

Between Mediterranean Centrality and European Periphery: Migration and Heritage in Southern Italy

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THIS ETHNOGRAPHICALLY INFORMED ARTICLE identifies and analyzes contemporary intersections between migration and heritage in southern Italy. Such appreciation of emerging trends seems particularly significant to an agenda that, by challenging simplistic European/Mediterranean dichotomies, may also foster immigrants' inclusion. The southern Italian case is particularly relevant in light of the region's role as an external maritime frontier of the EU and in light of the Southern Question narrative, with its history of massive emigration and disparagement in relation to the rest of Italy and Europe. Alongside this framework, the article identifies and evaluates also a more recent geo-historical and moral framework that on the one hand straightforwardly locates the Italian south 'in the West,' and on the other plays with southern Italy's rediscovery of itself 'in the center of the Mediterranean.' These multiple narratives inform discussions on what counts as southern Italy's intangible heritage. More crucially, they shape emerging engagements of that heritage in projects of migrant reception and broader political-cultural critique.

Residents of a Bologna suburb, in central-northern Italy, characterize *immigrati* [immigrants] as 'too lazy to work and so lacking in willpower that they spawn hordes of children;' as welfare-dependent, illiterate, parochial and violent 'bad people' (Kertzer 1980, 173–4). The immigrants, which the Bolognese surveyed by Kertzer in the late 1970s were referring to, are not foreigners, but southern Italians. Two decades later, soon after September 11, 2001, Lino Patrino, the editorial director of *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*, one of the most respected regional newspapers in southern Italy, protests from his column against those persons, especially Muslims and their 'collaborationists,' that 'it is like they want to accuse us for being the way we are. It is like we should ask

[142]

forgiveness for being Westerners' and for 'our wealth achieved through daily hard work'¹ (*La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*, October 14, 2001). This newly paradigmatic op-ed takes for granted, in quite a simplistic way, that 'we,' southern Italians,² are now wealthy and hardworking 'Westerners.' The reader, in the director's opinion, should also appreciate that southern Italians are engaged in the global struggle vis-à-vis non-EU and mostly Muslim migration, if not Islam itself.

In the first section of the article, I provide an overview of time-honored disparaging understandings of southern Italy in relation to the rest of Italy and Europe. My account is certainly not intended as an occasion to reinvent old clichés and simplistic historical narratives of European/Mediterranean dichotomy. On the contrary, it is meant as an analytical tool that turns powerful stereotypes inside out. What I set out to accomplish early in the article is also for the reader to consider and possibly appropriate such an analytical tool when looking at contemporary stereotypical Italian and European understandings of non-EU immigration – especially Balkan, African and Middle-Eastern migration – and of the places of origin of such migrants.

The article moves on to identify, analyze and evaluate a competing moral geography that, while on the one hand seeming to straightforwardly locate the Italian south 'in the West,' on the other plays with southern Italy's rediscovery of itself 'in the center of the Mediterranean.' I argue that this complex moral geography is of crucial salience. It deeply informs not only discussions on what counts as southern Italy's intangible heritage, but also the possibly benign manipulation of that heritage in institutional, scholarly and artistic projects of political-cultural critique and migrant inclusion.³ Thus, the overarching research question to which this article contributes asks whether and how the southern Italian heritage of emigration, domestic disparagement, marginalizing moral geography and newly rediscovered Mediterranean centrality affects dispositions toward non-EU migrants and their cultures and regions of origin.

A BALL AND CHAIN: MORAL GEOGRAPHY
OF THE 'PERIPHERAL' ITALIAN SOUTH

The 'South' – whether global or Italian – is not a geographically given, bounded, and autonomously meaningful unit of analysis. Rather, it



needs to be understood as the product of enduring socio-economic, scholarly, and governmental relations and interventions. In this section I provide a basic account of scholarly understandings that have framed southern Italy as marginal to Italy, and Mediterranean Italy as a whole as peripheral to Europe. It will be evident that there is an unwelcome parallelism between analyses that focus solely on the Italian 'South' as a bounded and a-historical object existing prior to legal, political and representational gazes and regimes, and those analyses that focus on ready-made 'immigrants' and 'Muslims' as non-relational givens. [143]

It is estimated that seven million Italians left the south between 1950 and 1975 (Calavita 2005, 53). They literally built the Italian 'boom,' working for low wages and undergoing much of the same discrimination that non-EU migrants face today throughout Italy. As evidenced by Kertzer's account above, southern Italians represented the dirty, provincial and ignorant 'others' within the national body, following an entrenched model.

The geographical definition of the Italian peninsula as a whole as liminally situated between 'Europe' and the 'Mediterranean'⁴ has been intertwined, since the 17th century, with the Eurocentric ranking of the fragmented Italian peninsula as socially and morally ill, politically unstable and culturally backward – even if exotically so. After the political unification of the country in 1860, Italian ruling powers intended to follow the model of modernity and centralism of more established European nation-states. 'Backwardness' tended therefore to be governmentally attributed to and localized in southern Italy only, and the 'South' became a bounded object of governmental knowledge, measurement and concern (Moe 2002; see also Carter 1997).⁵ Historically, and to this day, the drive toward the state's territorial and social control has been paired with the need for modernization and socio-economic and infrastructural *sviluppo* [development].⁶ In summary, the series of spatialized deficiencies, backwardness, differences and socio-economic and cultural problems commonly attributed to the south constitute what is known as the Italian *Questione Meridionale* [Southern Question]. Anthropologist Jane Schneider provides a synthetic and effective account of the evocative power of the Southern Question construct (Schneider 1998, 1; emphasis added):

[144]

In Italy, and in Italian studies, the ‘Southern Question’ evokes a powerful image of the provinces south of Rome as different from the rest of the peninsula, above all for their historic poverty and economic underdevelopment, their engagement in a clientelistic style of politics, and their cultural support for patriarchal gender relations and for various manifestations of organized crime. This tenacious catalogue of *stereotypes* includes, as well, the notion that southerners, by dint of their very essence, or at least their age-old culture and traditions, possess character traits that are opposite to the traits of northerners. Passionate, undisciplined, rebellious, intensely competitive, and incapable of generating group solidarity or engaging in collective action, they were and are – as the cliché would have it – unable to build the rational, orderly, civic cultures that, in the North, underwrote the emergence of industrial capitalist society.

The contemporary criminalization and racialization of non-EU migrants, and of their places of origin, has a telling precedent in the 19th century scholarly production of southern Italians as patriarchal and racially inferior ‘delinquents.’⁷ More broadly, the Southern Question has long been a focus of multidisciplinary analysis. Yet this corpus of scholarship, often simplistically looking for ultimate ‘causes,’ until very recently has not been able to direct its gaze *outside* ‘the South’ and to recognize the south’s dialogical identitarian, economic and political interplay with its northern counterparts and within the construction of the Italian nation-state. Quite typically, Banfield’s classic study (1958) suggested that the fault of the south was to be empirically sought *locally*, and resulted in its ‘amoral familism.’ Putnam’s more recent and equally influential work (1993) similarly traces the roots of the alleged contemporary southern Italian civic fragmentation to its medieval period and to a series of feudal, bureaucratic and hierarchical royal governments.

The application of Edward Said’s (1979) groundbreaking analytical approach *within* Europe and Italy aptly informs recent scholarship tackling the issue.⁸ Attention to Antonio Gramsci’s opus (1957; 1971) also provides a more relational analysis of the Southern Question. Gramsci argued that the socio-economic problems of the south were not



accidental, but rather the necessary presupposition for the working of the capitalist nation-state. He attributed much of the responsibility for the Question to the post-Unification conservative alliance between northern industrial and southern agrarian elites, which prevented any serious reform of land property in the south. This political and economic alliance and its economic results had tremendous and long-lasting consequences on the popular perceptions that objectified southern Italians. The complexity of Gramsci's argument is appreciable in a passage of his *Prison Notebooks* that deserves to be extensively quoted (Gramsci 1971, 70–1):

[145]

The poverty of the *Mezzogiorno* [South] was historically 'inexplicable' for the popular masses in the North; they did not understand that unity had not taken place on a basis of equality, but as hegemony of the North over the *Mezzogiorno* in a territorial version of the town-country relationship – in other words, that the North concretely was an 'octopus' which enriched itself at the expense of the South, and that its economic-industrial increment was in direct proportion to the impoverishment of the economy and the agriculture of the South. The ordinary man from Northern Italy thought rather that if the *Mezzogiorno* made no progress after having been liberated from the fetters which the Bourbon regime placed in the way of modern development, this meant that the causes of the poverty were not external [...], but internal, innate in the population of the South [...]. There only remained one explanation – the organic incapacity of the inhabitants, their barbarity, their biological inferiority. [...] [I]n the North there persisted the belief that the *Mezzogiorno* was a 'ball and chain' for Italy.

Gramsci's analysis still remains highly significant. Its methodological, descriptive and analytical insightfulness is well shown by its contemporary revival and topicality. In the Italian historical case as in the global arena today, the north's 'economic-industrial increment was [is] in direct proportion to the impoverishment of the economy and the agriculture of the South' (Gramsci 1971, 70). In this perspective, 'impoverishment' – evidently stigmatized by the ones who impoverish

[146] others – is not the collateral damage of ‘increment,’ but its necessary fundament. In other words, the ball and chain of poverty, marginalization and hierarchy must be inscribed in the bodies, social relationships and affective imageries of potential subjects to produce them into labor that is cheap, flexible and willing to emigrate in the first place.

With its modernist *moral* narratives of backwardness, periphery and stages of progress and development, the Southern Question entails a teleological trajectory.⁹ Intendedly or not, this teleology has been functional not only to the production of southern Italian cheap labor, but also to the salvational intervention of morally and economically superior subjects – among them, governors, intellectuals, statisticians and investors. In my analysis, this is a dynamic that we continue to witness in geopolitical and moral asymmetries in the Euro-Mediterranean area. By focusing on the southeastern Italian region of Apulia,¹⁰ in the next section I explore how these contemporary asymmetries crucially feature a relational ‘shifting of demarcation lines,’ (Balibar 1993, 128) now involving southern Italians and their new counterparts – foreign migrants and their places of origin.

SHIFTING DEMARCATION LINES: ON ‘BEING THE WAY WE ARE,’ WESTERNERS AND GATEKEEPERS

[...] French nationalists perceive the Italians to be less European and more exotic and Mediterranean, while Italians perceive their neighbours, the Slovenes, to be the advancing edge of a purportedly undifferentiated Slavic tide, in turn Slovenes feel to be more fully-fledged Europeans than their Croatian neighbours, who in turn feel more Westernized and civilized than the Serbs, who in turn feel immensely superior to the Albanians, who in turn feel more European than the Turks. The trip Eastward from Greece, to Turkey, to Iran, to the Indian Sub-continent and further East is a trip towards ever-deepening Orientalisms – specular images of the advancing tide of Westernization. Its habitual victims are not distant colonies and races, but next-door and ‘next-of-kin’ neighbours. [...] This points to the fact that we still live in a hierarchically imagined and defined world, where the West is the centre of everything, and everything is measured by vicinity to that model. [Conversi 2000.]



A young barber in Otranto, contracted to provide his services in a local refugee ‘processing’ center, casually told me that just by looking at the way some people sat in queue for his services (i. e., crouching against the wall), ‘not like us,’ he could easily guess they were ‘Orientals’ and Muslim. Elsewhere¹¹ I argue that militarized border enforcement and the performance of national and EU sovereignty on the southeastern fringes of Europe is working as a powerful tool in the identitarian creation of two categories of subjects: ‘non-EU/Muslim/ clandestine immigrants’ and ‘EU/Italian/Western/Christian citizens.’ If the former are undeniably ‘subject to someone else by control and dependence,’ the latter also become new subjects, *tied* ‘to their own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge,’ to use Michel Foucault’s wording and insight (1983, 777–8). Such supposed Western, liberal, hard-working subjectivity stereotypically relegates what lies on the southern and eastern side of the Mediterranean – what a pervasive Orientalism lumps together as ‘the Balkans’¹² and ‘the Middle East’ – to a condition of backwardness, archetypical violence and irreducible otherness. The short interviews and lived experiences below synthetically provide paradigmatic articulations of such a view.

[147]

Luca¹³ has worked for more than a decade as a volunteer and then as a legal expert on issues of asylum and migration. With regret, he once confided that a visit to Albania in the early 1990s gave him a sense of how late-18th century France might have looked (personal interview, January 14, 2005). And a tailor, in commenting on a picturesque postcard from Tirana, regrets that ‘it is useless that they build these new and nice architectures: sooner or later they are going to destroy everything anyway’ (personal interview, August 14, 2004). The words of an Italian high-ranking police officer intend to transcend specific examples, summarizing a trope that I have encountered countless times: ‘An imaginary door separates and divides, just as a temporal gate, our civilization and our culture from those of our closest neighbor, Albania’ (D’Alessandro 2002, 24). The Strait of Otranto thus becomes the locus of a temporal gate, a virtual time machine. The same emphasis on temporal segregation appears in my interview with *Signora Antonia*,¹⁴ the gray-haired director of a shelter in Lecce (December 9, 2004). She explains she has been a volunteer since 1990, when a priest

[148] involved in the reception of migrants prompted her to join in the effort. Since then, she has also visited Albania a number of times. With other volunteers, she would embark on a ferry from Brindisi to Vlorë, from where they would travel to several villages. Antonia is a native of Sicily, and in our conversation she refers to something for her even more unsettling than the images of material misery she saw in Albania:

My first time in the port of Vlorë, surrounded by hundreds of begging children, I found myself in my Sicily of 50 years ago. I went back 50 years, with the landing of the Americans [American troops]. [...] My goodness, *qui* [here, in Vlorë] time has stopped, and nothing has changed.

In Antonia's narration, temporal and spatial coordinates are conflated and intertwined. She uses the adverb *qui* [here] referring to Vlorë, while at the same time she re-experiences her childhood in Sicily as one of the 'hundreds' of children surrounding American soldiers for a piece of chocolate, a cigarette, or small change. Her first visit to Albania, Antonia continues, was 'really traumatic, I was sick for a week because *I have seen again what we were*. I couldn't eat, or do anything at all.' She continues, emphasizing the relational perception of southern Italian predicaments: 'When you go to *these places* you realize how lucky we are. [...] We have found terrible things there.' In this honest account, we learn that Antonia has seen in Albania what Italians, and southern Italians in particular, 'were' until recently.¹⁵

As shown earlier, southern Italians have been historically constituted as objects of a disparaging moral geography – still pervasive – that denies their coevalness,¹⁶ in a dichotomous relationship with northern Italy and Europe. And yet, as we are exploring in this section, they are also *agents* of a disparaging moral and temporal geography. This hierarchical geography situates them and non-EU migrants and their places of origin on interpretive maps of cultural affinity and difference, poverty and development, religion and civilization. The example of *Signora Antonia* in particular highlights the relational nature of popular (as well as scholarly and governmental) taxonomies and hierarchies of space and place, culture and modernity. Geographical



proximity is therefore to be understood as subject to a larger cartography of knowledge, power relations and economic frameworks.

Currently, proximity is partly obliterated by political, social, economic and geopolitical asymmetries, including the Italian and EU militarized regime of border enforcement and migration management. It is this author's belief that if borders are lived as fringes, margins and periphery of a core, and as militarized sites of surveillance, detention and civilizational clash, then southern Italians' role of gatekeepers reinforces the marginality of their lived experience within Italy and the EU. In one example, resignation to the alleged clashes pervading the Mediterranean is evident in a frustrated op-ed by the already mentioned editorial director of *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno* (April 18, 2004) the major newspaper in Apulia:

[149]

The [Mediterranean] sea, the longed-for sea of harmony, is [today] the sea of the most brutal conflicts on Earth. It is the scenery of a disquieting clash of civilizations. It is the sea in which there flows more blood than honey. [...] It seems we are at the exhaustion of the conviction that Apulia is a bridge between Europe and the Mediterranean; the exhaustion of the project of diversities' integration; of the white faces and the black ones; of *orecchiette* [a typical Apulian pasta] and couscous; of *kefiab* and blue jeans; of the veil and sexual liberation; of the cathedral and the mosque. Maybe this dream will be definitely betrayed by the 'power of the womb,' [one of polemist Oriana Fallaci's tropes] the demographic boom that submerges, with extra-communitarian [non-EU] children, cities more saddened by the elderly melancholia than cheered by children's voices. [...] But it's a dream betrayed also by the aggressiveness of Islam [...].

And yet, as I set out to explain, this understanding that focuses on the still ongoing peripheralization of the Italian south – first as a dead weight, and more recently as a civilizational gatekeeper – needs to be complemented by attending also to emerging practices and discourses of critical citizenship. In particular, below I illustrate selected trends that are manipulating southern Italian intangible heritage in cre-

ative ways, including by appropriating and refashioning the Southern Question narrative.

POLITICS, ART AND HERITAGE IN THE 'CENTER
OF THE MEDITERRANEAN'

[150]

Dominant discursive and political tropes, such as those of the 'western gatekeepers' explored above, fortunately do not reproduce themselves mechanistically: they need to be continuously nourished and sustained in institutional and everyday life, and this may or may *not* happen. In this sense, shifts in political leadership and trends in artistic production are proving consequential in promoting a normative re-articulation of heritage, migration and the Southern Question.

Institutional and artistic ferment is particularly discernable in Apulia, while not being unique to the region. For example, in July 2005 the newly elected Regional Government promptly organized 'Mare Aperto' [Open Sea], a conference and public forum critically debating the restrictive Italian immigration law and contesting the presence in the region of state migrant detention facilities. This conference and the national debate it generated would have hardly been thinkable without the leadership, credibility and charisma of the newly elected Governor, Nichi Vendola, who also involved in the debate the Governors of other Italian Regions. Vendola, elected in 2005, is the first communist Governor of an Italian Region. He is also a poet, a journalist, an expert of anti-Mafia strategies, a liberal Catholic and a leading member of *Arcigay*, *The Italian Gay Association*. The complexity of such a figure certainly embodies southern Italian cultural variation. More significantly, it offers a paradigmatic case of the emerging, unorthodox appropriation of the Southern Question, which I illustrate below.

Soon after his electoral success, Vendola built on ongoing social ferment, political activism and scholarly knowledge production,¹⁷ articulating his view of the role of Apulia, of its location in the Mediterranean and of the relationship between heritage, emigration, immigration, peace and social justice. The relationship between politicians' statements and public opinion certainly needs to be always extensively investigated. For our purposes, it is safe to note that Vendola, differing from a number of other politicians, speaks to an audience that



he does *not* postulate as inherently xenophobic – a stance that in the opinion of this author would deserve to be fostered. He asks Apulians to remember their own ‘history of emigrants, the bitter bread of generations of workers and families uprooted from their land, who have often left in the clandestinity of ship holds’ (Vendola 2005, 3). He advocates the comeback of the Southern Question not to be intended as the quasi-stereotypical rhetorical narrative presented above, but rather as an extremely real social and popular critique of neo-liberal trends, stemming from the Italian south (p. 5). The southern question, in this understanding *without capital letters*, is not anymore a tool for the reproduction of a cheap labor reserve of disparaged southern Italians. Rather, it is a permanently revolutionary tool finally *in the hands* of southern Italians and migrants alike. With due differences, they both face recurrent economic crises, and they are both participants in late-capitalist exploitative practices as flexible and mobile workers. Accordingly, Vendola envisions Apulia ‘as a crossroads rather than a frontier, as a territory of hospitality, encounter and mediation’ (Vendola 2005, 28). Like many southerners, he is certainly concerned with the enlargement of the EU to the countries of the Baltic and central Europe, for there might be a risk of further ‘marginalization of our country [Italy] and especially of its southernmost regions, confined to the role of extreme Mediterranean periphery’ (p. 46). But such risk has little to do with geography, as for Vendola it is a matter of political choices and models of integration. In other words, Apulia must find once again its function in the relationship with Balkan, Middle Eastern and North African countries. As ‘a crossroads of exchanges’ and ‘an open frontier,’ it must have a role in the creation and implementation of economic integration and unrestricted circulation of people, ideas, goods, services and capitals (p. 46). Such an advocated set of international relations within a Mediterranean framework is not a utopian political model or merely a normative model for *sviluppo*¹⁸ [development]. Instead, it actually builds on historical precedents and actual lived experiences, as I set out to indicate – hence rather approvingly – with the following examples.

[151]

Papas Nik, the parish priest of the church *San Nicola di Mira*, a Roman Catholic church of Byzantine rite in the old part of Lecce, offers

a particularly complex understanding of the proximity between Apulia and Albania (personal interview, September 20, 2004). A fluent speaker of Albanian and Italian, Papas Nik has a privileged access to Lecce's Albanian population, which includes Muslims, Catholics and atheists. [152] Regardless of their religious affiliation, they know that his parish might provide material relief. Additionally, there they meet other Albanians, and organize travel or shipments to their native country. Papas Nik underlines that Albania and Apulia are extremely close, and that several migrants go often back and forth, 'still on speedboats.'¹⁹ If they are documented migrants 'the ridiculous amount of 30 Euros' allows them to board a ferry to Albania, while for 100 Euros they can fly from Bari to Tirana in sixty minutes. He also suggests that Albania materializes in his own parish house as well, with radio programs, satellite TV and Albanians always around. In either case, he continues, '*qui è vicino*,' [we are close, here]. The celebratory tone of his observations resonates with that of another priest who during our conversations routinely made a point of stating that Lecce is closer to Istanbul than to Milan.

Geographical proximity to south-eastern Europe is quite obvious when, on clear days, Corfu and the Albanian mountains are visible on the horizon of the Strait of Otranto. Driving around Apulia one can see traffic signs showing the way to Greece, Turkey and Montenegro – to busy ferries, that is. Brindisi, once an important maritime gateway to India, is the port where hundreds of thousands of tourists from all over the world board ferries to Greece and Turkey. Bari, the head town of Apulia, since 1930 hosts the *Fiera del Levante* [trade show of the East], one of the most important international trade shows in the Euro-Mediterranean area. For decades Bari has also served as the preferred shopping venue of many Yugoslavs who took advantage of its proximity.

During fieldwork, I have frequently noticed, for sale in bookstores, reversed maps of the Italian south. These South-up color copies of 16th century Flemish maps literally turn upside down entrenched geographical conventions, and metaphorically point to a revolutionizing new perspective. This new perspective is indeed epitomized by the charismatic voice of the above mentioned Vendola, but also by in-



terlocking instances of scholarship, commercial practices and artistic productions. Such a perspective partly re-orientates and complements – yet does not replace – the southern hegemonic gaze that historically has been primarily directed to northern Italy and western Europe in search for higher education, employment and modernity. As an iconic example of this very recent re-orientation, we may mention the ‘myth of origin’ of *Opa Cupa*, an Apulian-Bosnian-Albanian music band. The Apulian founders maintain that one day in the early 1990s they finally oriented their parabolic antenna toward Albania, rather than having it set up for mainstream Italian channels as usual, and were tremendously fascinated by the ‘Balkan melodies’ they heard for the first time.

[153]

And yet, it needs to be mentioned that such fascination with what lies beyond the Strait of Otranto is often quite shallow and ephemeral. Too often it rearticulates exotic tropes without necessarily implying a serious engagement or critique. It is not uncommon to come across celebratory self-understandings of Apulia as the ‘gate to the Orient.’ Local intellectuals, politicians, journalists, artists and travel agents deploy several tropes that contribute to this overarching narrative of ‘Oriental’ liminality. For example, they state and restate that some of the pre-Roman inhabitants of Apulia were of Illyrian origin – quite ironically, they immigrated from the Balkan peninsula; or the fact that Apulia was a florid region of Magna Graecia, and later a nodal point of the Roman network of roads and communications toward Asia Minor. Catholic and other local sources point out that the southernmost part of Apulia was the disembarking point of Saint Peter on his way to Rome. Otranto was a valuable crusaders’ outpost; and different waves of Albanian, Dalmatian, Jewish, Greek-speaking and Byzantine populations, monks, prelates, soldiers and aristocrats have consistently reached Apulia and settled since antiquity. Dozens of times I have heard the history of Apulia encapsulated in a succession of invasions and conquests by foreign powers, such as the Messapian Illyrians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Byzantines, the Normans, the Swabians, the Anjou, the Turks, the Aragonese and the Piedmontese.

At any rate, though, such narratives present Apulian heritage as built in porous layers by these presences. In some local accounts, contemporary immigration benignly adds to such history – selective but

[154]

essentially accurate – of foreign arrivals and syncretic cultural contributions. Equally often I have encountered the apparently counterintuitive narrative of a pre-immigration situation of essential demographic and cultural unity, homogeneity and immobility, disrupted since the early 1990s by a novel, more problematic situation of diversity and multiculturalism. In this somewhat twisted logic that sees ‘difference’ only as a recent point of arrival, rather than as a historical constant, ‘Italy should be grateful to immigration and to migrants,’ for they ‘let us understand that there exists a world to discover,’ as a speaker claimed in front of the large audience of the *Dialoghi di Trani* (September 26, 2004), a yearly high-profile series of conferences and artistic performances focusing on the intersections of tourism, heritage promotion, literature and intercultural dialogue. At any rate, his quote well summarizes pervasive journalistic, artistic and scholarly accounts of the post-immigration self-rediscovery of Apulians, Sicilians and other southern Italians as political and cultural Mediterranean actors.

In summary, some narratives enthusiastically embrace a heritage of exposure to a variety of cultural influences, foreign dominations and maritime trade; others, simply recognize the inevitability of the contemporary exposure to migration and world commerce. In both cases, the geo-moral location ‘in the center of the Mediterranean’ is simplistically perceived to enable the positive reception of both migrants and tourists, almost by default. This self-rediscovery is certainly reflected, and perhaps stimulated, by political and institutional programs. It is also to be contextualized, together with larger practices of cultural revivals and tourist-friendly reinventions of traditions, in the contemporary flexible predicament of economies, where the image-building and branding of communities plays a role in the powerful logics of competition.²⁰ Finally, this burgeoning sense of southern and Mediterranean centrality is also performed by selected trends in the local performing arts industry, as I illustrate below.

Puglia: santi, profughi e musicanti [*Apulia: Saints, Refugees and Musicians*] is the title chosen by the Italian magazine *World Music* (1999, no. 39) to promote a CD compilation of music from Apulia. This title provides an effective slogan that in the perception of the publishers encompasses the contemporary predicament of this region, with its religiosity, im-



migration and the pervasive growth of music ensembles. The latter increasingly perform local, traditional tunes rearranged in light of North African, Klezmer and Balkan rhythms, such as in the above mentioned case of *Opa Cupa*. Southern pride and anti-racism, together with the use of dialect and a broader social critique, are pervasively displayed, including in *Caparezza's* hip-hop and in *Sud Sound System's* reggae. [155]

A very popular and successful example of openness to the Mediterranean is certainly *Radiodervish*, an ensemble constituted in 1997 by Michele Lobaccaro and Nabil Salameh, born respectively in Apulia and in Palestine. Many of their songs are multilingual – featuring Italian, Griko,²¹ Arabic, Spanish, English and French – and have been intended by the ensemble ‘as small laboratories where passages unveil themselves between East and West and between the symbols and myths of the Mediterranean, a border place that unites in the very moment it separates.’²² *Radiodervish* has recently toured a new poetry and music show, *Amara Terra Mia* [Bitter Land of Mine]. Now also on CD, it narrates the precariousness of contemporary migrant experiences in both the region of origin and the region of destination, and puts forward an open call to peace and interreligious understanding. In its title and substance, *Amara Terra Mia* references the 1973 song by ‘Mr Volare’ Domenico Modugno, in which the popular Apulian singer evoked the bitterness of southern Italian emigrants. *Radiodervish's* show debuted on March 31, 2006 in Tricase, a small southern Apulian town. The somber scenery was limited to a dozen thin light poles, tenuously evoking migrants’ boats in the pitch-dark Mediterranean. Many in the audience appreciated the ensemble’s frank approach and its whispered reflections on emigration, immigration, pain, terror and dialogue in times of alleged cultural clash. The show received a five-minute standing ovation by an audience initially prone to skepticism. *Radiodervish* also performed in Bethlehem the night of December 24, 2007, as part of *Rassegna Negroamaro*. *Negroamaro* is an annual travelling ‘Festival of Migrant Cultures’ funded by the District of Lecce. Quite significantly, it is named after *Negro Amaro*, a red wine grape variety native to Apulia. The District of Lecce also sponsored the Italian tour of Palestinian musicians. And *Radiodervish's* frequent Italian performances with Noa, the American-Israeli singer, are routinely reported as an eminent ex-

ample of interreligious dialogue and peace building. Whether these performers are truly enjoying these experiences as cosmopolitan ones is of limited interest here.²³ In any event, what they do and sing on stage demystifies in practice pundits' loud belief in conflict as the necessary point of arrival of cultural and religious diversity.

[156]

RESISTING CONCLUSIONS

The southern Italian heritage of emigration, domestic disparagement, marginalizing moral geography and newly rediscovered Mediterranean centrality cannot be taken as a mechanistic guarantor of fixed sets of (good) dispositions toward migrants and their cultures and regions of origin. In particular, the selective recall and manipulation of individual histories and regional heritage needs to be always explored also in light of transnational processes of identification and knowledge production which accompany the governance of borders and immigration. Migrants in Italy, or trying to reach its coasts, increasingly face death, detention and deportation (see Albahari 2006). In such a context, it is certainly not bland multicultural or hybrid practices *per se* that hold any anxieties for (governmental or other) defenders of the status quo. What is crucial for them, to quote anthropologist Talal Asad, is not 'homogeneity versus difference as such but [their own] authority to define crucial homogeneities *and* differences' (1993, 267; original emphasis). In this perspective, the problem of north–south boundary demarcation is a time-honored question of Italian nation-building. But *how* and *where* the 'North' secures its distinction vis-à-vis a shifting 'South' is also a crucial, unsolved and hopefully unsolvable²⁴ problem of the new Europe's institutional, scholarly and popular quest for identitarian distinctiveness. As Mary Douglas (1966) suggested long ago, it is not only what is being separated that matters, but rather the power, prerogative and practice of order and separation in itself. Hence, uncritical celebrations of diversity, as well as shallow celebrations of heritage, might often constitute just one more tool of ephemeral governance and marketisation rather than of artistic creativity and political-cultural critique.

This article has accounted for emerging voices that emphasize a newly rediscovered southern Italian centrality in the Mediterranean.



Too often these voices are not exempt from the modernist dictatorship of ‘development’ and from the late-capitalist quest for authentic hybridity.²⁵ And yet, trying to reverse a contemporary predicament engulfed in economic crisis, nativism and pervasive inequalities, they are also indicative of a welcome shift in perspective, of a gaze no longer merely bound to a south–north directionality. Thus, the case of southern Italy should prompt analysts to look for ‘agentival capacity’ not simply in those acts that overtly resist norms and established institutions, but also in the multiple ways in which subjects ‘inhabit’ and manipulate norms (Mahmood 2004, 14–15).

[157]

The case of southern Italy also suggests that any potential solidarity with immigrants is not based on what long-time residents supposedly *are* – former emigrants; racialized southerners; cosmopolitan artists; Westerners guarding Europe or ‘the gate of the Orient.’ In other words: rather than focusing on more or less ascribed identities and legacies in the abstract, we need to focus on socially engaged lived experiences, concrete policies and even artistic performances that might concretely interplay with those identities and legacies.

In conclusion, in light of the concurrent histories and complex dynamics surveyed in this article, it is important to note that merely *shifting* the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion still reinforces entrenched models of hierarchical relations. At the same time, we also witness time-honored moral geographies being creatively turned upside down, thus nourishing the subversive potential to reshuffle Italian and European/Mediterranean simplistic dichotomies and exclusionary power relations.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This article builds on my participation in two workshops: ‘Mutuality and Memory: Encounters in Mediterranean and Middle Eastern Cities,’ convened by Julie Scott and Nefissa Naguib at the 10th European Association of Social Anthropologists Conference, Ljubljana, Slovenia, August 2008; and ‘Everyday Cosmopolitanism: Middle East and North African Urban Settings,’ convened by Asef Bayat and Sami Zubaida at the 9th Mediterranean Social and Political Research Meeting, Montecatini Terme, Italy, March 2008, organised by the Mediterranean Programme of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Stud-

ies at the European University Institute. I am extremely grateful to conveners, discussants, fellow participants and to the EU1 and University of Ljubljana organizers. My trips to Italy and Slovenia were generously made possible respectively by grants from the Department of Anthropology and from the Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts at the University of Notre Dame. Finally, I am thankful to Ana Hofman and to IJEMS' anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments.

NOTES

- 1 All translations from Italian newspapers, scholarly literature, personal interviews and conferences are mine.
- 2 A category in which I include myself, having grown up in southern Italy. Anthropological literature, to which I unhesitatingly refer the interested reader (e. g., Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Bunzl 2004), has convincingly and conclusively shaken the foundations on which the very problematic label of 'native anthropology' has been long based.
- 3 See, for a comparative perspective focusing on Andalusia, Calavita and Suarez-Navaz (2003) and Driessen (1998).
- 4 Indeed, within the false dichotomy between 'Europe' and 'the Mediterranean,' it is possible to identify a European and Western hegemony in the broader Mediterranean area. See the recent contributions of Argyrou (2002) and Chambers (2008).
- 5 The north–south dichotomy, once mapped into a geography of difference, can count on the apparently commonsensical and scientific nature of maps. Precisely because of its assertion of neutrality and scientificity, cartography is a successful tool for presenting specific values, standpoints and interests as universal, scientific and disinterested. With Harley (1988), we may say that certain cartographies tend to 'desocialise' the territory they represent.
- 6 On 'development,' see the seminal work by Ferguson (1994).
- 7 On the usage of 'delinquent' rather than 'criminal' see Foucault (1979, 251ff). See Teti (1993) for critical views on Italian Criminology dealing with southern Italy.
- 8 See, in particular, Schneider (1998).
- 9 As Kearney points out, teleological time, running from lesser to greater development, is consistent with the binary space of centers and peripheries (1995, 550).
- 10 The administrative Region of Apulia comprises the south-eastern



peninsular part (the so-called 'heel') of Italy, stretching in the Ionian and Adriatic Seas and facing the Balkan Peninsula. Together with Sicily and Calabria, it is since the early 1990s at the forefront of the reception of maritime migration, largely as a result of its proximity to the Albanian and Montenegrin coasts. While for the purposes of this article Apulia can be considered paradigmatic of the historical and current predicament of Italian southern regions, the reader should also keep in mind the internal distinctiveness of Italian histories, geographies and political cultures.

[159]

- 11 In Albahari (2006; in press) I offer extensive data and references on immigration in Italy, including on Italian colonialism, on the more recent history of border enforcement and militarization, and on migrants' death, 'processing,' detention and deportation.
- 12 See Todorova (1997).
- 13 A pseudonym.
- 14 A pseudonym.
- 15 Journalist and researcher Gian Antonio Stella's book on Italian emigration (2005) is titled precisely *L'Orda: Quando gli Albanesi eravamo noi* [*The Horde: When we were the Albanians*]. It is undeniable that southern Italians have now access to the rights and privileges of Italian and EU citizenship, and have dramatically improved their socio-economic conditions. But it is also important to point out that both unemployment and the socio-economic gap with northern Italy are growing again; that a high percentage of households is on the brink of financial collapse; and that mobility to northern Italy and Europe, for labor and higher education, is still one of the main available options. See SVIMEZ (2008).
- 16 On this denial and 'allochronicity' see Fabian (1983).
- 17 See the seminal work by Cassano (1996).
- 18 Advocated, for example, by SVIMEZ, one of the most influential organizations and think-tanks seeking to promote southern economic development.
- 19 This account conflicts with official state accounts.
- 20 See, for example, Raoul Bianchi's convincing analysis of the 'marketisation' of culture and heritage (2005).
- 21 A variation of Modern Greek spoken in parts of southern Apulia.
- 22 [Http://www.radiodervish.com](http://www.radiodervish.com). Last accessed October 15, 2008.
- 23 I deal extensively with forms, potentialities and pitfalls of 'staged' cosmopolitanism in Albahari (2008).

- 24 Any 'solution' to the new Europe's quest for identitarian distinctiveness would result, it seems to me, in further institutionalization of a deeply exclusionary, ethnocentric and undemocratic regime of citizenship, membership and belonging.
- [160] 25 For another case of 'authentic hybrids' see Ballinger (2004), which focuses on the Istrian and eastern Adriatic context.

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