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Redirecting Ethnic Singularity

Italian Americans and Greek Americans in Conversation



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Yiorgos Anagnostou, Yiorgos Kalogeras, and Theodora Patrona

EDITORS

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Redirecting Ethnic Singularity

**Italian Americans and
Greek Americans in Conversation**

*Yiorgos Anagnostou, Yiorgos Kalogeras,
and Theodora Patrona, Editors*

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

Italian Americans and Greek Americans in Conversation

Yiorgos Anagnostou, Yiorgos Kalogeras, and Theodora Patrona

This volume contributes to US ethnic and immigration studies by bringing into conversation scholars working in the fields of Italian American and Greek American studies in the United States, Europe, and Australia. The work moves beyond the “single group approach”—an approach that privileges the study of ethnic singularity—to explore instead two ethnic groups in relation to each other, primarily in the broader context of the United States and secondarily in Greece, in Italy, and in one specific case Australia.¹ The chapters bring into focus transcultural interfaces and inquire comparatively about similarities and differences in cultural representations associated with these two groups.²

This conversation is necessary for several reasons, one certainly in relation to a powerful academic discourse that often tends to undervalue the study of European Americans. Seen as tenuously holding onto surface identities and largely assimilated into “whiteness,” Italian Americans and Greek

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Americans have been marginalized by a significant sector of the US academy. Italian American and Greek American studies have certainly been effective, the former more so than the latter, in bringing into focus the vibrant cultural production of their respective ethnic groups. Indeed, one might speak about a proliferation of research on food, community history, diaspora affiliations, transnational connections, literature, and popular culture, among other topics. Since the 1960s, scholars have begun responding to the devaluation of their subject matter by establishing in their publications its academic and public value. They bring to the fore the arts, cultural expressivities, and histories of these two groups, demonstrating how Italian American and Greek American ethnicities keep shaping American society and their respective historical homelands.

Our book contributes to these developments from a particular angle, namely transcultural and comparative scholarship. The volume reflects our interest in promoting the understanding of Italian Americans and Greek Americans through the study of their interactions and juxtapositions. This is rarely practiced in the scholarship of European Americans.³ Initiating a broader conversation that moves beyond seeing ethnicity as singularity, the chapters come closer to ethnographic, popular culture, and historical realities.

Immigrants and individuals connected with hyphenated identities do not live insular lives, nor do they negotiate solely in relation with “American culture.”⁴ Instead, they interact, collaborate, clash, and affiliate with each other in various modes and degrees.⁵ How do the groups’ experiences both converge and diverge in matters of music, sensory memory, and affect? What do we know about the fields of their interactions? In what manner does popular culture represent all this? The transcultural and comparative angle of this volume illuminates new and unexpected facets of Greek and Italian ethnicity in the United States.

The book explores Greek and Italian US encounters and coexistence, both at the level of ethnography and political discourse—a musical gathering, for instance, and national electoral politics—as well as of media representation. The analysis of the transcultural encounters in various chapters takes cues from concepts such as contact zones, focusing on social dynamic processes involving negotiation, conflict, cooperation, solidarity, and cul-

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tural exchanges that have marked these encounters. We identify differences, similarities, and intersections across the historical experiences of these groups. We map specific encounters and comparisons to find out what they tell us about American society as a transcultural terrain.

Greek Americans and Italian Americans have certainly been classified under the same rubric as “white ethnics,” but also as “probationary whites,” in Matthew Frye Jacobson’s ironic term.⁶ The concept of kinship implied in the chapters focuses on personal relations and the practices that maintain them rather than on group membership with its attendant othering of nongroup entities; it champions boundary crossing over boundary maintenance. Our contributors emphasize the seemingly natural but ultimately unstable logic of whiteness, probing the classification of Greek Americans and Italian Americans into joint racial categories and identifying the cultural and political specificities that nuance the historical negotiation of these groups with whiteness.

Embracing the Comparative Approach

We embrace the comparative approach in this work as a method to explore ethnicity relationally: how the practices of one ethnic group illuminate the practices of the other. Both groups have built robust religious and educational institutions. In what ways are their adaptations and cultural expressions similar, and in what ways are they different in specific contexts? How do we account for the similarities and differences? While the two groups have been classified in relatively similar situated ethnoracial otherness, their historical experiences also differ markedly. For instance, the negative association of Italian Americans as enemy aliens and criminals—during World War II and through the Mafia discourse respectively—differentiates them from the US Greek experience. There is also the issue of regional variations within each group. Ethnic groups encountered different social dynamics on the East Coast and the West Coast, and in turn they negotiated their place in society differently. The chapters register regional historical realities in addition to national ones. They explore how Italian American and Greek American authors and cultural producers have represented their ethnicities

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in literature, film, and documentary. They also ask how the two groups have been represented on television. All in all, in what ways did Italian American and Greek American histories, experiences, self-representations, and representations by others converge or diverge?

Our volume contributes to the fields of transcultural and comparative studies. The book is multidisciplinary. It features scholarship from the perspectives of architecture, ethnomusicology, education, history, cultural and literary studies, and film studies, as well as whiteness studies. It examines the production of ethnicity in the context of American political culture as well as popular culture, both visual and “lowbrow” crime fiction. It includes analysis of literature. It involves comparative work on religious architecture, transoceanic circulation of racialized categories, translocal interconnections in the formation of pan-Mediterranean identities, and the making of the immigrant past in documentaries from Italian and Greek filmmakers. This volume is the first of its kind in initiating a multidisciplinary transcultural and comparative study across European Americans.

Comparisons, Encounters, Identities

Comparison is a vested practice. A scholar’s selection of the entities to compare and the aim of bringing them in relation to each other result from particular interests. The juxtaposition of two groups of people, for instance, may serve the purpose of understanding the Self via the study of the Other or understanding each other. Both endeavors value communication across cultures. Comparison may also be driven by the desire to fashion grand theories about humanity, a product of both academic paradigms—evolutionism, structuralism—vying for institutional power, and personal vision. Both epistemological and political interests are at play in the examples given here. There is no such thing as neutral comparison. Any claim to its practice, therefore, requires the explicit recognition of the motivations that drive it.

Our interest in connecting Italian Americans and Greek Americans speaks to several interrelated institutional and epistemological exigencies. Our project is a response to the largely unheeded call to move beyond the “single group” approach in the study of European Americans. The rationale

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for this move is that cross-cultural analysis can yield new insights about immigration and ethnicity in the United States that otherwise might remain invisible. In moving toward this direction, we foreground the importance of Italian American and Greek American studies—two relatively undervalued fields of study—for contemporary conversations about immigrant integration, transatlantic circulations, cultural preservation, the making of whiteness, representations of ethnicity in US popular culture, tactical political solidarities, and the forging of intercultural bonds.

The comparative approach concerns itself with similarities as well as dissimilarities. In its exploration of difference, our project makes the case further for rethinking a host of academic assumptions that have had a major effect in the marginalization of the two academic fields under discussion. It is not rare for one to hear members of dissertation committees speaking—formally or informally—about early twentieth-century immigrants from southeastern Europe as a uniform phenomenon: poverty-stricken illiterate, patriarchal peasants, deeply immersed in religious beliefs and superstition. It is common also for one to read about the superficial ethnic affiliations of contemporary “white ethnics” and their eventual decline or even apocalyptic loss. Greek Americans and Italian Americans are assumed as already known, unworthy of further research. The denial of their value in the academic marketplace discourages junior scholars from engaging these topics. Our project sets itself against this epistemological bias, seeking to carve conceptual spaces such as “transnational Mediterranean” and “US Southeastern Europeans” to promote new knowledge about these subject matters. In this manner we contribute to the empowering of Italian American and Greek American studies.

What is the reasoning for selecting these two particular peoples for the comparative exercise? Our departure point is a recurrent commonality. We build on the sociological fact that both groups have been classified similarly in various historical periods by powerful social discourses. Both were seen as “racially in-between” people in the era of early twentieth-century mass migration; they were the probationary whites, not “fully white,” not “fully nonwhite.” They were put in the same category as “white ethnics” in the context of ethnic and racial competition for material and symbolic resources as well as the struggle for public cultural visibility in the tumultuous 1970s.

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And both are now rendered as “symbolic ethnics,” with thin and readily disposable ethnic affiliations. Throughout the twentieth century, US Italians and Greeks encountered and grappled with assigned normative classifications. How did they negotiate this constitutive historical experience?

This route to comparison raises the issue of self-representation. It opens up the terrain to examine comparatively how two groups subjected to similar external representations worked out issues of survival, dignity, making a home, integration, mobility, status, and cultural reproduction. What cultural resources did they activate in their respective negotiations? What set of cultural resources was selected over another? What were the implications of these processes to each group? How did they contribute specifically to a particular trajectory of cultural change? What was retained (or modified) for contemporary purposes? Our comparative endeavor aims to generate insights about these topics that we would not have been able to identify had we stayed with the study of a single group.

We approach Italian and Greek transnational communities as internally differentiated. We view immigration and ethnicity as a dynamic social process whose comparison contributes to our understanding, of “how similarly or differently it is experienced in different locations and by different populations by gender, national origin, age,” and other sociological variables.⁷ We carefully attend to how and who resisted, manipulated, or even contributed to the making of these groups. Understanding how agency was mobilized, by whom, and for what purpose is of central importance in this endeavor.

US Italians and Greeks exhibit significant historical and social differences. Their respective demographics, both in the past and the present, are of a scale that is incomparable. The massive influx of Italian migration took place between 1870 and 1920 with 4.1 million people entering the country, ranking Italians as the second largest group of Europeans in the United States after the Germans.⁸ A significantly smaller group, 450,000 Greeks entered the United States in the period of mass migration (1890–1924),⁹ with the numbers on the increase again in the period between 1946 and 1982, reaching 211,000.¹⁰ More recently, the 2010 census shows that 17.6 million identified themselves as Italian Americans and 1.3 million as Greek Americans.¹¹ While the 2020 census data are still being processed, Robert Oppedisano estimates an increase in the number of people who identified themselves as

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Italian Americans; this increase between the 2010 and the 2020 census, according to Oppedisano, results from a need of people to “maintain their cultural identity.”¹²

An additional variable is how their respective religious affiliations shaped the social organization of their communities and the visual communication of their identities via religious architecture. On the political front, the fact that their historical homelands allied with opposing camps during World War II deeply affected their place in the United States and their aspirations to national belonging. Let us also take into account those historical moments in which Greece and Italy figured differently in the American national imagination, affecting the perception, status, and cultural production of their diaspora populations in the United States.

The comparative angle foregrounds the manner in which these differences played out in the respective ethnic negotiations in specific sociohistorical moments. How did each group handle adversity? How did it capitalize on favorable conditions? Under what circumstances did they forge alliances and intercultural communities? In what way did authors, political elites, and ordinary citizens negotiate difference, and to what end? This volume casts light on how US Greeks and Italians navigated historically situated difference and similarity.

Italian Americans and Greek Americans shared structural similarities. A host of common problems shaped their immigrant and later ethnic lives: survival as economically and socially vulnerable groups; protection (importance of kin and regional relations; residential clustering); confrontation of negative stereotypes; suburbanization and the issue of cultural reproduction (education, family); self-representation; and social and economic empowerment. Usually scholars discuss these issues under the rubrics of adaptation, cultural preservation, and cultural politics. Comparison sheds light on how similarly situated groups negotiate their predicament. It asks how different histories and cultural positioning (beliefs, attitudes, cultural capital) lead to different or similar solutions to a common problem.

Notions of similarity, however, should be treaded cautiously. Italian and Greek immigrants in the early twentieth century were for the most part impoverished peasants migrating from agricultural areas of their respective countries. In the case of the Greeks, migration had a starting point in the

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Middle East as well, an ever-expanding diaspora. On the other hand, there was a clear divide between the Italians who arrived in the United States from the north and those who arrived from southern Italy, the Mezzogiorno. It will be therefore erroneous if their shared “peasant” status is treated as a measure of sameness. We know that Greek and southern Italian peasants were positioned differently in relation to the market economy, and in turn they placed themselves differently in relation to US capitalist modernity. Knowledge about the workings of the market furnished cultural capital that guided the entrepreneurial orientation of Greek immigrants in the niche economy of small businesses at the time. Italian and Greek immigrants possessed different sets of beliefs and aspirations regarding the importance of education in social mobility and the connection between education and family cohesion. Belonging to the similar socioeconomic category “peasant,” then, is not evidence of a fundamental sameness. If comparison is to avoid erroneous analogies, it must historicize the entities that it brings next to each other.

What histories, cultural, and political processes have connected Greek Americans and Italian Americans? To begin with, why were they both part of the early twentieth-century mass migration to the United States? How did policies of their respective states and regional economies bring them together on the same ship headed for Ellis Island? Or later, in the tumultuous 1960s and 1970s, in what way did the civil rights movement and its aftermath shape US Italian and Greek political interconnections? What brings them together today in musical gatherings in the contemporary United States, and how does this coexistence challenge conventional notions of ethnic identity? In what way did Italian and Greek authors capitalize on the American genre of crime fiction to place their respective ethnicities in popular culture? In what manner do second-generation Italians and Greeks negotiate historically specific ethnic patriarchies? Close attention to the context in which texts are produced, human mobility materialized, cultural expressions animated, and cultural categories generated is of paramount importance for meaningful comparisons.

Contributors to this volume practice the mode of what Bruce Lincoln endorses as “weak comparisons.” Unlike comparative projects aspiring to

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reveal universal truths or general patterns, weak comparisons work on a different scale, at the level of the particular. They set in motion “inquiries that are modest in scope, but intensive in scrutiny, treating a small number of examples in depth and detail, setting each in its full and proper context.”¹³ In this approach, the necessary task of the comparativist entails careful reflection about the processes producing commonalities or differences, the contexts in which they are deployed, and the specific human agents who cultivate and deploy them for specific purpose. This volume mobilizes this comparative endeavor not only to illuminate anew the histories and cultures of Italian Americans and Greek Americans but also to start opening new analytical routes toward the understanding of southeastern or Mediterranean European Americans.

The Sections and the Chapters

For the editors of this volume, a series of fundamental questions is addressed by the contributors: How did each group negotiate externally imposed categories? What cultural resources did they activate? Why were particular resources and not others chosen? What were the strategies of negotiation? What were the implications of these processes for each group? How did they contribute specifically to a particular trajectory of cultural change? What was resisted from the old culture? What was retained or modified for contemporary purposes, bearing on the question of usable pasts?

At the most basic level, this volume explores historically specific strategies of self-representation and agency in the context of externally imposed representations. In what way did dominant representations of each group change through time, and why? How did each group, and specifically who within each group—elites, ordinary people, women, politicized immigrants, leaders—negotiate its place in the United States at specific historical moments? Finally, in what way does each comparative project in the volume contribute new insights about southern European ethnicities in general in the United States?

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PART I: CONSTRUCTING, HISTORICIZING, AND CONTESTING IDENTITIES

The three chapters in Part I bring attention to how we can think relationally, transnationally, and comparatively about the parallels and especially the interdependences of the Greek and Italian American and Australian situations. Italian and Greek Americans and Australians found themselves as objects of US and Australian racialized categories. The chapters illustrate the analytical value of simultaneously practicing comparative transnational and transcultural approaches in investigating intersections between racial classifications, class, nation, and migrant histories in the making of new migrant identities. The formation of a white consciousness among Italian Americans involved solidarity across southeastern European American populations in the backlash against affirmative action policies set to redress racial injustices. Furthermore, one of the chapters contributes to the comparative project by illustrating that ethnicity functioned differently as a determinant in political behavior between Italian Americans and Greek Americans.

Andonis Piperoglou explores the transnational history of the racial slur “dago” and its meanings in early twentieth-century United States and Australia as a starting point to investigate the process of Italian Australian and Greek Australian identity formation. This transnational comparativism illuminates the racialized contours of this identity formation, and particularly the way whiteness discourse, which circulated between the United States and Australia, contributed to the racialized amalgamation of Italian and Greek migrants. The histories of these groups, he argues, cannot be seen independently from dominant racial classifications, like “dago,” that mediated their making. Piperoglou practices “cautious comparativism,” seeking neither absolute uniqueness nor regular uniformities but instead historically situated commonalities and differences as they were expressed and negotiated in public speech and popular representations. His attention to migrant responses to the racial slur “dago” ventures into a transcultural analysis of the ways in which Greek Australians and Italian Australians articulated common purpose and experience based on their distinct, yet overlapping, histories, claiming joint inclusion into whiteness. Piperoglou’s work illustrates the analytical value of simultaneously practicing comparative transnational and transcultural approaches in investigating intersections between racial clas-

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sifications, class, nation, and migrant histories in the making of new migrant identities.

Stefano Luconi brings Greek American and Italian American studies in conversation around a pivotal historical moment in the making of Italian American “whiteness.” He explores Italian American voting patterns in the 1968 presidential elections in connection to Richard Nixon’s decision to favor a Greek American over an Italian American as his vice presidential nominee. The analytical move to place the political behavior of a particular ethnic group in relation to a political figure from another “white ethnic” group enables Luconi to highlight a key mode in the racial politics at the time. The formation of a white consciousness among Italian Americans involved solidarity across southeastern European Americans in the backlash against affirmative action policies set to redress racial injustices. Luconi further contributes to the comparative project by illustrating that ethnicity functioned differently as a determinant in political behavior between Italian Americans and Greek Americans. This finding probes further research to explain this difference.

Jim Cocola discusses a wide range of literary and filmic depictions in which Greek and Italian Americans have regarded one another and closely juxtaposes the treatments of Italian Americans by Elia Kazan and evocations of Greece by Gregory Corso. His examples from American and Australian spheres show that the expressive cultures of the Mediterranean diaspora have been marked by ambivalences, competing affiliations and disaffiliations, and contending exclusions and inclusions vis-à-vis whiteness. Cocola observes that whether asserting dubious claims to, exercising attendant privileges of, or resisting interpellations into whiteness, the writers and filmmakers he discusses have never fully transcended their regional and ancestral origins; nor have they fully assimilated into national identities. He proposes the concept of paraethnicity to understand the process of taking into account adjacent populations in the process of consolidating these identities, or, by contrast, disavowing them. Greek American representations of Italian Americans and Italian American representations of Greek Americans and of Greece retain particular distinctions, and even more granular local manifestations, but they also deserve to be read in a broader key as Mediterranean American self-representations.

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PART II: DEPLOYING IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION STRATEGIES IN
TWO ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

The two chapters in Part II examine their case studies deeply to explore important dimensions of social, material, and heritage production. The authors corroborate the view of how architecture and education are foundational to identity construction. Overall, this section focuses on identity formation through language and architecture at the intersection of local, national, and transnational processes.

Angelyn Balodimas-Bartolomei and Fevronia Soumakis undertake a comparative history of Italian American and Greek American educational institutions in New York City to examine the role of cultural background, class, religion, and settlement patterns in shaping the organization and politics of each group regarding language retention via ethnic education throughout the twentieth century. Their comparative inquiry identifies how differences in the socioeconomic experiences upon the arrival of these groups early in the twentieth century, as well as the place of their respective religions in the city's ethnoreligious milieu, decisively resulted in two distinct educational trajectories. Whereas Greek Americans privileged an ethnoreligious orientation in ethnic education, Italian Americans adopted a cosmopolitan approach to Italian language. The historical comparison in these chapters projects differences and similarities in ethnic strategies for cultural reproduction. Anchored in a particular urban context, discussing the particulars of community activism, and taking into account transnational lineages, this study clarifies identity formation through language at the intersection of local, national, and transnational processes.

Kostis Kourelis situates the agency of Italian and Greek immigrants in the period from 1870 to 1925 to express identity via monumental religious architecture in connection to the structures of their respective religious institutions as well as ethnic and national histories. The analysis casts a global cultural, historical, and religious net to explain regional and national differences between US Greek and Italian architectural styles and arrangements in the internal spaces of worship. This broad net is crucial for historicizing comparison as a transnational project. One cannot explain, for example, the canonical Greek Orthodox style in the United States—a generic pan-European

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“round-arch-style”—independently from the formation of Greek national identity and its formation in connection with Western Europe. What is more, this visual expression of identity needs to take into account the intercultural religious dynamics between Byzantine Christianity and Islam. Similarly, one cannot understand the particularities of Italian immigrant visual signatures—the Renaissance and the Baroque—in the eclectic US religious landscape without considering their ethnic negotiations with universal Catholicism as well as the transcultural histories of Catholic and Protestant architectural styles. In his painstaking transnational and transcultural charting of routes of styles and histories of institutions, Kourelis offers a paradigmatic approach for historicizing comparison. His attention to institutional structures as a key variable in mediating, even determining, local expressions of identity via religious styles strengthens his comparative insights. Various degrees of local agency between early Italian and Greek immigrants cannot be explained outside the webs of institutional power and the transnational histories of each group.

PART III: EXPRESSING ETHNIC AND GENDER IDENTITIES IN
LITERATURE AND MUSIC

The authors in Part III compare and describe identity making in literature and music to probe the power of kinship within the family but also beyond it. They identify relational ethnic identities, acknowledge the regional specificity of ethnicity, and reckon with gendered dimensions. Their examination of music and literature uncovers how identities in performance and identities in fictive narration animate selective memories of ethnic pasts, as well as individual reflections in connection to group identity.

Eleftheria Arapoglou applies a transcultural approach as a mode of comparative inquiry. Her close reading of the narrative structure of two novels, Annie Lontas’s *Let Me Explain You* (2016) and Paola Corso’s *Catrina’s Haircut: A Novel in Stories* (2010), demonstrates the value of exploring in each work how particular narrative voices engage in dialogue across generational differences, across differences in gender and sexuality, and across the pre-immigrant past and the American present. This “dialogic transculturalism” contributes to the mapping of ever-evolving subjectivities in relation to

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family and communities as well as the particularities in the enactments of individual identity. This reading foregrounds intraethnic plurality, unravels techniques for belonging, and identifies strategies of resistance women employ to counter immigrant patriarchy. Arapoglou also employs the trans-cultural reading across the two novels as a comparative tool. Bringing *Let Me Explain You* and *Catina's Haircut* in conversation pinpoints a literary space in which characters enact shared concerns and voice different experiences across the gendered landscape of Italian American and Greek American subjectivities.

How do American authors of Italian and Greek background inflect the genre of the hard-boiled detective novel with ethnic elements, and what insights about ethnicity does this inflection reveal? Francesca de Lucia examines this question via a close reading of a pair of novels by two established writers, Domenic Stansberry and George Pelecanos. Her comparative inquiry identifies commonalities and differences on several levels. Within Italian American writing, she brings to the fore contrasts between West Coast and East Coast Italian American writers. Across the writings of Stansberry and Pelecanos, she points to the importance that these two writers assign to the local urban context and discusses the particular racial dynamics that shape the protagonists' engagement with ethnicity and views toward racial Others. She also ventures in cross-genre comparisons, stressing how "ethnic" hard-boiled fiction differs from the immigrant novel. This set of comparisons reflects the differences in the historical experience of the two groups, intergenerational tensions and affinities, ambivalence in the ethnic identification of the second generation, and interracial solidarities, as well as conflicts. Bringing the two authors in conversation, de Lucia charts interethnic and interregional diversity within "white ethnicity," alerting scholars about the importance of analyzing subjectivity in its particular social and racial contexts, including everyday interactions.

Panayiotis League discusses how an everyday gathering of a few musicians and dance educators provides the occasion to consider how these individuals compare their intercultural connections with and disconnections from their Italian New England and Asia Minor Greek heritages and "mainstream" categories of ethnicity and national identity. This localized cross-cultural encounter takes place within a cultural space that the participants

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share, namely their affective and interpretive engagement with Asia Minor Greek music and dance. League practices a “concept-based” analysis that focuses on everyday sociality as the means to explore the collaborative and emergent cross-cultural intersubjective understanding among the participants. His dialogic microethnography moves away from generalized comparisons of ethnic identities. The interest instead is in uncovering how individuals attach meanings to particular cultural aspects of their regional heritages, and how they consciously curate their imaginative living in connection to selective cultural identifications. Emphasizing complexity and nuance in negotiating multiple heritages at the level of the individual, dialogic microethnography enables the critical scrutiny of narratives of collective “white ethnic” identity that either reify ethnicity or render it thin and easily disposable. League recognizes the limits of conversation as a site of knowledge production. Microethnography nevertheless offers a valuable tool to recognize the place of cultural heritage in individual lives and a starting point to raise poignant questions about how to connect particularized exchanges with broader discourses of belonging.

PART IV: ETHNIC IDENTITIES AND VISUAL CULTURE

Part IV focuses on the representation of ethnic identity in visual culture with attention to the lens of postethnicity: the struggle to uphold US identity, the performance of ethnic identity in private and public, the breaking away from popular stereotypes, and the intricacies of Greek and Italian ethnic and racial politics.

Sostene Massimo Zangari’s chapter brings to the fore the all-powerful role of television in the reshaping of Italian American and Greek American identity. Zangari sheds light on the impact of the CBS series *Kojak* (1973–78) on the rise of these two white ethnic groups as new American cultural heroes. This comparative approach discusses the media projections of the eponymous Greek American policeman Kojak, played by Telly Savalas, and his Italian American colleagues, while emphasizing the reestablishment of a new connection between the ethnic hero and the mainstream viewer. Through a critical examination of the overall changing sociocultural and political framework of the 1970s, Zangari specifies how the series repudiates

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numerous ethnic stereotypes of the past by highlighting the centrality of family bonds and middle-class values. The Greek American hero represents these middle-class values and the balance between family loyalty and the avoidance of tribalism. On the other hand, the Italian American characters, though typically steeped in corruption, crime, and the Mafia, are often led to criminal acts by their need to protect family harmony. The author concludes by identifying the legendary figure of the ethnic cop, depicted in *Kojak*, as the embodiment of a reborn version of the American Dream, a hard worker smoothly assimilated with his “humble” origins in the European South.

The visual culture of immigration offers a fruitful site for comparing how the immigrant past is narrated in the present. Yiorgos Kalogeras draws from a pair of Italian American documentaries and another pair of Greek American ones to explain the differences and commonalities in their telling of histories of immigration. The measure for his comparison, however, is not ethnicity. It is the intended primary audience of the documentaries. Italian and Greek documentaries whose primary intended audience is the US public, including “American ethnics,” share this commonality: they represent the Americanization of the immigrants as a teleological trajectory toward fulfillment and cultural closure. They produce celebratory accounts and unveil a fixed notion of identity. In contrast, Italian and Greek documentaries whose primary intended audiences lies in Italy and Greece recognize immigrant history as a multifaceted process defined not merely by success but also experiences of loss, cultural mixing, interethnic coalitions, and open-ended identities. They refrain from a linear narrative of completion to acknowledge instead ambiguity and complexity in identity formation. Kalogeras organizes his discussion around the concept of post-ethnicity, which he explores to illuminate the reasons for the bifurcation between celebratory idealization and stark historical constructions of the immigrant past.

According to Michail C. Markodimitrakis, the representation of the ethnic American subject in popular culture, especially film and television, often reinforces the relationship between stereotypes and lived experience. For Italian American and Greek American characters on screen, the portrayal of their journey to assimilation into the “melting pot” of American society

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without abolishing their ethnic cultures is often connected to class aspirations and social mobility; the process of belonging also includes performances of the ethnic subject's gender roles in public and private spaces. Occupying a different economic status compared to their ancestors, younger generations of Italian and Greek Americans, as portrayed in popular culture, negotiate their status as American citizens through cultural anxieties related to their own "pursuit of happiness," one of the primary, constitutive principles of the American Dream. The author compares *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002) and *Moonstruck* (1987) as two filmic examples that display the complexities of immigrants and ethnic Americans in the process of striving to belong to the society they live in. The protagonists perform the meaning of being American at home and in public. The Portokalos and Castorini families redefine themselves as part of the American society, while also retaining their distinct cultural identities. Markodimitrakis focuses on the performance of the key filmic characters in public and private, bringing attention to ethnic belonging as a function of gender and class. He then shifts attention to how the two female protagonists engage in the pursuit of happiness; their goal is realized through segmented assimilation to the dominant white middle-class culture. In other words, the author compares how the two characters let go of their ethnic identities in favor of a more commodified, liberal form of womanhood.

NOTES

1. Conzen, "The Invention of Ethnicity."
2. There is a fascinating discussion and comparison between Italian American and Jewish American experiences in Moss, *Creating the New Right Ethnic in 1970s America*.
3. The bibliography on the discussion between the cultural representations of the two groups is rather scarce. One of the earliest of the few comparative works on Italian American and Greek American literature is Helen Geracimos Chapin, from 1977: "If You Seek Justice, Put a Gift on the Scale" (<https://bit.ly/3B5jDgt>), an article comparing the works of Nelson Algren, Pietro Di Donato, and Harry Mark Petrakis. Chapin has also examined ethnic female writing in "Struggle, Sorrow, and Joy: Women in White Ethnic American Literature" (<https://bit.ly/3FrilPA>). For a comparative analysis on Greek American and Italian American representations on cinema, see Kalogeras, "Entering through the Golden Door." See also Patrona, *Return Narratives*.

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18 *Anagnostou, Kalogeras, and Patrona*

4. An interesting exploration of mixed Italian American and Greek American heritage can be found at <https://bit.ly/3iwMBi3>. Additionally, a joint analysis of both migrations can be found at <https://bit.ly/3a4pSVM>.

5. The coexistence between Italian and Greek immigrants has been noted in Kallia Papadaki's award-winning Greek novel *Dendrites* (Athens: Polis, 2015). Another recent novel of return, Perry Giuseppe Rizopoulos's *Wheat Songs: A Greek American Journey* (Brookline, MA: Cherry Orchard Books, 2018), explores memory and belonging through the author of mixed Greek/Italian and American heritage who, through his grandfather's narrations, returns to the Greece of World War II. On the other hand, Maria Lombardo's novel *A Camp without Walls* (Newton Center, MA: Italy Enterprises, 2001) unravels her Italian father's experience in Greece as a soldier and later partisan during World War II.

6. Jacobson, *Whiteness*.

7. Brettell, "Anthropology," 657.

8. Luconi, "Italian Americans," 1248.

9. Patrona, "Greek Americans," 1001.

10. Frangos, "The Greeks."

11. Luconi, "Italian Americans," 1247; Patrona, "Greek Americans," 1000.

12. <https://bit.ly/3msSL45>.

13. Lincoln, *Apples*, 11.

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P A R T I

**Constructing, Historicizing,
and Contesting Identities**

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Mediterranean Americans to Themselves

Jim Cocola

In Italian American representations of Greece, as in Greek American representations of Italian Americans, a self-reflective Mediterranean American imaginary begins to emerge. Rather than insisting on national distinctions still relatively inchoate at the point of emigration, we should regard these representations as self-representations, or, put another way, as representations of similarly situated otherness. Like many other Mediterranean emigrants and their descendants, Greek Americans and Italian Americans have been doubly and mutually othered in the imperial and national logics of diaspora: eclipsed not only by Anglo-Saxon settler colonist power structures upon arrival in North America, but first of all by incursions of Ottoman, Spanish, and British power—or by further refractions within the nascent Greek, Italian, and Turkish nation-states—occasioning their very departure from the Mediterranean.¹ Sharing in the largely appropriated legacies of classical antiquity, and struggling with the present-day vagaries of skin privilege

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and symbolic ethnicity, Greek American and Italian American expressive cultures are ripe for exercises in comparison, which might also lead to exercises in collectivity. This dual errand also provides a comparative analogue to those exercises in comparison and collectivity bringing Chinese, Filipino, and Japanese Americans under the umbrella of the Asian American field imaginary nearly half a century ago.

Italian Americans and Greek Americans have invoked one another, or their respective homelands, in many literary and filmic depictions. Mentions of Greece occur in the work of John Ciardi, Diane di Prima, and Gay Talese. Greece plays a role in Gregory Corso's plays, poems, and letters. And Elia Kazan's controversial film *Baby Doll* (1956) features a Sicilian American antagonist, Silva Vacarro.² While such texts cut across national origins, they also emanate from local roots in a commonly held bioregion, registering as cases of self-reflection by Mediterranean Americans. Whether conceived of as looking in the next mirror over or as looking in the selfsame mirror, whenever Greek American and Italian American audiences and authors—which is to say, Mediterranean American audiences and authors—consider their respective works in common, they create the conditions to achieve greater clarity in reflecting on questions of identity and performativity in more particular and more generalizable keys.

If emigrants from Sicily and Smyrna were propelled from their respective homelands for distinct reasons, upon arrival in America they faced similar cultural and social challenges, whether in Boston, Detroit, or San Francisco. For every Charles Atlas, the famed Italian American professional bodybuilder born Angelo Siciliano in Calabria, there is also a Jim Londos, the popular Greek American professional wrestler born Christos Theofilou in the Peloponnese. Particularly among succeeding generations, even as acculturation, language acquisition, and socialization proceeded apace in the period spanning immigration restriction and civil rights reform, Greek Americans and Italian Americans continued to depart from Anglo norms in terms of complexion, family structure, and religious practice. On the national political stage, for example, the rises and falls of Spiro Agnew and Frank Rizzo have their parallels, just as Mario Cuomo's triumphs and struggles in the political arena found their echo in those of Michael Dukakis. For some, the Mediterranean American identity formation may present an

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anachronistic and misrepresentative label when applied to figures who infrequently identified as such, yet the same objection could be applied to Asian American identity formation at the moment of its emergence in the 1970s. In fact, as a distinct watershed, the Mediterranean presents a geographical catchment area more definite and distinct than the more familiar but no less tendentious continental formations of Asia and Europe.

While the Mediterranean American identity formation remains nascent, Mediterranean studies stands as a well-established field, dating from Fernand Braudel's two-volume study *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (1949), which posited the region's "unity and coherence," in an argument more frequently applied to the ancient and medieval periods than to the modern period.³ More recently, Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell's *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (2000) questioned whether "the Mediterranean region as a distinct whole" could serve as an "indispensable framework" for "the *very recent* history and likely futures of its people," cautioning that "we should not take its unity as an uncontroversial geographical datum."⁴ And yet, due to cultural and linguistic convergences in diaspora, present-day Mediterranean American populations present a more cohesive unit than any demographic unity spanning the contemporary Mediterranean itself. In the United States, as Greek Americans and Italian Americans have tentatively assimilated, some have striven to affiliate and others to disaffiliate from whiteness, slowly accruing or incompletely incorporating elements of white privilege. At the same time, the specific contours of their alterity have remained evident even as they have gradually amalgamated among themselves, following the tendency identified by Ronald Horowitz whereby a set of distinct ethnic groups combine to "form a new group, larger and different from any of the component parts."⁵ Indeed, the very volume in which this essay appears can be read as evidence of such a tendency.

Whereas Anglo, African, and Asian American depictions of Greek Americans and Italian Americans have turned on complex processes of hostility and sympathy often harboring concealed reflections on their own distinct and separate identities, Greek American invocations of Italian Americans can be understood as vehicles for ventriloquized modes of self-reflection. So too, Italian American invocations of Greece offer opportunities for reflec-

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tion on their ethnicity and identity. Such dynamics pertain not only in the American context, but also in Australia, as manifested in the works of writers including Rosa Cappiello, Angelo Loukakis, and Vasso Kalamaras.⁶ In American and Australian spheres alike, the expressive cultures of several Mediterranean diasporas have been marked by fraught identifications that consistently trouble—and are troubled by—the discriminatory norm of whiteness.

As a demographic and geographical phenomenon, Mediterranean American identity formation draws on bioregional and racialized origins alike. Standing as a cousin to Michael Novak’s favored acronym, “PIGS—those Poles, Italians, Greeks, and Slavs,”⁷ the broader designation of Mediterranean American also allows for more distant and more recent arrivals from the Maghreb and the Mashriq. And yet, while Matthew Frye Jacobson has classed earlier new immigrant populations under the heading of “Ellis Island whiteness”—as distinct from “Plymouth Rock whiteness”⁸—whiteness as an identity formation brooks no qualifiers. During the 1920s, as the whiteness of Mediterranean populations was called into question, their access to Ellis Island was all but foreclosed. Many in subsequent generations of Mediterranean Americans have balked, following a trajectory identified by Yiorgos Anagnostou wherein “ethnicity is disarticulated from whiteness and rearticulated into an emergent ethos of interracial solidarity.”⁹ Rejection by and resistance to the dominant culture has brought members of the Italian and Greek diasporas together in their mutual distrust of—or, less honorably, in their desperate attempts to cling to—the invidious logics of American racialization.

Ottoman Greek emigrants like Kazan can be understood in the terms Robert Viscusi used to describe Italian emigrants, as “orphans of massive political catastrophes” whose expressive culture “does not belong to a national project” so much as to multiregional and translocal imaginaries. Insofar as the emergence of the modern Greek, Italian, and Turkish states was informed by Anglo and American imperialism in the Mediterranean, propelling emigrants into diaspora, it moved them not so much toward as away from the national, to which they remained tenuously attached in memory even as they were driven by and into larger, newer empires that ambivalently incorporated them. From emigrant figures like Kazan and Pascal D’Angelo

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to American-born descendants such as Gregory Corso and Jeffrey Eugenides, Greek American and Italian American artists and writers have contested what Viscusi describes as “the bourgeois Anglo order of prestige,” aiming “to overcome its effects on their lives and literary ambitions.”¹⁰ Even as American citizens, their identities continue to pivot on Mediterranean descent, for as Ghassan Hage has observed, writing in the Mediterranean Australian context, “the acquisition of formal citizenship does not give any indication of the level of practical national belonging granted by the dominant cultural community,” which “remains determined by questions of cultural descent far more than by state acceptance,”¹¹ in a dialectic of exclusion and inclusion redounding for several generations.

Whether asserting dubious claims to, striving for attendant privileges of, or resisting partial interpellations into whiteness, Italian Americans and Greek Americans have never fully transcended their regional and ancestral origins, nor have they fully assimilated into national identities, whether as emigrants or immigrants, whether as citizens or descendants. Although not co-ethnics, they have become co-nationals along similar trajectories, thereby accruing a kind of paraethnicity, linked through comparable but distinct descent lines, national origins, and subject positions. Here, *para*—comes from the Greek *παρά* (*pará*: beside; next to, near, from; against, contrary to), and *ethnicity* from the Greek *ἔθνος* and *εθνικός* (*éthnos*: custom, nation, tribe). Even as Greek American representations of the Italian and Italian American representations of the Greek retain particular distinctions and local manifestations, they nonetheless deserve to be read in a broader key as Mediterranean American self-representations, fashioned by proximate figures who stand next to one another: alongside, but not fully of—and thus, potentially poised against and contrary to—the American paradigms of white nationalism and white supremacy.

The Italian's Greece

Near the peak of Mediterranean immigration to the United States, around the turn of the twentieth century, the US Immigration Bureau devised a framework accounting for different categories of “race or people,” partition-

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ing Italian immigrants into two different classes. Per 1898 codifications subsequently incorporated into the US census, a panoply of over twenty racial categories included “Italian (north)” and “Italian (south),” while a 1903 refinement of these guidelines clustered “races or peoples” into “four or five recognized divisions,” including the Teutonic, Celtic, Iberic, Slavic, and Mongolic. Although ostensibly unified in 1871, “Italian (north)” and “Italian (south)” were repartitioned through the racialized logic of the US Immigration Bureau, with “Italian (north)” classed as Celtic alongside “Irish, Welsh, Scotch, [and] French,” and “Italian (south)” classed as Iberic alongside “Greek, Portuguese, and Spanish; also Syrian from Turkey in Asia.”¹² This partition exemplified a process of racialization whereby southern Italian emigrants converged with Greek emigrants rather than with northern Italian emigrants, not only in terms of complexion and descent lines in the Mediterranean but also in terms of privilege and social position within the United States.

Recalling her childhood in Helper, Utah, Helen Papanikolas noted that “North Italian and South Italian miners fought each other over whether to call a strike” as the Klan met Mediterranean coal and rail workers with the warning: “Take the Greeks and Italians and get out of town.”¹³ Racialized dynamics also pertained for Gay Talese as an undergraduate in the 1950s at the “then lily white University of Alabama,” where he counted himself among those “olive-skinned out-of-staters whose ancestry might be Jewish, Arab, or Greek,” those “whom the Tuscaloosa chapter of the Ku Klux Klan saw as borderline whites,” or, in another Klan formulation, as “marginally white.”¹⁴ But whereas the Klan racialized Italian Americans together with Greek Americans, Italian Americans themselves, particularly in the second and third generations, emphasized connections to Greek Americans on a more decidedly cultural basis. Thus, in his poem “A Five Year Step,” John Ciardi described his family, emigrants from Campania to Massachusetts, as “Greeks who spoke ourselves in bad Italian” with “our saints/ disguised as Catholic” but in fact “mountain-rank.”¹⁵ Meanwhile, in her memoir *Recollections of My Life as a Woman* (2001), Diane di Prima recalled the division of her immigrant family—with grandfather Pietro deciding “to stay in America” and his brother Giuseppe electing “to ‘go home,’ to return to Sicily”—as “a Mediterranean, or North African ritual, the splitting of a tribe,” with

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“the makings of Greek tragedy.”¹⁶ Later rendered “outcast, outrider” after she dropped out of Swarthmore and returned to New York, di Prima began to “study Homeric Greek out of an 1890’s grammar I had discovered in my Aunt’s attic in Queens.”¹⁷ The framings of these returns do not so much as mention Italy as such, being more decidedly aligned to Greece, and to the Mediterranean.

More recently, in her memoir *The Anarchist Bastard* (2011), Joanna Clapps Herman emphasized the “deposits of Greek colonization” structuring her family’s removal from Basilicata to Connecticut, bespeaking “a subtle layer, remnant of that Greek ‘new world,’ one inscribed in cultural mores and oral traditions.” Tracing her heritage back to the Italian peninsula, she nonetheless positioned her deeper roots as Greek, turning, like di Prima, to Homer as the “author who acts as a useful guide to the land and tribe whence I came.”¹⁸ Such Greek and Italian fusions abound among Mediterranean American writers, from Don DeLillo’s novel *The Names* (1982), set largely in Greece, but extending across the Near East to Lahore, to the fiction of Jeffrey Eugenides, who emphasizes Greek protagonists but also relies on related Mediterranean characters and references as a way of testifying to Mediterranean alterity in novels including *The Virgin Suicides* (1993), *Middlesex* (2002), and *The Marriage Plot* (2011). In a more autobiographical key, the poet Eleni Sikelianos reflects in *You Animal Machine (The Golden Greek)* (2014) on the intermingling of Greek and Italian strains across her family tree. Writers in the Mediterranean itself have also been alive to such synergies. For example, Greek novelist Kallia Papadaki’s *Dendrites* (2015) narrates a Greek American immigrant’s rise in the 1920s among an Italian American community in Camden, New Jersey—one that welcomes him only to rebuff him in turn, revealing the contingent and provisional nature of paraethnic solidarity.

Mediterranean American identity often solidifies in print, in diaspora, though it can also coalesce in person, at sea. Whereas Ciardi, di Prima, and Herman considered connections between Italian descent and Greek culture from perches within the United States, Gregory Corso traveled directly to Greece to engage that intersection, albeit reluctantly. In one 1958 letter, from Paris, he confessed being “very afraid to go to Greece because I always

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dream of Greece and if I see it I'll lose the dream"; in another, from Rome, he explained that "the ancient Rome of my dreams was a far greater ancient Rome, an ancient Rome that never existed," suggesting he could "devise far nobler Caesars, far colossus Coliseums, damned if I had gone to Greece and I would have forfeited that too, happily so."¹⁹ But across his third and fourth volumes, *The Happy Birthday of Death* (1960) and *Long Live Man* (1962), Greece, not Italy, drives his imagination. In "Spontaneous Poem After Having Seen the Metropolitan Museum," Corso writes from Central Park, noting "I'm out here / and old Greece is in there," asking "what good my sitting here and Greece in there," while in "Mortal Infliction" he references Polyphemus and Ulysses.²⁰ Even in poems where Italy is invoked, such allusions point toward Greece. In "Marriage," Corso imagines fatherhood, proposing a nursery for his baby where he would "tack Della Francesca all over its crib / Sew the Greek alphabet on its bib / And build for its playpen a roofless Parthenon"; in "On Palatine," he begins by announcing "Via Sacra I look down upon you, / my ownself tribunal," and ends by declaring "I've an eye impure for sight; / I dare not visit Greece."²¹

Yet Corso did visit Greece, resolved "to prove my belief that the golden statue of Poseidon, the biggest ever, the Trojan gog God is two miles out beneath the Aegean."²² Upon arrival, he found himself drunk in Athens, "crying all night putting down the Greek peasantry for having chased Poseidon away."²³ In the capital, Corso's failed errand was not Athens but the Aegean, less concerned to reify an imagined national community than to recover the ancient Greek god of the sea. Crete, rather than continental Greece, most captivated Corso, prompting anxiety and enthusiasm alike. In "Paranoia in Crete," he cursed the "Damned Minoan crevices, that I clog them up!" resolving to "Plaster myself away from everything, all that out there!" and "forfeit the Echinadian Isles." In "First Night on the Acropolis," with "pressed face against a pillar I cried / Cried for my shadow that dear faithful sentry / Splashed across the world's loveliest floor." In "Greece" he presented himself as "the once Grecian / Grecian no more."²⁴ Summing up his journey, in "European Thoughts 1959," Corso allowed that "Greece was a marvelous country / but of course I was not marvelous in it." Nevertheless, he formed some connections, however unlikely. In a section of "Some Greek Writings"

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titled “Phaestos is a Village with 25 Families,” Corso recalled a day at the tavern with some Cretans, where “we could not speak each other’s language / but drink after drink we talked about everything.”²⁵

A more seasoned Corso returned from Greece with equal parts nostalgia and pessimism. By 1961, weary of Europe, Corso wrote to James Laughlin that being in London came as “a relief after two years of alien tongues,” positing, in “After Reading ‘In the Clearing,’” that “my homeland were Greece and England / Shelley is my ichor—Demeter is my mother.”²⁶ In regarding Corso as “the most frequent and explicit of all the Beats in his references to classical lore,” Stephen Dickey, Shelia Murnaghan, and Ralph M. Rosen speculate that this might be “despite or because of the fact that he was the least formally educated,”²⁷ but it might also be understood as a function of Mediterranean descent: here was an autodidact who took the time to follow his roots back to their sources. And while Corso’s Shelleyan tendencies might seem to betray an Anglophilic and ultimately Western taste in the Mediterranean, his interest emanated from and gravitated toward decidedly eastern and southern vantage points.

Corso’s engagement with the Mediterranean did not confine itself to Europe, but also extended to North Africa. In “Bomb,” he expressed anxieties about American hostility toward the Mediterranean in imagining “Penguins plunged against the Sphinx” and “The top of the Empire State / arrowed in a broccoli field in Sicily.”²⁸ Corso also developed a taste for Tangier, maintaining, in a section of “Some Moroccan Writings” titled “The European Section in Tangier,” that “one culture must blend with another culture / (ancient Phrygia can tell) / to maintain the separation it demands.”²⁹ But even before arrival in Morocco, Corso had the Maghreb in mind. Nonplussed by the Parisian atmosphere in “The Sacre-Coeur Café,” Corso kept his eye on North Africa, writing that “the Algerians / they don’t go to the Sacré-Coeur Café,” while in “Reflection in a Green Arena” he conjured “France Algeria” as a case of “sad geo-woe.”³⁰

Asked by Michael Andre if he was a classicist, defined as “someone who found great value in past civilizations, particularly Greece and Rome,” Corso replied in the affirmative, explaining that “if anyone were to ask me about Carthage or Phoenicia, or about the Bogomils or about Sumer and *Gilgamesh*, I know the shot.”³¹ Significantly, when the subject turned to Greeks and

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Romans, Corso's attention turned beyond Western European antecedents, extending to the Balkans, the Levant, the Maghreb, and Mesopotamia. Elaborating on his tendency to "go backwards," he explained that he did not stop with "Ancient Greece and Rome," but went from there "to Egypt, and from there to Sumer and wedges."³² This interest in the ancient Near East also emerged in his affinity for *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, which he described as "the first thing written down," devoting an hourlong lecture to the text in a 1977 seminar at the Naropa Institute's Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics.³³

Corso's eastern and southern orientations were apparent even before he broke into print, as manifested in his early closet drama *Sarpedon* (1954). According to legend, he wrote the play on a dare from a teaching fellow at Harvard who told him "if I could write a Greek play I could stay at Eliot House." Corso "did it overnight," drawing on elements of Homer in the tradition of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.³⁴ "Like the great Greek masters," Corso explained, "I took off where Homer left an opening."³⁵ Drawing on an episode from Book XVI of *The Iliad*, Corso focused his attention on the titular son of Zeus, who nonetheless fought and died on the side of the Trojans against the Greeks during the Trojan War. Dead and unaccounted for, it is Sarpedon's very absence that structures Corso's play.³⁶ When Charon accepts a roll call of seventy newly dead, Hades objects, noting a list of seventy-one, including Sarpedon, whom he describes as "something special" and "unlike the common mortal," since "his mother was Europa/ and his father, a bull."³⁷ Sarpedon here stands as a cipher for Corso, a son of Europe who could not be contained by Europe, identifying more strongly with the Near East than with the West.

Presenting himself as Greek and Anglo, rather than Italian or American, Corso displayed a preference for deeper civilizational origins stretching all the way back to Sumer, even while despairing of the prevailing cultural direction in America. His critique of the United States proved especially pitched in *Elegiac Feelings American* (1970), as, for example, in "Eleven Times a Poem," where he presented Athens as "the birthplace of liberty" and "wondered if my country were its grave."³⁸ Notes of Mediterranean American self-abnegation occur elsewhere in late Corso, as in "The Mirror Within," where he thinks "to see myself/like a battered Greek statue/slowly ruining

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away.”³⁹ Taken together, it is striking to observe that some of the most prominent Italian American poets of the twentieth century—Ciardi, Corso, di Prima—prove less likely to identify themselves with the nation-state as such than with their specific regions of origin—Ciardi via Campania, Corso via Calabria, di Prima via Lazio and Sicily—and their deeper civilizational roots, drawn more decidedly to ancient Greece than to modern Italy.

The Anatolian’s Sicilian

As one of the most conspicuous and provocative stage and screen directors of the twentieth century, Elia Kazan nevertheless proved reluctant to engage with his own origins, which he ventriloquized for decades before shifting to a career as a novelist, only then moving to address the contours of his Greek Ottoman and Anatolian American heritage, in *America America* (1962) and *The Arrangement* (1967), both adapted as films he directed, as well as in *The Anatolian* (1982) and *Beyond the Aegean* (1994).⁴⁰ In early work as film director, Kazan prevailed upon Irish ethnicity as a vehicle for exploring otherness: first, more explicitly, in *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1945), and later, more implicitly, in *On the Waterfront* (1954), one of the few Hollywood films to treat organized crime without placing Italian Americans at the center of the power dynamic.⁴¹ Kazan’s most prominent Mediterranean character of the 1950s came in *Baby Doll* (1956), developed from a Tennessee Williams screenplay that Kazan brought to fruition. Yet, in keeping with the casting redlines of the day, the role of Sicilian American Silva Vacarro was not played by a Mediterranean actor. Originally hoping to draw Brando for the role, Kazan eventually settled on Eli Wallach, in his screen debut. Born to Jewish emigrants from Poland, Wallach had also portrayed Alvaro Mangiacavallo opposite Irish American actress Maureen Stapleton’s Serafina Delle Rose in the 1951 stage premiere of Williams’s *The Rose Tattoo*, a play about Sicilian Americans with an oliveface cast, populated almost exclusively by non-Mediterranean actors. Despite their once and future collaborations, Kazan demurred from directing Williams’s *The Rose Tattoo* on stage or screen, preferring to concentrate on the development of *On the Waterfront*.

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Thus, several years before treating Greekness on film, Kazan focused on a Sicilian. Moreover, several years before treating a Sicilian, Kazan focused not only on the Irish, but also on a pair of protagonists embroiled in racialized passing, with Gregory Peck as Philip Schuyler Green in *Gentlemen's Agreement* (1947) and Jeanne Crain as Pinky Johnson in *Pinky* (1949). Peck, an Anglo-Irish Catholic from California, was cast to type, portraying a journalist posing as a Jewish writer on undercover assignment to expose the social malaise of anti-Semitism in Manhattan. Crain, also Irish Catholic, portrayed a light-complexioned woman of partial African descent returned home to Alabama after crossing the color line in Massachusetts, through a dizzying filmic logic in which an actress regarded as white passed in portraying a character regarded as Black who had herself passed for a woman regarded as white. *Pinky* was met with considerable controversy, prompting a cross-burning at a drive-in screening in Macon, Georgia, where “newspapers reported that the Klan could not be definitively linked to the incident.”⁴²

For its critics, *Pinky* “embodies the mulatto through a white actress, producing an ambiguous interplay of audience identifications,”⁴³ with the casting of Jeanne Crain making “a far more successful movie but a far less honest one, too.”⁴⁴ A related dynamic pertains in *Baby Doll*, with the casting of Wallach as Vacarro. Just as in *Pinky* “the mulatto woman becomes a physical absence in the very narrative that attempts to account for her presence and represent her story,”⁴⁵ so too in *Baby Doll* the Sicilian man is subjected to a similar dialectic of absence and presence. Nevertheless, Kazan’s extended treatment of Vacarro emboldened him to include other Italian American characters with key supporting roles in later films, including Anthony Franciosa as Joey DePalma in *A Face in the Crowd* (1957) and Zohra Lampert—like Wallach, translating Eastern European Jewish identity into southern Italian identity—as Angelina Stampler in *Splendor in the Grass* (1961). Such roles offered further mouthpieces for the ventriloquism of Kazan’s Mediterranean roots, laying the groundwork for his direct treatments of Greek American protagonists: Stathis Giallelis as Stavros Topouzoglou in *America America* (1963) and Kirk Douglas—this time translating Eastern European Jewish identity into Anatolian Greek identity—as Evangelos Arness in *The Arrangement* (1969).

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Set in the fictionalized Tiger Tail County, Mississippi, and shot on location in Benoit, Mississippi, *Baby Doll* was based on a Tennessee Williams screenplay developed from two of his one-act plays: *The Long Stay Cut Short; or, The Unsatisfactory Supper* (1946) and *27 Wagons Full of Cotton* (1946). Principal filming began in November 1955 at the J. C. Burrus House, an 1858 Greek Revival mansion subsequently used as a Confederate hospital and headquarters for General Jubal Early. More immediately, Kazan was on location only a few months after—and only fifty miles from the site of—the lynching of Emmett Till. The irony of filming on location beneath a Greek architectural facade representing the redoubt of a waning white supremacy breached by an unwelcome Mediterranean newcomer was not lost on Kazan.

Baby Doll revolves around the unconsummated marriage of would-be-gentleman farmer Archie Lee Meighan, portrayed by Karl Malden, and his nineteen-year-old bride, Baby Doll Meighan, portrayed by Carroll Baker in her screen debut. Occupying a dilapidated, largely unfurnished plantation house, the Meighans find themselves disrupted by Sicilian interloper Silva Vacarro, whose shrewd management of the Syndicate Gin unsettles the pecking order in Tiger Tail County. While Ron Briley has read Archie Lee and Vacarro as “symbols of the Old and New South,”⁴⁶ Vacarro’s place in the American South was far from assured. The film suggests an uneasy path to parity between Meighan and Vacarro, and Kazan’s original intentions for the film’s ending suggest that he meant Vacarro less as Southern symbol than as a Mediterranean American martyr, representing the foremost ethnic insertion in a county whose white majority grew increasingly defensive amid its shifting demographics. Even as Archie Lee finds himself piqued by Vacarro personally and professionally, *Baby Doll* fields attention from the Jewish dentist in town, and a pair of Chinese men watch bemusedly as the Meighans fight in public.

Vacarro’s introduction in the film comes courtesy of an elder statesman described as “the old boy,” who sings the Sicilian’s praises only to be heckled and pelted by the audience for his pains. In Williams’s script, Vacarro admonishes the assailants by declaring, “If anybody’s got anything more to throw, well, here’s your target, here’s your standing target! The wop! The foreign wop!”⁴⁷ These lines are dropped from the finished film, where fire

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consumes Vacarro's gin following a series of catcalls. While the hostility toward Vacarro proves largely implicit in the film, it reads much more plainly in the script, which describes a fire engine "lax in its efforts and inefficient," manned by firemen taking "an odd pleasure in the flames, which they seem more interested in watching than fighting." One can only imagine the un-filmed scenario in which Vacarro fights the firemen in order to seize the hose, attempting to extinguish the fire by himself, screaming "in a foreign tongue" before collapsing, surrounded by firemen, where, "lit by the victorious flames are a circle of faces which are either indifferent or downright unfriendly," some of whom "cannot control a faint smile."⁴⁸ Suppressed on screen, such pleasure in Vacarro's misfortune suffuses the script, where, after the fire, at the Brite Spot Café, "a holiday mood prevails," with the fire having "satisfied some profound and basic hunger and left the people of that community exhilarated."⁴⁹ In the film, this treatment is sharply minimized, reduced to Vacarro's line in the café that he has "never seen so many happy faces."

In one of the film's source texts, *27 Wagons Full of Cotton* (1946), Williams introduces Silva Vicarro as "a rather small and wiry man of dark Latin looks and nature," wearing "a Roman Catholic medallion on a chain about his neck"; Flora subsequently observes that Silva is "natcherally dark," a line that her equivalent, Baby Doll, also utters in the script and the film.⁵⁰ In the play, Jake, the basis for Archie Lee, notes that Silva's name is "like a silver lining," and Flora asks if it's "like a silver dollar"; in Williams's screenplay, Vacarro, his name slightly altered, appears as "a handsome, cocky young Italian" marked by "a certain watchfulness, a certain reserve," yet the animus toward him proves more pronounced and more collectively felt.⁵¹ Vacarro does not hesitate to acknowledge the racialized slurs against him. Upon their meeting, Baby Doll observes that his "name sounds foreign," to which Vacarro replies, "I'm known as the wop that runs the Syndicate Plantation." Archie Lee objects by interjecting "Don't call yourself names. Let other folks call you names!" When Baby Doll follows up by asking "So you're a wop?" Vacarro responds "with ironic politeness," saying, "I'm a Sicilian."⁵² In the film, under his breath, to himself, he can only incredulously repeat: "So you're a wop!" Later in the film, Archie Lee calls Vacarro a wop on several occasions: first in passing, then in anger, finally in murderous rage. When

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Archie Lee resolves to “wipe that grin off your greasy wop face for good,” Vacarro asks Baby Doll “Is my wop face greasy?” She kisses him but doesn’t answer directly. Later, when Archie Lee slurs Vacarro as a “yellow-bellied wop,” the intimation is cowardice, but the implication is racial.

If the Meighans offer an awkward portrait of white privilege in decline, then Vacarro, who may aim to accede to their station, cannot partake fully in their privilege. On the verge of brandishing his rifle, Archie Lee explains to Vacarro that he “ain’t got the advantage” of those who “got position in this county” thanks to being “born and brought up” alongside “longstanding business associates and social.” In the script, Archie Lee also proceeds to ask “ain’t you a dago, or something, excuse me, I mean Eytalian or something, here in Tiger Tail County?”⁵³ On the one hand, Vacarro can be read as Baby Doll’s predator; on the other hand, he can be read as Archie Lee’s prey. Vacarro links the violence against him to a longer history of racialized violence in the American South, telling Baby Doll that he believes in “ghosts” and “evil spirits,” namely in “spirits of violence, cunning, malevolence, cruelty, [and] treachery,” recalling that upon the burning of his gin, “the faces I saw were grinning,” in a “manifestation of the need to destroy” by people “overrun by demons of hate and destruction,” leading him to conclude that “this place—this house—is haunted.” Baby Doll subsequently cautions Vacarro that “justice here is deaf and blind,” warning him that her signed testimony will have little traction in a county—and a country—intent on preserving white supremacy at his expense and at the expense of his Black analogues and associates.⁵⁴

Michele Meek has pointed to “the film’s implicit challenge of the domesticated woman’s role” and its “explicit portrayal of female sexual desire” as “an antiestablishmentarian perspective.”⁵⁵ Crucially, the antiestablishment ethos in *Baby Doll* centers not only on female sexuality, but more precisely on female sexuality vis-à-vis interethnic, racialized desire. In Williams’s script, Vacarro’s Syndicate Plantation registers more obviously as a site of integration. When Archie Lee spots some of Vacarro’s men walking past, he objects to the “*White an’ black mixed!*” and resolves to “blast them out of the Bayou with a shotgun!”⁵⁶ In the finished film, this dynamic remains implicit, with the workmen briefly shown, but overtly linked neither to integration nor to Vacarro. Yet the racialized logics of the film remain apparent

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at its conclusion, with Archie Lee's final appeal to the authorities coming in the name of preserving his supremacy. "I ain't a white man?" he asks, urging them to "turn me on in but don't you leave my Baby Doll with him," making his plea "as one white man to another." Vacarro poses a threat not only to the sanctity of the Meighan marriage but also to the sanctity of whiteness itself, with Archie Lee appealing to law enforcement as the ultimate defender of white supremacy. Just as the film necessarily conformed to the logics of the Motion Picture Production Code by suppressing the implication of adultery, so too it necessarily suppressed the implication of miscegenation, though Kazan managed to suppress both of these dynamics in plain sight.⁵⁷ In *Baby Doll*, Vacarro telegraphs the specter of miscegenation: racialized as not quite white, he is hardly embraced and ultimately repulsed by the establishment figures of Tiger Tail County. While Williams's dramatic attraction to an amorous Sicilian male was made with implicit reference to the love of his own life, Frank Merlo, to whom he dedicated his play *The Rose Tattoo* (1951), Kazan had his own reasons for being drawn to Vacarro. As Kazan navigated a fraught marriage to Molly Day Thacher, Vacarro's titillations and tribulations offered him an opportunity to reflect on and refract his own sense of alterity vis-à-vis whiteness.

Kazan intimated an identification with Vacarro by explaining that he made *Baby Doll* "to get on film what I felt in the South."⁵⁸ Indeed, the film stands as a record of what any Mediterranean American man might have felt in the South of that era. Yet this identification also bespeaks an identification with Southern Blackness more generally—a connection not lost on Arthur Knight, who noted in *The Saturday Review* that "Kazan seems not unlike the Negroes in this film, watching everything with a quiet smile but personally disengaged," adding that "if he has any strong personal convictions about these people, any private resentment or objection to their way of life, it is kept well hidden behind the smile."⁵⁹ It is this coolness, finally, that unsettled the film's critics. For all its suggestiveness, the film never explicitly smolders beyond the burning of Vacarro's gin. As Meek points out, given the animus against *Baby Doll*'s immorality, "one would expect it to contain more than a few scenes of light petting," yet as Kazan himself observed, within a few decades such scenes would fail to "raise the most timid eyebrow."⁶⁰ What was condemned and suppressed in *Baby Doll*, then, was

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not so much seduction or sexuality in general, but seduction and sexuality between a controversial pairing.

If *Baby Doll* scandalized in part due to the youth of the titular lead, it also scandalized in part due to the representation of sexual conquest by a Mediterranean lothario who threatened to undo the color line and transcend the racialized ghetto, not only in the segregated South but also in the ethnically divided North.

What was perhaps most offensive of all in the North as in the South was the notion that an Italian male might be taken seriously as an object of desire, in a longstanding grudge dating back to the precipitous rise and sudden death of Rudolph Valentino. The threat of this specter was most clearly visualized by Kazan in a scene in which Baby Doll drinks a bottle of Coke as Vacarro begins to intensify his gradual advances toward her (Figure 1).⁶¹ Here Kazan positions Baby Doll and Vacarro in a space simultaneously intimate and permeable: over Vacarro's shoulder, through a shattered window, a Black man looms in the distant background. Kazan thus locates the Sicilian between blackness and whiteness, suggesting a seduction that, triangulated, further signals the forbidden topic of miscegenation, still banned at the time in the Motion Picture Production Code, and still illegal at the time in twenty-six out of forty-eight states, including Mississippi.⁶²

Released during the Christmas season in 1956, according to *Time*, Kazan's *Baby Doll* registered plausibly as "the dirtiest American-made motion picture that has ever been legally exhibited."⁶³ Condemned by the Catholic Legion of Decency as "morally repellent" in its "carnal suggestiveness," and its "unmitigated emphasis on lust" that proved "grievously offensive," the film was denounced as evil and immoral from the pulpit by Cardinal Spellman, who enjoined his charges to avoid the film "under pain of sin." In subsequent weeks, *Baby Doll* found itself banned in locales from Maine and New Hampshire to Memphis and Atlanta, partially censored in Providence, and disrupted by a bomb threat at a screening in Hartford before being pulled from general distribution by Warner Brothers.⁶⁴ Yet none of these controversies stopped *Baby Doll* from garnering four Academy Award nominations, including Carroll Baker for best actress in her titular role as Baby Doll Meighan.

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FIGURE 1. Frame at 0.41.03 from *Baby Doll*, directed by Elia Kazan, with performances by Carroll Baker and Eli Wallach (Warner Brothers, 1956).

For all controversy surrounding the finished *Baby Doll*, the Code silently shaped many aspects of the film during production, particularly in terms of its denouement. As Albert J. Devlin has observed, “agreement on the elusive ending of *Baby Doll* was not forthcoming until the end of principal filming.”⁶⁵ The contestation around this ending reveals a significant gap in the authorial visions of Kazan and Williams. As Ron Briley noted, “Kazan suggested that the final confrontation between Archie Lee and Vacarro conclude with the Sicilian being pierced by a frog-sticking pole wielded by Archie Lee during a swamp battle,” after which Archie Lee “accidentally shoots and kills a black man.” Williams objected less to the lynching of Vacarro than to the shooting that followed, arguing that such an ending was “false to the key and mood of the story.”⁶⁶ Williams later praised Kazan for his plans to revise the ending of the “frog-gigging episode—its violence notwithstanding,” redrawn to culminate “with Archie Lee shouting to the

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men on the bank of the bayou that he burned the Syndicate gin” before “one of the silent witnesses, goaded by Vacarro to acknowledge the forced confession, kills the outsider with a rifle shot.”⁶⁷ Among other interpretations, the layers of this violent conclusion can be read as an elaborate and heavily sublimated allegory for the lynching of Emmett Till.

Williams’s script had no such designs, culminating as “Vacarro drops out of tree and stands with arms lifted for Baby Doll,” revealing a yawning gap between Williams’s comedic notions and Kazan’s tragic vision.⁶⁸ In the finished film, Archie Lee pursues Vacarro with a rifle, but nothing comes of it, and Vacarro slinks off as Archie Lee is perfunctorily hauled to jail for the night, with Baby Doll retreating to the house, concluding, “We’ve got nothing to do but wait for tomorrow, and see if we’re remembered or forgotten.” Though the Code ending of the film overrode Kazan’s initial and modulated intentions for a conclusion, it could not disappear the evidence of what it suppressed. Kazan’s design throughout the principal filming was for Vacarro’s lynching, initially as impaled at the hands of Archie Lee, and in revision, as gunned down by an uncredited extra. But Vacarro’s heroism and martyrdom could not play, even when murdered by a peripheral rather than central assailant: by the Code’s logic, Vacarro could only be sinner and villain, not hero and martyr, even though Kazan himself continued to associate Vacarro with Christ. In Williams’s play *27 Wagons Full of Cotton*, Vicarro explains that his is “an Italian name” and identifies himself as a “native of New Orleans,”⁶⁹ whereas in Kazan’s film Vacarro explains that he is Sicilian and says he is from Corpus Christi, to which Baby Doll responds “Oh, how unusual!”

Received as salacious in its own time, in retrospect *Baby Doll* has been understood as “a far more subtle and subversive film than critics emphasizing its sexual content ever recorded.”⁷⁰ In this regard, the film offers a pivotal link between Kazan’s earlier and more broadly distributed explorations of ethnic and racialized difference in general and his subsequent turn to more focused explorations of his own ethnic and racialized difference in particular. As it happened, in the spring before Kazan went to Mississippi to film *Baby Doll* on location, he traveled to Greece and Turkey to do some preliminary research toward the project that would evolve into the novel and film titled *America America*. It was here that the Mediterranean came

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into clearer relief for Kazan, and here that Silva Vacarro likely emerged as a clear test run toward the protagonist that Stavros Topouzoglou would become.

On Mediterranean American Mutuality and Solidarity

In Corso's poetry and in Kazan's films alike, we see the ambiguous positions of Mediterranean Americans within the legacies of the European grand tour, the shifting discourses of civil rights, and the indefinite arrays of racialized identity. These commonalities transcend the particular distinctions that separate Mediterranean Americans in their respective descent lines. After all, the Calabrian American Corso spent more time thinking Greece than thinking Italy, and the Anatolian American Kazan relied upon a Sicilian American avatar in order to enable more extended reflections on his own ethnic identity. This mutual willingness to consider roots in relational and transnational terms is characteristic not only of their national origins, such as they are, but also of their Mediterranean heritage, a Mediterranean that has registered in antiquity and modernity alike as "a space of dynamic and multiple interconnections," and "a fragmented world which is nonetheless united by its very interconnectivity."⁷¹ In the American context, such connections constellate not only to Greek and Italian points of contact, but also via the Iberian, to the Hispanic and Latin American imaginaries, via Egypt, to the Afrocentric imaginary, and, via the Mashriq, to the Asian American imaginary.

Many will nonetheless regard the Mediterranean American frame as unduly broad, constituted as it is of multiple national and religious affiliations, not to mention myriad local and regional identifications that overwrite any tendency toward interethnic coalition. Yet similar features also characterized the Asian American field imaginary as it coalesced around the work of editors Frank Chin, Jeffrey Chan, Lawson Inada, and Shawn Wong, who in their pathbreaking *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian American Writers* (1974) conjured "the first generation of Asian Americans to be aware of writing within an Asian American tradition." While this first effort included Chinese, Filipino, and Japanese American exemplars to the exclusion of Korean,

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Vietnamese, and other Asian American ethnicities, it offered a starting point to be addressed in subsequent work, which was catalyzed in the context of US imperialism across the Asian and Pacific regions. As Chin, Chan, Inada, and Wong explained of this initial constellation of Asian American writers, “we know each other now. It should never have been otherwise.”⁷² Their bid for interethnic solidarity amid divisive—and correspondingly unifying—forms of racialization in the United States has a fainter, and perhaps diminished, but nevertheless parallel, and possibly reemergent analogue in the Mediterranean American imaginary, which, starting from Greek and Italian American connections, can further extend to Albanian, Moroccan, Syrian, and Turkish American cognates, among others. Such a formation does not stand distinct from but rather relates decisively to the Asian American case, not least because the Asian and the Mediterranean American formations hold the Near East in common. As the Italian legislator and sociologist Franco Cassano has argued, “to think the Mediterranean today means, first of all, to deconstruct the perspective of a clash of civilizations,” insofar as “the Mediterranean, as a sea *between* lands that does not belong to any of them, is a *communal* sea.”⁷³

Just as philosopher Antonio Gramsci was taken up by literary critic Edward Said, and he in turn by Leila Ahmed, so too pop star Madonna presents a model not only for Lady Gaga but also for Bebe Rexha. Similar convergences of affect and alienation mark a trio of loosely autobiographical protagonists in recent examples of bildungsroman by Turkish American novelist Elif Batuman in *The Idiot* (2017), Italian American novelist B. G. Firmani in *Time’s a Thief* (2017), and Moroccan American novelist Laila Lalami in *The Other Americans* (2019). As for similarities of affect and alienation linking Corso and Kazan, despite a prevailing late twentieth-century anthropological paradigm emphasizing the salience of honor and shame across various social formations in the Mediterranean, Corso’s speakers, like Kazan’s characters, shamelessly flout standards of honor, like the daring works from which they spring, made by Mediterranean Americans unafraid to upset the status quo even in the highly conformist 1950s.⁷⁴

Ultimately, the expressive cultures of American artists and writers of Greek and Italian origin and descent cannot be fully discerned by recourse to Anglophone or European frameworks, much less to the exclusionary par-

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adigm of whiteness. Such figures are finally best read in a Mediterranean key, and best understood not only separately but also together. The conditions for their convergence, their comparison, and their collectivity spring from what Mary N. Layoun has described as “the massive movements and dislocations of peoples in the modern period” which have led to “radical juxtaposition” among “different peoples and ideas and things that were hitherto not colliding with one another in quite the same close fashion.”⁷⁵ In America, Greek and Italian immigrants and their descendants can confidently juxtapose themselves, for all their differences, as relatively similar peoples. We might think of them, after Marcel Detienne, as “neighboring configurations,” who in their “particular differential features” reveal a “deviation from the norm that distinguishes, among a whole set of possibilities, the particular formula of a microconfiguration of politics.”⁷⁶ If the tandem study of these neighboring configurations offers a version of “weak comparatism,”⁷⁷ it also offers a place to begin theorizing a Mediterranean American imaginary, and, potentially, to enact a Mediterranean American collectivity whose several constituencies, taken together, might illuminate one another after the examples of an Asian American imaginary and an Asian American collectivity.

One larger project would be to link earlier waves of Italian and Greek immigrant arrivals and their descendants to more distant and more recent waves of Maghrebi and Mashriqi immigrant arrivals in the United States. Though beyond the scope of this essay, this comparison suggests a further range of analysis, poised to explore the striking sets of parallels—migratory intensification, mandated restriction, persistent intersections of ethnic difference and religious alterity, and enduring stereotypes of imputed criminality emboldening racialized profiling—that have marked Mediterranean Americans from one century to the next. Today, even as Greek Americans and Italian Americans vacate longstanding ethnic ghettos, finding themselves increasingly dispersed, their distribution across the American landscape remains relatively delimited. Moreover, the shift from concentrated ghettoization to gradual atomization only further underscores their dual distinction, described, nearly half a century ago, in terms of an “unmeltable” ethnic difference that has attenuated in some spheres but remains palpable in others.⁷⁸

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In any event, their forebears came cheek by jowl. Near the end of *America America*, as the *Kaiser Wilhelm* approaches Long Island, Kazan presents the “steerage passengers” first and foremost in bioregional terms, as “very poor and from every country served by the Mediterranean,” near American shores but “still in their native clothes, their possessions bundled and always at their sides.” Itemizing their several nationalities, from Italians, Romanians, and Albanians to Serbs, Croats, and Syrians, he links them once again by describing them as “fanatics” and “men alone.”⁷⁹ United neither by their countries of origin nor by their various destinations, such migrants had the Mediterranean in common. It is time that their descendants listened more carefully to one another, and it is time for others to listen to them in the aggregate. To listen in this way serves not only the mutual interests of Mediterranean Americans but also the wider project of transcultural solidarity in an increasingly fragmented and increasingly interconnected multiethnic and multiracial America.

NOTES

1. While Robert Stam and Ella Shohat acknowledge the “mutual opposition and antipathy” in the two terms “Latin” and “Anglo-Saxon,” they present them as “regional variants” of “Eurocentrism,” particularly given “a Native American or an Afrodiasporic ‘view from below’” that renders them “mere nuances within European whiteness.” Yet, contrary to Stam and Shohat, such consolidations obscure internal differentiations *within* Latin and Anglo-Saxon formations, whereby southern Italian and Ottoman Greek populations in the Latin domain—like various Celtic populations in the Anglo-Saxon domain—have been ambivalently racialized into their own versions of a “view from below” that place them astride the trajectories of the colonizer and the grievances of the colonized. See Stam and Shohat, “Transnationalizing Comparison,” 126.

2. Kazan’s work paved the way for Greek American director John Cassavetes, who, after portraying the eponymous lead in the NBC drama *Johnny Staccato* (1959–60), also flagged solidarities between Greek and Italian American figures in his films *Husbands* (1970) and *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* (1976), particularly through the casting of Ben Gazzara, his costar in *Husbands*.

3. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, 2:14.

4. Horden and Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea*, 3, 7.

5. Horowitz, “Ethnic Identity,” 115.

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6. In Cappiello's *Paese fortunato* (1981), translated into English in 1984 as *Oh, Lucky Country*, a protagonist recently arrived from Naples traverses the migrant ghettos of Sydney among various Mediterranean Australian compatriots. Meanwhile, in Greek Australian short story collections including Kalamaras's *Other Earth* (1977) and Loukakis's *For the Patriarch* (1981) and *Vernacular Dreams* (1986), Greek and Italian Australian characters move in parallel and often travel together.

7. Novak, *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics*, 63.
8. Jacobson, *Roots Too*, 7.
9. Anagnostou, *Contours of White Ethnicity*, 128.
10. Viscusi, *Buried Caesars*, xii, xiv, 22.
11. Hage, *White Nation*, 50.
12. For an analysis of these classifications, see Weil, "Races at the Gate."
13. Papanikolas, *A Greek Odyssey in the American West*, 264, 291.
14. Talese, *A Writer's Life*, 118, 123; Talese, *The Gay Talese Reader*, 245.
15. Ciardi, *Lives of X*, 72.
16. Di Prima, *Recollections of My Life as a Woman*, 20–21.
17. *Ibid.*, 102.
18. Herman, *The Anarchist Bastard*, 8.
19. Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 100, 179–80.
20. Corso, *The Happy Birthday of Death*, 25–26; Corso, *Mindfield*, 86.
21. Corso, *Mindfield*, 63; Corso, *Happy Birthday*, 63.
22. Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 196. With high hopes, at the racetrack in New York in May 1959 before his journey to Greece, Corso admitted to Ginsberg that he had "lost at Belmont about \$400 on such names as Aegean Cruise, Macedonian Way, Agamemnon all came in last or next to last. Can you imagine that and I who put so much faith in Greece. Damn Greece I say" (194).
23. *Ibid.*, 196, 211.
24. Corso, *Mindfield*, 75; Corso, *Long Live Man*, 19, 27.
25. Corso, *Mindfield*, 106, 112.
26. Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 292; Corso, *Long Live Man*, 89. Corso's Anglophilia can also be read as a brief against northern Italy. Drawn to the English over the Tuscan, Corso revealed his distrust of Dante in a 1961 letter to Laughlin, writing against "that kind of Italian who is cocksure, smart, granite morality and beautiful," who, nevertheless, "always irritated me," and noting that "I have no doubts about Shakespeare, Homer, Milton; I doubt Dante" (300).
27. Dickey, Murnaghan, and Rosen. "Introduction," 4.
28. Corso, *Mindfield*, 65–66.

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29. Corso, *Long Live Man*, 65.
30. Corso, *Happy Birthday*, 85; Corso, *Long Live Man*, 28.
31. Corso, *The Whole Shot*, 54–55.
32. *Ibid.*, 65.
33. *Ibid.*, 67. The lecture in question, delivered on July 1, 1977, is available via archive.org.
34. Sayre, *Previous Convictions*, 203.
35. Corso, *An Accidental Autobiography*, 405–6.
36. Absence also marks C. P. Cavafy’s early poem “The Funeral of Sarpedon,” in which Zeus “mourns deeply” and prevents Sarpedon’s “dishonor,” and Apollo attends to his corpse as he “bleaches his skin” and “combs out the jet black hair.” As George Savidis notes, this poem—likely written before 1892, first published in 1898 as “Ancient Days,” and published in subsequent versions under its final title in 1904, 1908, and 1924—was, “though never actually rejected by Cavafy . . . not included in his mature collections,” so that Cavafy simultaneously contended with and shielded an engagement with Sarpedon’s legacy in an effort spanning a quarter of a century. Thanks to Yiorgos Kalogeras for suggesting Cavafy’s Sarpedon in view of Corso’s Sarpedon. For the text of Cavafy’s poem and the relevant editorial note, see *Collected Poems*, 7, 218.
37. Corso, *Sarpedon*, 15.
38. Corso, *Elegiac Feelings American*, 32–33.
39. Corso, *Herald of the Autochthonic Spirit*, 39.
40. In the initial voiceover narration of *America America*, Kazan explains his heritage by saying he is “a Greek by blood, a Turk by birth and an American because my uncle made a journey.”
41. Kazan and screenwriter Budd Schulberg took this approach deliberately, basing the film’s protagonist, Terry Malloy, portrayed by Marlon Brando, on Italian American longshoreman Anthony DeVincenzo. By contrast, Arthur Miller grounded his treatment of longshoremen, *A View from the Bridge* (1955), squarely within the Italian American community of Red Hook.
42. McGehee, “Disturbing the Peace,” 31.
43. Kydd, “The Ineffaceable Curse of Cain,” 96.
44. Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattos, Mammies, and Bucks*, 152.
45. Kydd, “The Ineffaceable Curse of Cain,” 118.
46. Briley, *The Ambivalent Legacy of Elia Kazan*, 85.
47. Williams, *Baby Doll*, 32.
48. *Ibid.*, 33–34.
49. *Ibid.*, 40.
50. Williams, *Plays 1937–1955*, 313, 316; Williams, *Baby Doll*, 56.

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51. Williams, *Plays 1937–1955*, 313; Williams, *Baby Doll*, 30.
52. Williams, *Baby Doll*, 50–52.
53. *Ibid.*, 132.
54. As delivered in the film; equivalent passages in *ibid.*, 78–80, 121.
55. Meek, “Marriage, Adultery, and Desire.”
56. Williams, *Baby Doll*, 115.
57. The indeterminacy of Sicilians with respect to racialization, and, thus, to miscegenation law, had been established in neighboring Alabama by the legal precedent of *Rollins v. State*, 92 So. 35, 36 [1922]. For more on this case, see Novkov, *Racial Union*, 125–28.
58. Crowther, “The Proper Drama of Mankind.”
59. Quoted in Briley, *The Ambivalent Legacy of Elia Kazan*, 80.
60. Meek, “Marriage, Adultery, and Desire”; Williams and Mead, *Tennessee Williams*, 209.
61. Other exemplifications of the consumption–miscegenation matrix come in an early scene from the film involving ice cream cones, and a transition cut from the script that dissolved from Baby Doll singing a lullaby to Vacarro in her crib to “Aunt Rose eating chocolate cherries” in the town hospital. For the latter, see Williams, *Baby Doll*, 107.
62. Susan Courtney notes that “from 1930 to 1956 the Production Code’s sixth regulation on matters of ‘sex’ boldly declared: ‘Miscegenation (sex relationship between the white and black races) is forbidden,’” though she mentions Kazan only in passing in a footnote in connection with his 1949 film *Pinky*. See Courtney, *Hollywood Fantasies of Miscegenation*, 105, 343.
63. Quoted in Briley, *The Ambivalent Legacy of Elia Kazan*, 81.
64. On resistance to *Baby Doll* from the pulpit and in the theatre, see “New Kazan Movie Put on Blacklist” and “Cardinal Scores ‘Baby Doll’ Film.” For further commentary, see Briley, *The Ambivalent Legacy of Elia Kazan*, 81.
65. Kazan, *The Selected Letters of Elia Kazan*, 305.
66. Quoted in Briley, *The Ambivalent Legacy of Elia Kazan*, 74.
67. Devlin, in Kazan, *The Selected Letters of Elia Kazan*, 312.
68. Williams, *Baby Doll*, 139–40. As Meek notes, there is also the fact of “Williams’s later adaptation into the play *Tiger Tail*, which concludes with the lovers unambiguously united,” reverting to a comedic ending that attempts to overwrite Kazan’s tragic sense and the film’s ambiguous conclusion.
69. Williams, *Plays 1937–1955*, 317.
70. Philip C. Kolin, “Civil-Rights and the Black Presence in *Baby Doll*,” 3.
71. Isabella and Zanou, *Mediterranean Diasporas*, 1.
72. Chin et al., *Aiiieeeee!* 38.
73. Cassano, *Southern Thought and Other Essays on the Mediterranean*, 142.

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74. On early anthropological discourse on Mediterranean unity, see Peristiany, *Honour and Shame*; Davis, *People of the Mediterranean*; and Gilmore, *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean*.

75. Layoun, "Endings and Beginnings," 212.

76. Detienne, *Comparing the Incomparable*, 99.

77. Lincoln, *Apples and Oranges*, 27.

78. Robert Novak's *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics*, first published in 1972, was revised in a second edition as *Unmeltable Ethnics* in 1995. It was reprinted as recently as 2018, suggesting the continuing solidity of the unmeltable paradigm.

79. Kazan, *America America*, 165.

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