described, trauma victims, in order to survive, need to dissociate from the event. It is only through her reporting it to the doctor that her trauma is given birth and is articulated, and thus she becomes cognitively aware of it. This explains her physical discomfort in telling her story which, at times, prevented her from proceeding. As a trauma survivor,

Maragrazia lives not with memories of the past but with an event that had no completion or closure and, thus, continues in the present and is current, for her, in every respect (Laub 69).

The doctor becomes a co-owner of such a trauma and through his very listening becomes part of it, living Maragrazia's disorientation, grievances, and confusion (Laub 58): "The young doctor kept watching her. He was horrified and had an expression of mercy and, at the same time, of repugnance and loathing" (Pirandello 943). The reader and viewer become witnesses too, of course, adding another layer of recording. We record the doctor recording, through his presence and ears, Maragrazia's articulation of her trauma, thus activating two different historical canvases. In the first canvas, we have Maragrazia's trauma, rooted in Garibaldi's coming to Sicily and its perpetration through the post-unification years. In the second, we have the doctor, who is estranged from that historical event because of his young age and geographical origin. The doctor is, thus, forced to confront the myth of Italy's unification through Maragrazia's trauma.

This leads us to the second reason for Pirandello's literary choice, which lies in trauma's capacity to shatter national and personal myths. As Tal writes: "only trauma can accomplish that kind of destruction... the tragic shattering of old myths" (122). National myths are part of the official history, and as such, are recorded in official histories and in textbooks in public schools, as well as documents in the popular culture. They do not belong to one individual, but "individuals borrow from them and buy into them in varying degrees." They are collective myths that help us create our ideas of a nation and of its "character." Historians suggest that they can be gradually revised, as new elements enter the public discourse (Tal 115). Personal myths, conversely, are an individual's sets of beliefs, expectations, and reasons through which circumstances and actions take form, usually as schemas. These schemas, which are mostly

unconscious, become the paradigms through which we make sense of the world and serve as the basis for our individual assumptions about “the ways things work.” If an event threatens one of those foundational schemas, the individual tries to cope with it by “misinterpreting” the event to make it fit into her schema. This process results in the “trade-off of a distorted awareness for a sense of security,” the latter being what psychologist Daniel Goleman believes is the organizing principle for human existence (Tal 116).

Going back to trauma as a way to experience the “tragic shattering of old myths,” both national and personal, which of Maragrazia’s personal myths do we see shattered in the story? The first myth to go is her sense of safety and security, the organizing principle of her very own existence. She no longer lives in the safety of her house, preferring to spend her days and nights sitting on the front steps of the Farnia houses: “She pulled up her shawl over her head and sat on the step in front of the door to spend the night waiting. At dawn, she was sleeping when the doctor, who was an earlier riser, opened the door... and he saw the old woman fall while still sleeping” (Pirandello 934). The second is her sense of motherhood. After all, the sons she loved and made all kinds of sacrifices for have left her; by comparison, the son she cannot even look at has a bed ready for her in his own house.

What about the revision of her national myths? I would contend that, because of her social class, Maragrazia probably did not have national myths, as she was not educated enough to have any knowledge of Italy’s official national history. However, I would argue that Maragrazia experiences in her own skin the shattering of the myth of “one Italy.” National unity would not have given rise to emigration, which causes the splitting of its people and its families. Her psyche registered her sons’ migration as a loss and absence that are personal but also



historical. LaCapra makes a distinction between “loss” and “absence” and situates absence on a transhistorical level and loss on a historical level:

In this transhistorical sense, absence is not an event and does not imply tenses (past, present, or future). By contrast, the historical past is the scene of losses that may be narrated, as well as of specific possibilities that may conceivably be reactivated, reconfigured, and transformed in the present or future. The past is misperceived in terms of sheer absence or utter annihilation. Something of the past always remains, if only as a haunting presence of symptomatic revenant. (48-49)

For Maragrazia, migration is the scene of the loss of her beloved sons, who were supposed to care for and support her. Thus, her loss is compounded, referring not only to the physical absence of her sons, but also to the loss of what she thought was of her, namely, her sons’ care and support. Her loss is inscribed in a past that is constantly reactivated in the present, thus her need to have someone write letters to ask her sons to fulfill what she perceives as their duty. The letters become a haunting and obsessive presence in her life. However, her sons’ migration also represents the wound that divides, and as such, it represents the transhistorical absence of Italy’s unity, which was supposed to come to fruition through its military unification. This transhistorical absence is still haunting Italy today.

As a trauma survivor, Maragrazia’s speech has the potential to become highly politicized, because it threatens the political forces that tamed that experience by elevating it to national myth (Tal 7). However, because of her marginality, rooted in her mental condition, Maragrazia can hardly be a threat to any national myth, at least until she meets the new doctor. As a listener to her trauma, the doctor becomes the enabler of her testimony, “the one who triggers its

initiation, as well as the guardian of its process and its momentum” (Laub 58). In the film, the doctor is thus forced to bear witness to her story with the people of his own generation and of his land. By situating the doctor as coming from outside of the South, the Tavianis underscore even more his mission as bearer of the survivor’s tale to an audience that, just like him, is removed temporally and spatially from the trauma. The doctor, as yet, is not the writer of the trauma; Pirandello is. Rightly, Tal observes that “crucial ... is the ability to consider the author as *survivor*, to bring to bear the tools of sociology, psychology, and psychiatry ... to the task of reading the literature of survivors. If we begin here, we can start to examine the process of writing as an act of personal revision” (132). Personal revision would lead us, the readers, to consider some important questions: What changes in Pirandello’s representation of his personal myths have occurred, and how do they affect his conceptualization of national myths? How is the national myth changed by these operations? How does Pirandello’s revision affect his readers?

To answer these questions, we need to keep in mind that Pirandello believed in the Historical Left’s ideals, represented in Sicily by Crispi, which prefaced the creation of a united Italy (see Chapter 2). I would argue that Pirandello revised his political and ideological schema while living through Italy’s post-unification period, which he considered to be no more than a colonization of the South by Northerners’ hands and interests. His dramatic revision of his personal myths brought him, first, to sarcastically describe Garibaldi as “Canebardo” and, then, to describe Garibaldi’s work as leading to the rape of Sicily with the complicity of Southern “bandits.” This complicity produced and reproduced Sicily’s wound, with an ensuing bleeding out of its own people. Pirandello employs his “imagination and fictional techniques in order to fill in gaps left by official histories, pointing to unhealed wounds that linger in or on the body,” as well as on the national body, I would add (Vickroy, *Trauma* 167). Consequently, the text’s

brutal, multiple traumas affecting multiple people foregrounds Pirandello's disenchantment with the national myth of Italy's unification as a tale of heroic freedom for all.

My last question refers to Pirandello's readers, and how his revision affects them. Scholars disagree as to the degree of readers' emotional participation and its effect on the shattering of their myths. For instance, Tal asserts: "the personal myths of the reader are never 'tragically shattered' by reading.... The revision of national myths occurs only as far as the changes made do not interfere with non-survivors' basic conceptions of themselves" (122). Tal does not define what she means by "basic conceptions of themselves," yet I would argue that the individual's national identity and ethical grounding must be included. Consequently, the readers would revise their national myths only provided that their national identity and their sense of right and wrong are not changed or challenged.

Laub, instead, describes the relation between survivor and non-survivor as one where the latter is the enabler of the survivor's testimony, which, in case of historical trauma, is always a highly political endeavor. It would seem, therefore, that Laub recognizes and acknowledges the reader's capability of revision through the reading of trauma, as in the case of the doctor. To these two models, I would like to add a third one, professed by Stef Craps, who suggests the possibility for the reader to be a collaborator with the survivor in revising national myths (42). Craps's publication refers to books that have been published much more recently and in "non-Western" countries. In particular, Craps refers to an essay on "Stolen Generation" testimonies, including those in *World Memories* by Kennedy and Wilson. In this essay, an Australian Aborigine, who was removed from his family by the Australian government to be fostered out to a white family, writes not "to ask the reader, who is addressed as a white Australian, for empathy but to become critically conscious of his or her own role in the ongoing conspiracy of silence

regarding Aboriginal history and Aboriginal dispossession” (42). I propose to extend Craps’s notion beyond Australia’s historical and geographical borders, as I am inclined to believe that any historical trauma would invite its reader to become critically conscious of his/her role in it, thus denouncing it and fighting the indifference of those who have been privileged in silencing it.

## **Conclusion**

Pirandello’s story and its filmic rendition deal with Maragrazia’s personal traumas. Trauma’s nature is such that any opening to the future is blocked; hence, the traumatized person is forced to obsessively relive the traumatic event in a perpetual present. Maragrazia’s tragedy thus becomes a metaphor for what Pirandello presents as Sicily’s historical trauma, rooted in Italy’s unification and perpetuated through the post-unification period, leading to the Great Wave of emigration. While Capuana portrays emigration to America as a viable solution to Sicily’s problems, for Pirandello it represents only a bleeding wound, affecting not just Maragrazia but the whole village. As emigration is not an acceptable option, Pirandello is left with only the choice of theorizing that Sicily can work through its trauma and find copying and adapting mechanisms that will enable it to survive its post-unification evils.

Pirandello’s solution greatly differs from that of the Taviani brothers. Their filmic rendition disavows Pirandello’s option, underscoring emigration as the only plausible way for the Sicilian rural masses to survive Sicily’s traumatic history. At the time the Tavianis released their movie, Sicily was undergoing the bloodiest Mafia cartel war ever fought on its grounds. In only seven years, one thousand people were eliminated in Palermo and more than three thousand were killed across the whole island. *Cosa Nostra*’s violence and overbearing power were facilitated by a government that, because of its endemic weakness and the corruption of some of its politicians, was unable to combat its impact. Consequently, for the Tavianis, emigration

continued to remain the only possible solution to the island's oppressive violence, which keeps traumatizing its inhabitants.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Few and brief biographical data: Capuana was born in Mineo, near Catania in 1839. In 1860, he was galvanized by the myth of Garibaldi to whom he dedicated a poem, *Garibaldi: leggenda drammatica (Garibaldi: dramatic legend)*. He attended the University of Catania, pursuing a degree in Law, but soon he quit his studies to devote himself to writing. In the literary field he debuted as a playwright, as he tried to create a national theater through plays with historical themes, such as *La battaglia di Legnano (Legnano's Battle)*; *Cesare Borgia*; *Federico II*. Later, he abandoned playwriting and began writing novels. His most acclaimed novels are *Giacinta* (1887); *Profumo (Perfume)* (1892); *Il marchese di Roccaverdina (Roccarverdina's Marquis)* (1901); and *Rassegnazione (Resignation)* (1907). He published also different collections of short stories and fables. These latter works were inspired by his interest in the Sicilian language and folklore. He died in Catania in 1915 (Traversa, *Capuana* 3-12).

<sup>2</sup> Few and brief biographical data: Emanuele Crialesi was born in Rome in 1965 by Sicilian parents. He graduated in Film and Theater Direction from Tish School of the Arts in 1995. In 1998, he wrote and directed his first film, *Once We Were Strangers*, which was selected for the Sundance Film Festival. In 2002, he directed *Respiro*, selected for the Venice Film Festival. In 2006, he directed *Nuovomondo*, selected for the Oscar as best foreign film and with *Terraferma* (2011) he won the Venice Film Festival (Treccani.it).

<sup>3</sup> Near Agrigento in the South of Sicily.

<sup>4</sup> By 1990, only half a million immigrants lived in Italy. By 2012, the number rose to 5 million and 11 thousand (Cincinelli 101).

<sup>5</sup> Although Sicily had been the most wooded area of Magna Grecia, by the seventeenth century deforestation was already showing the usual effects. Whenever a harvest failure sent cereal prices rocketing, peasants, out of necessity, would clear a virgin territory to cultivate it for few seasons to, then, abandon it before the tax collector would discover them (Smith 184). In 1832, the historian Rivera wrote: "The land devastation was much worse during political upheavals like those of 1815, 1820 and 1821. During those years, peasants would cut and burn woods to toil the soil, certain that they would not be punished for that" (qtd. in Armiero 232). In other words, during times of political upheaval peasants would take advantage of the political uncertainties to take possession of the common lands and clear them to cultivate them. This activity together with poor monoculture agriculture practices, which did not allow fields to rest, and over-lumbering, to get the wood needed to build ships, were all culprits of Sicily's deforestation (Smith 186).

<sup>6</sup> The "Padrone system" was the operating system through which emigrants were able to reach America. This system is not dissimilar to today's "coyote system" operating in the U.S., or the "scafisti system" operating in Italy.

<sup>7</sup> It is important to keep in mind that in 1895 Sigmund Freud published *Studies in Hysteria*, where he linked neurosis to past traumatic experiences (Freud 36-38).

<sup>8</sup> Vittorio Taviani was born in San Miniato (Pisa) in 1929 and his brother, Paolo, in 1931. Their father was an anti-fascist lawyer who had many problems with the regime. They started studying at the University of Pisa but never completed their degrees, preferring to concentrate their energies on film-making. By 1955, they were in Rome where they directed their first documentary *San Miniato nel '44*, on a Nazi-perpetrated massacre on San Miniato's inhabitants. In 1977, they won the Gold Palm at the Cannes Film Festival with the film *Padre, Padrone*. They won at Cannes again in 1988 with *La notte di San Lorenzo*. In 1984, they won *il David di Donatello* (the Italian version of the Oscar) with *Kaos*. In 1989, they won the *Golden Lion* for Distinguished Career Achievement Award at the Venice Film Festival. In 2008, they received a *Laura at honoris* from the University of Pisa (Treccani.it).

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<sup>9</sup> Here it is important to point to the fact that, unlike in the United States, the homicide rate is low in Italy. In 2015, there were only 469 homicides in all of Italy (Istat).

<sup>10</sup> Bocce is an Italian game played by rolling balls on the ground to get them as close as possible to a little ball, *boccino*, which is the target. It is similar to American bowling.

## Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have aimed to offer the possibility of reading canonical Sicilian writers' works as instruments of cultural and intellectual resistance to Sicily's *piemontizzazione*. My theoretical approach is interdisciplinary, combining different, yet well-connected, fields of study such as post-colonialism, narrative and trauma studies, new historicism, film studies, border studies, and critical race theory studies. The periodization of my work spans from 1860 to the Great Wave of immigration (1894-1920), which is the period of state and national formation. During this time, the South was invented both as a geographical and cultural entity through many symbols and discourses. As Dickie points out: "in the drive to articulate a bourgeois identity...discourses of statistics, criminality, hygiene, sexuality, and demography were deployed" (147). To these discourses, my dissertation adds race, which is central to my discussion. The race discourse created paradigms wherein the three Sicilian writers could voice their dissatisfaction and disappointment through their literary works in their own time. As in our time, the four film directors expanded that discourse through their own films. As I demonstrated, race discourse is also one of the axes on which the North and South divide came to be articulated in the nineteenth century, as it still is today. The existence of a political party like the *Lega Nord* (League) that is proposing the North's secession from the less prosperous and "European" South, reveals that the "Southern Question," with all of its implications, has not yet been solved.

In conclusion, I want to draw out some post-work reflections and connections, and possibly make some points of my discussion more explicit. What my examination of the Piedmontese dominance and the Sicilians' resistance to it reveals is the difficulty of dealing with the concepts of "dominance" and "subalternity" as fixed and monolithic. As Dickie argues, the North and South did not lead a separate and hierarchical existence. Rather, they "interacted and

fused at many levels” (10). Even Gramsci argued that Southerners such as Villari, Niceforo, and Fortunato often became the North’s organic intellectuals supporting the Northern hegemony. Thus, in their cultural and intellectual resistance, Sicilians neither created nor acted as one unified block. Pirandello’s disappointments and criticisms toward the new state contrasted with the views of Sicilian statistician and anthropologist Niceforo, who called for the North’s civilizing mission in the South, for example. Moreover, both of Verga’s stories, “What is the King?” and “Freedom,” portray the deep social class divisions that made it impossible for Sicilian rural masses and the Sicilian liberal bourgeoisie to have the same political and economic desires and aims. The *Risorgimento* was, after all, a bourgeois enterprise.

Further studies are needed to better understand the relationship between social classes and race in the post-unification years. In Vancini’s film, race division seems to be stronger than social class division. The film shows Bixio’s racial prejudices toward Sicilians of his same social class. Likewise, it shows Sicilian notables paying lip service to Bixio while refusing to collaborate with him, rejecting the idea that a Northerner may have the power to impose an order on them. The notables’ political ability to contrast the new state, ultimately eluding its control in exchange of votes, shows that the Northerners’ domination did not go unchallenged and that Sicilians’ subalternity was not across the board. Naturally, only Southern aristocrats and notables were able to sway power over the government as, even with the 1876 electoral law, suffrage was limited to 6.4% of the Italian population. As Verga’s stories demonstrate, the new state did not improve the rural masses’ status quo because it did not have the political strength to curb the Southern aristocrats and notables, again pointing to the difficulty in neatly defining which group was dominant and how the dominance was exercised.



Further studies are also needed to analyze the “Orientalized” language of both Pirandello and Verga. Verga uses the adjective “Turk” in both stories. In “What is the King,” he uses it to show the Piedmontese domination over the Sicilian masses and its power to name, thus underlining how Turin, the new state’s capital, becomes what Bhabha defines as the site of enunciation. In “Freedom,” though, Verga uses it to deflect the orientalizing construction of Sicilians, prevalent in his time, into the Northern Bixio. Pirandello in “The Black Baby Goat,” ironically describes a Sicilian shepherd as an Arab. Both adjectives, “Arab” and “Turk,” are used to evoke negative images, demonstrating that orientalism was part of the Italian collective imagination too, even if Italy had no colonies in the “Orient” per se. It also demonstrates the adaptability of any race discourse. More examples are needed to understand how the “Orientalizing” discourse came to be articulated in the North and South of Italy. If the Northern bourgeoisie used a rhetoric that would assimilate the Southerners to the Orient, how did the Southern intellectuals use it? How did they differentiate themselves from the Turks and the Arabs, as they too ultimately wanted to be part of Europe?

Both Verga’s “Freedom” and Pirandello’s “The Black Baby Goat” denounce England’s intrusion in Italian political matters. As the unquestionable superpower, England swayed both a dominant and hegemonic power over Italy, which was clearly resented by the Sicilian authors. The presence of England and its politics on Italian ground, as represented in the stories, expands the discourse on dominance and resistance from Italy to the whole colonizing Europe, revealing remarkable similarities. Interestingly, Crialesi places an English woman in the ship carrying Sicilians to Ellis Island at the turn of the twentieth century. Her story is a perfect example of how dominance and subalternity are not singular positions in society rather they are played out through nationality, race, class, and gender. In the film “Golden Door,” although Lucy is English,

bourgeois, and belongs to the Anglo-Saxon race, she is denied entrance to the United States as a single woman; hence, her strategic plan to marry Salvatore, a Sicilian peasant who is her subaltern for race, class, and nationality. However, as a man, Salvatore has a dominant position over Lucy. Lucy is one of only three protagonist women in my dissertation, revealing a deficiency in my work that needs to be addressed in the future. In Pirandello's "Madam Mimma," the discourse on dominance and resistance is articulated completely through the two women's rivalry and their fight for survival in a changing economy. In this story, the *piemontesa*'s domination is displayed through practices of differentialist racism as articulated by Tuguieff, as *Mimma* shows that she is not able to acquire the skills she needs to assimilate into the new state. The total absence of men in the story underscores the fact that the Piedmontese domination was also carried out across gender; women were not spared. The third woman present in my dissertation is Maragrazia, from Pirandello's "The Other Son," who is raped by a bandit freed from jail by Garibaldi's decree. Thus, the story brings to light the indirect connivance between Garibaldi and the local bandits, suggesting that the Piedmontese dominance was sustained by the illegal forces and the violence of local power-holders. The nature of this alliance is not too surprising as, from the unification on, many Italian politicians have made deals with the Sicilian Mafia, as the Tavianis' film implies.

Because the Italian government was unable to control the unruly Sicilian landowners and *galantuomini*, the latter continued exploiting the peasantry that expatriated *en masse* between 1894 and 1920, as Capuana and Pirandello report in their respective works, *Rabbato's Americans* and "The Other Son." Capuana's novel depicts the creation of an Italian identity for the Southern masses who could see themselves as Italian only when physically removed from their own homeland, where they had been oppressed by the old and new systems—or, better said, by the

new system supported by old exploitative practices. The Sicilian *galantuomini* were legally allowed to continue their exploitative practices even on the emigrants because of laws that gave them power to burden the leaving peasants with new taxes, revealing one of the levels on which “the North and South interacted and fused,” to use Dickie’s words.

My last thoughts bring us to present Italy as a country not so much of emigrants but rather of immigrants, further challenging the myth of the “one-Italy,” to use Teti’s words. As a consequence, Italian-ness, as constructed against the Southerners’ political, cultural, and economic backwardness, is further challenged by the presence of the *extracomunitari*, non-Western immigrants who come from outside the European community’s borders. The word *extracomunitario* lumps together people who come from many different countries, just as *meridionale* has lumped together the Southerners since unification, thus creating the notion of one undifferentiated *Meridione*. As Grace Russo Bullaro reports, the non-Western immigrants in Italy have not displaced the North and South divide and the racist rhetoric toward Southerners, and she cynically comments: “apparently there is enough ‘racial’ hatred to bestow on both targets” (xx). For instance, the *Lega Nord* considers both Southerners, often defined disparagingly as *terroni*<sup>1</sup> and *extracomunitari*, as equal threats to the economic well-being of Northerners and their ethnic dominance (Bullaro xxi). Both groups are ultimately accused of not being able to assimilate well enough into Northerners’ ideologies and culture; hence the need for the North to be removed from the South and Rome’s policies. It would seem that the race discourse that labeled the Southerners as “stigmata otherness” has functioned almost as a matrix for the present race discourse couched in the national rhetoric of right-wing political parties, fearing both cultural and biological miscegenation. As my dissertation’s starting point was Foucault’s dictum stating that “where there is oppression there is resistance,” future studies may

focus on the ways non-Western immigrants are formulating their own intellectual and cultural resistance to their racialization in today's Italy, and whether the Southerners' experience in this field has functioned as a guide.

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Notes

<sup>1</sup> The word *terrone* comes from the word *terra*, which means "land," besides "earth," "soil," and "ground." Consequently, the *terroni* are people who work the land—that is, "peasants." Grace Russo Bullaro rightly points to the fact that Southerners were defined as such once they moved to the North to work in the factories during Italy's economic boom (1958-1963) (xv).

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### Education

- 2016 Expected Interdisciplinary Ph.D. in Modern Studies  
The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, English Department  
Milwaukee, WI  
*Area of concentration:* Italian Film, Literary and Cultural Studies, Race and Postcolonial Theory  
*Dissertation:* Sicilian Intellectual and Cultural Resistance to Piedmont's Appropriation (1860-1920)  
*Advisor:* Dr. Gregory Jay  
*Committee:* Robin Pickering-Iazzi, Shelleen Greene, Michel Bouldok, Peter Paik
- 1999-2003 Doctoral course work  
The University of Wisconsin-Madison, Spanish and Portuguese Department  
Madison, WI  
*Area of concentration:* Modern Peninsular Spanish Literature  
*Advisor:* Alda Blanco
- 1998 M. A. in Spanish  
The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Spanish and Portuguese Department  
Milwaukee, WI  
*Area of concentration:* Spanish Literature
- 1999 B. A. in Continuing Studies  
The University of Omaha, Department of Education  
Omaha, NE
- 1986 Diploma in Translation and Interpretation  
Scuola Superiore per Interpreti e Traduttori  
Roma, Italia  
*Area of concentration:* Translation and Interpretation from Spanish and English Into Italian

## Academic Experience

2003 to Present	Adjunct, full-time Instructor of Italian, Marquette University
2004-2006	Adjunct, part-time Instructor of Spanish, Marquette University
2003-2004	Adjunct, part-time Instructor of Spanish and Italian, UWM
1999-2000	Adjunct, part-time Instructor of Spanish, Carroll College
1995-1998	Teaching Assistant of Spanish, UWM

## Work Experience

1992-1995	Teacher of Italian, Wolk Hoch Schule—Friedberg, Germany
1987-2010	Freelance Translator and Interpreter

## Courses Developed and Taught

*Subsequent to employment at Marquette:*

ITAL 1001	Beginning Italian 1
ITAL 1002	Beginning Italian 2
ITAL 2001	Intermediate Italian 1
ITAL 2001	Intermediate Italian 2
ITAL 3001	Advanced Italian 1
ITAL 3100	Advanced Italian 2
ITAL 3210	Italian Literary Studies in Translation: “Southern Question and the Italian Experience of Emigration to America” approved to fulfill the diverse cultures knowledge area requirement for the University Core of Common Studies
ITAL 3200	Italian Cultural Studies in Translation

## Courses Taught

*Subsequent to employment at Marquette:*

ITAL 001	Beginning Italian 1
ITAL 002	Beginning Italian 2
ITAL 003	Intermediate Italian 1
ITAL 004	Intermediate Italian 2
SPAN 003	Intermediate Spanish 1

## Courses Taught

*Prior to employment at Marquette:*

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

SPAN 001	Beginning Spanish 1
SPAN 002	Beginning Spanish 2
ITAL 003	Intermediate Italian 1

Carroll College

SPAN 3001 Intermediate Spanish I

### **Study Abroad Program**

Summers: Marquette University  
2009-2012 Instructor of Italian and Translator, Department of Journalism  
Cagli, Italy  
Developed course materials to teach Italian to Journalism students

### **Academic/Administrative Work**

2013 (with Dr. John Pustejovsky) Developed an Independent, Interdisciplinary  
Minor in Italian Studies

2013 to present Served four times on Faculty Advisory committee

### **Research in Progress**

**In progress** Constitution of the Italian State and consequent construction of Italian  
identity

**In progress** Resistance to the racialization and sub-alternation of Southerners during  
Italy's unification process

**In progress** Emigration as a possible form of resistance

### **Presentations**

*Prior to employment at Marquette:*

1997 Correcting first language interference in second language acquisition,  
Marquette University

2001 The Invention of Cuzco in the *Comentarios Reales de los Incas* by  
Garcilazo de la Vega el Inca, The University of Wisconsin-Madison

### **Grants**

2016 Gettel Grant \$ 300

2015 Gettel Grant \$ 200

2012 Mellon Grant \$ 2,000  
(with Sarah Gendron, Anne Pasero Tyler Luiten) Co-taught class on the Immigrants' Experience in Europe through Films

### **Community Outreach**

2002 to present Secretary of WisItalia—No-Profit Organization aimed at the teaching of Italian Language and Culture

2015 to present Collaboration of MU Italian Program with *The Italian Times*, the local Newspaper of the Italian Community Center

### **International Outreach**

2012 to present Developed collaboration with the Università del Sacro Cuore in Milan. Set up cultural and linguistic exchanges between my students of Italian and the university's students of English via Skype

### **Awards**

2011 Recipient of WisItalia Award for Italian Teacher of the Year