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Migrant Identities from the Mediterranean: A Southern Italian Vista

Lidia Curti

Migration is a phenomenon concerning Italy, today more than ever. Italy, a nation of emigrants, has become the destination of often unwelcome or even contested migratory movements from many countries of the Mediterranean, including its ex-colonies in East Africa. These "new Italians" are the mirror image of the Italian migrant condition of not so long ago.

This article is based on my experience as the coordinator of "Communicating Migration," a collective project devised within the program elaborated by the research group Pae*se*saggio.[1] The project explored the phenomenon of migration in some villages of Matese, a mountainous area northeast of Naples, in its historical, geographical, and cultural dimensions, with particular attention to communication. The research found its specific focus in two of the five localities involved, Gallo Matese and Letino, that experienced substantial waves of emigration, particularly since the 1950s, leading to a crisis in the local economy and the subsequent abandonment of the town centers.
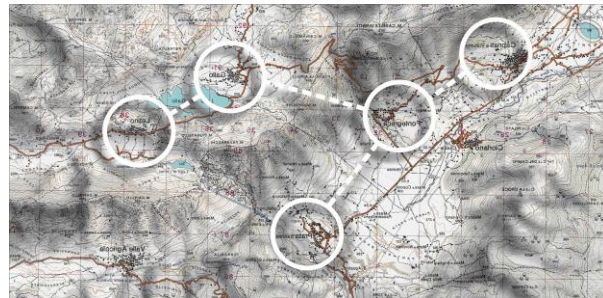
The project privileged certain key concepts, such as the *archive*, the relation between *migration* and *memory*, and the articulations of *tradition* and *transformation* generated by *modernity* and *technology*. Our main aim has been to formulate ways of narrating migration by developing, through visual and critical elaborations, suitable communicative strategies and means, such as videos, music, guided and unguided interviews, territorial analyses, and digital interaction.[2]

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[1] Within the European Union-financed Integrated Territorial Projects and the Document of Orientation of the Matese Regional Park, the group Pae(*se*)saggio has elaborated a program involving diverse interventions in the five municipalities of Capriati al Volturno, Fontegreca, Letino, Gallo Matese, and Prata Sannita, seeking to promote their economic and cultural revitalization. Through common agreement, the five municipalities have created a mutually supportive network to pool energies and resources. In this context, the group has elaborated three major axes of intervention: Urban Node, the Village of Art, and a Center for ecological education. For further details, see Chambers, et al. 2007.

[2] The Communicating Migration projects are part of Urban Node and were developed in collaboration with the Centre of Postcolonial Studies, directed by I. Chambers at the Università di Napoli "L'Orientale." The researchers involved were O. Albolino, S. Guarracino, S. Marinelli, A. Spedaliere; the website *www.azione matese.net* was created by V. Campanelli, M. Orabona, and A. Sepe. The results of the research are published in the catalogue *Urban Node Laboratory of Memory* (2008); the concluding conference was accompanied by an exhibition and marked the inauguration of the building designed by some of the Pae(*se*)saggio architects as a

Our methodological point of reference has been an interdisciplinary space, uniting anthropology, architecture, and philosophy, alongside artistic and literary expressions, as they come together in a cultural cluster. The understanding here is that the cultural meaning of a place or a community is always in the process of becoming and is never conclusive: "meaning is never finished: it is always in flow, always-already 'in process'" (S. Hall 2008). The research underlines that migration can mean different things at different times in spite of the apparent sameness of place and aims. More specifically, our work moves within the paradigm of ecocritical cultural studies where the economic and social reality of the territory is connected to the expressions of an environmental poetics. In fact, the first phase of our collective work, the Village of Art, carried out a territorial investigation of the five Matese villages with the contribution of international artists, using the visual arts as a means for critically promoting cultural values.

There has been an attempt to elaborate an open and rhizomatic *discourse*, composed in the interweaving of different *cartographies*: from the stories of local and global migration to the geo-ecological economy of the Matese region. The goal of the research is the creation of new perspectives within the coordinates of the Matese Regional Park; these propose a journey towards an elsewhere that may allow a "return" to the area, now routed through a multiple scale of sites: from the local to the planetary, with a different sense of self and identity.

As a site of emigration, and in recent times of immigration, the south of Italy, the south of the modern world, is part of a series of *mobile landscapes*. Thus, it is configured as a flexible, open archive that allows a dissemination of perspectives enabling a re-elaboration of the place of departure and a reconsideration of its always, already composite nature. In this re-articulation of the cultural and socio-economic field, in this re-writing of the territory, we encounter the possibility of unexpected routes, which, through the essential errancy of artistic languages, allow us to travel beyond the limits of existing conceptual maps.

In the meeting of different gazes, where the writing of time and place – historio-graphy and geo-graphy – is crossed by those unconscious histories stored within the excessive languages of art, we encounter the "exuberant" Benjaminian time of something that is both more than the past and more than the present. Visual, sonorial, and poetic images, as they come to be expressed in the territory, suggest the interrogation of time itself: promoting responses, reactions, mobility. Here, the profile of landscape, in all its geographic, historical, and cultural complexity, acquires a multiple memory and a subsequent openness that prompts us to revisit the past and commence a journey towards a future yet to be narrated.

As Franco Cassano writes in *Il pensiero meridiano*, there is not only the past with its nostalgia but also the future, and the relation between the two does not allow contempt or resentment towards the present (1999, 8).

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space for events, reading groups, internet classes, etc. (Sept. 6, 2008). See the final images in this article.

A Space of Suspension

Proprio come se nulla fosse avvenuto
(Roberto Andò)

It is as if nothing had happened, as if Italian emigration had not happened. There is an area of oblivion in Italian culture concerning the huge influence that migration has had on the formation of its national identity. It is a minor gap in comparison with the deliberate omission of the Italian colonial enterprise from history and education (Ponzanesi 2000, Curti 2007), but it is still true that, as Donna Gabaccia (2000) and Livia Turco (2005) have noted, adequate studies of this influence are lacking. It is also a way of putting the lid on the feelings of dispersion, exile, and displacement coming from not having a language or a location.

The departure of Italian migrants towards other worlds is at the center of the play *Proprio come se nulla fosse avvenuto. Natura morta per la Darsena Acton di Napoli*, that Roberto Andò enacted in the Darsena Acton in Napoli in June 2008. This location, a secluded dockyard now reserved for the Italian Navy and therefore closed to the city, was once part of the *scalo marittimo*, the seaport from which thousands of emigrants departed on their way to other nations and continents throughout the last century. In the play catalogue, the director writes: "In una città sovrabbondante di segni come Napoli, la Darsena ritaglia una dimensione neutra e quasi assoluta, abbastanza rara. . . . ha la neutralità e direi l'opacità peculiare a un luogo di partenza . . . luogo intermedio tra la partenza e l'arrivo"[3] – an intermediate space between departure and arrival, a place at once beautiful and disquieting like the maternal womb we all come from.

This recalls Anna Maria Ortese, who in *Il mare non bagna Napoli* (1953) looked at Naples with pitiless eyes through a streetcar window and saw only a dead city to flee from: a city of pain, fear, and corruption. This was the place where the migrant from the rural areas of the South had earlier faced urban aggressivity and degradation. That particular clash is described in Raffaele Viviani's musical drama *Scalo Marittimo* (1918), a text that has inspired Andò's play, alongside Ortese's book. Viviani spoke of the dramatic gap between "those who stay and those who leave," between those who are losing "patria, casa, onore" and those who sing their precarious farewell (Viviani 1987, 568). In his posthumous work *La fine del mondo*

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[3] "In a city overflowing with signs such as Naples, the dockyard cuts out a neutral, almost absolute dimension, rather rare. . . . [I]t has the neutrality and what I would call the opacity of a space . . . intermediate between departure and arrival." (Andò 2008, 19, my translation)

(1977), Ernesto De Martino observes that emigration for the people from the rural South was considered a sort of death.

The suspension prior to going into exile has been well represented in Emanuele Crialese's film *Nuovomondo* (2006). There is the sea journey across the Atlantic ending at Ellis Island, the limbo in which the migrants live under the menace of incomprehensible bureaucratic rules before the entrance into the "new world," while the "old world" is still present in their minds. Ellis Island like the Darsena Acton, both the film and the play, never leave that space, that indeterminate state.

I wish to recall here another suspended space, one of the large, apparently superfluous, passages in Rome's Fiumicino International Airport, where an elegant, seemingly cosmopolitan woman recognizes me and comes to shake my hands. Faced with my confusion, she tells me she is from Gallo Matese, mentioning the occasion in which we met and adding that she is now on her way, of course, to Toronto, where she lives and works. She answers my questions with a sigh; she is a little here and a little there, travelling between Gallo and Canada, from the Tirrenian sea over the Atlantic to reconnect parts of the family, her attachments, and relations: a coming-and-going between places and people that epitomizes the meaning of migration. Still, the image that remains with me is of her standing in that empty space.

The Southern Question

> *Culture alive is always on the run*
> (Gayatri Spivak)

Southern Italy has been the point of departure of a double migration, towards Western Europe, the Americas, Australia, and, internally, to northern Italy and northern Europe. In both cases, it was the migration of the underprivileged in search of a better future.[4] Migration has certainly contributed to the formation of a national identity and has strongly influenced the populations of the South in many ways, though as I have noted this influence is rarely given adequate attention.[5] The history of Italian migration is marked by a form of internal colonization that places the southern half of the country in a condition of subalternity. Its people have maintained an identity distinct from common national representations, to the extent that regional origins and their linguistic and cultural features (Sicilian, Sardinian, Calabrian, etc.) can be more important, when abroad, than national affiliation (Ponzanesi 2004).

The foundation of the concept of subalternity in geographical, or rather, in territorial terms is significantly considered in Antonio Gramsci's *The Southern Question* (1926). The

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4. In the last thirty years of the nineteenth century, the flow of people who left Italy to relocate abroad was very high. More than half (55.4%) were from the North, while 35.2% left from the southern regions, especially Calabria and Campania; more than 95,000 people departed from the province of Caserta alone. Only in the first half of the twentieth century, the southern regions, including Matese, acquired a predominant role in the emigration towards the Americas and later, due to restrictive laws, towards Northern Europe. A new intense flow between 1945 and the 1960s marked the beginning of a massive emigration towards Northern Italy, due to the industrial development of the North and the decline of agriculture in the South. A weaker, yet not less important, flow regards the contemporary emigration of young people from rural to urban centers. For a general history of Italian emigration, and for more comprehensive statistical data, see Bevilacqua, De Clementi, and Franzina 2001-02.

5. In the short presentation to the *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana*, the editors remark on the important role of emigration in the development of Italian economy and on its significant influence both on our symbolic universe and collective immaginary (ibid., Vol. I, xi-xii). See also De Clementi 1995.

Sardinian intellectual envisaged a "common ground" between Southern peasants and Northern workers, arguing that subalternity, rather than being a fixed immutable condition, depends on a geography of domination, a cultural, linguistic, economic and institutional hegemony, against which ductile and contextualized strategies of resistance have to be directed.

Gramsci's description of the complexity of cultural elements brings into play a different sense of tradition and modernity, a relationship that is not defined in a binary opposition, but in osmosis and movement: each part nourishes the other, in a temporality that renders the past con-temporary, both in memory and in reality. The nomadic nature of culture has always transformed territories and civilizations, coming to life through contradictory elements that I will later return to.

Contrary to contemporary psychoses, particularly in the new millennium, everyday life in the United States may reveal that behind the monolithic façade of the country lies an extremely variegated culture, profoundly transformed and "re-configured" by the presence of the other. As I am discovering in my study of Italian migration writings, and as has been observed in various studies on the subject (C. Hall 1997, Gabaccia 2000, Salih 2003, Ruberto 2007), the traces of this re-configuration are everywhere: in the names of streets and cities, in architecture, food, ways of dressing, and life styles. This is evident in the Italian quarters of all the major cities in the world, the various "Little Italies," where emigrants and their descendants once concentrated. Besides these more or less homogeneous areas (there are others, for other ethnic groups), the Italian presence is widespread in urban spaces, especially in the food industry which remains a structural element of Italian emigration; other fields such as fashion have a less significant impact but a marked representative function.[6]

An interesting example of concentration comes from the Matese area. Emigrants from Gallo, Letino, and Prata Sannita have created twin-like communities, respectively in New York, Toronto, and Rhode Island, beside a scattered presence in the rest of the world. They have some connections to the original towns but hardly any links among themselves despite the contiguity of their places of origin. The whole region has been at the center of migratory movements like the rest of Southern Italy: from being, in the past, object of conquest and migration of populations from various parts of Europe it then becomes a point of departure for emigration and today the point of arrival for immigration. Although seemingly moving in opposite directions, these movements are the differentiated temporal expression of long-established planetary processes.

The extensive emigration from the Matese villages and towns during the last century led to the consequent reduction and progressive marginalization of the population (see Albolino 2008). All possible strategies – such as the valorization of the landscape, the recovery of the ancient village centers, and the distinctive features of each village – have somehow to be rooted in the specific history and identity of these places, and they must locate their foundations in the suggestions and the initiatives originating from the communities themselves. Franco Cassano (1999, 5) insists on the importance of a "south thinking of the south" ("un sud che pensa al sud").

6. The Latin presence is important in California both due to the Spanish and Mexican dominations of the past and for the massive presence of immigrants from Central and South America, which constitute a large part of the state population. In a limited degree, Italian emigration has been present since the second half of the nineteenth century; it is more difficult to find compact quarters (although there is a "little Italy" in San Francisco) as the Italian population, especially in the fishing industry, is more integrated in the local culture and landscape, with features of its own. See the long interview with "Malio Stagnaro: The Santa Cruz Genovese" (*Regional History Project's Catalog of Interviews*, UC Santa Cruz, Library Archive, California. *http:library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/index.htn*).

But, however important is the recognition of diversity, the shared heritage of the Mediterranean area should be emphasized too. Increasingly set in historical transit and cultural translation by patterns of migration from the south (southern Europe, southern Italy, the southern shore of the Mediterranean, the south of the world), the assumed stability of traditions here transmutes into an altogether more mobile and mutable Mediterranean. It is precisely in this emerging critical space that it becomes possibile, both in cultural and political terms, to appreciate the full significance of Cassano's call to "not think of the south in the light of modernity, but rather to think of modernity in the light of the south" (ibid, 3). This different notion of modernity is elaborated in Iain Chambers' work, particularly in *Mediterranean Crossings* (2008).

If we observe the works installed in the territory during the Village of Art, we find emigration at the center of most of them. Stories of emigrations recur in the panels and murals made by children under the guidance of the painter Bruno Donzelli. These depict the ships of departure and the many hands simultaneously holding and letting go: gestures that express the pain of separation as well as the festiveness of the well-wishing farewell. The young people spread paint on canvases in Gallo, and from Gallo, the ten-meter sequence took off and arrived on Letino's walls where it still stands.

In the photographs of emigrants that were dug out of drawers and trunks, called by the artist "icons of memory," Cristina Piza sought to illustrate the "becoming" of the images of the migrants. Once taken out of their confined spaces, the pictures expanded, as they were enlarged and mounted on human-sized cylinders. They then appeared in Gallo and Letino streets and squares, forming a space of interaction between residents and travellers, those who stayed and those who left. The circular motion of the observer around the cylinders and the movement of the images represented the motion of identities from Gallo to Letino and vice versa.

The "flags of origin," erected during the Stalker-ON workshop to mark the places of emigration of the former inhabitants of each house, emphasize the connection between here and elsewhere, just as the "urban lacework" (*tombolo urbano*) woven between one house and

the next connects the abandoned buildings of the historical center through women's traditional art, as if to mark a possible trajectory of redevelopment and of new beginnings, between past and present.

The carpenter/artist (this is how he defines himself) Giuliano Mauri added the specific theme of the overlapping of mobility and (up)rooting to that of writing on the landscape. He built mobile wooden structures, rafts, floating on the lake of Gallo, light on the surface while solid and heavy beneath the water level, to represent the contradictory movements coexisting in migration. With a similar symbolic meaning, the earth at the base of the structure was to be cultivated by the wind and give rise to the growth of plants that would put out roots to seek stability. The movement will eventually turn the rafts from roaming homes to stationary abodes. These perishable structures can decompose in a process stirring emotions. In the meantime, they exist as inscriptions on the landscape, attracting attention to the beautiful, albeit artificial, lake. This water basin had a major impact on the strongest emigration wave from Gallo when the lake itself submerged houses and precious expanses of cultivated land, creating displacement and unemployment.

> By the term archive, I do not mean the sum of all the texts that a culture has kept upon its person as documents attesting to its own past, or as evidence of a continuing identity. . . . It does not have the weight of tradition; and it does not constitute the library of all libraries, outside time and place; nor is it the welcoming oblivion that opens up to all new speech the operational field of its freedom; between tradition and oblivion, it reveals the rules of a practice that enables statements both to survive and to undergo regular modification. It is *the general system of the formation and transformation of statements.*

> Michel Foucault

Migration may be considered as an interruption and interrogation of the assumed linear continuity of history and progress, often underlining the difficulty of containing the development of nations, as well as populations and ethnicities, within fixed, well-determined boundaries. In *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1971), Foucault argues against those who believe in the continuity of history and conceptualizes an opposing network of constant change: a system of relations connecting different sites and conflicting subjects, in a vision of contemporary society based on heterogeneity and heterotopias. In analyzing the cluster of notions that guarantee continuity (tradition, mentality, spirit, uniqueness of the *oeuvre*, the archive), Foucault observes, touching upon a theme recurrent in recent philosophical thought: "We must be ready to receive every moment of discourse in its sudden irruption. . . . Discourse must not be referred to the distant presence of origin but treated as and when it occurs." (Foucault 1995, 25).

Foucault does not propose to refuse the presence of origins but to put them on hold, to render them problematic, shaking the acquiescence with which they are accepted and underlining that they are the effects of a process of construction whose rules we need to know. In her work on the image of the migrant in France, Françoise Lionnet (1996), evoking Foucault's argument, states that the linguistic, temporal, and spatial dispersal of the migrant subject questions the continuity and linearity of discourse in the Western episteme.

Furthermore, migration cannot be read in a univocal manner. Italian emigration has rightly been depicted as causing pain and misery for those who are deprived of "land, home, and honor" but can also carry different readings. In his book on globalization and its impact on local populations, Zygmunt Bauman (2007) considers the contradictory and double-edged process of migratory movements: on one side, migration, as a possibility to access global mobility, emphasizes the economic and social inequalities between countries and population; on the other, the analysis of the cultural and social makeup of such movements reveals the existence of creative powers at times questioning and at other times reinforcing binary categories – yet always in complex ways that challenge the conventional meaning of modernity, tradition, and religion. In her book on the migration of Moroccan women to Italy from the 1970s onwards, one of the important links across the Mediterranean in present-day Italy, Ruba Salih (2003) brings to light the multifarious and contradictory processes in which they are involved and the conflictual pressures placed on them by both Italian society and the originary Islamic tradition. In a contrapuntal manner, this discourse may be extended to Italian migrants in Northern Europe or America.

A twofold vision of migration and a vision of the relation between migration and memory as a zigzag, to and fro, movement, emerged in our research. It found a focus in the relationship between those who have stayed and those who have left, between the old and the new world, between tradition and modernity, between sheep-rearing and Internet, as well as

between the musical heritage (whether kept in official archives or in oral culture) and rock, rap, and techno music. This is especially true, in the latter case, for the contrast between the archive, which may be handed down to us as motionless and immovable, in "the condition of being self-evident" as Foucault would say, and the sometime divergent memory of a music that has been kept and passed on by the local inhabitants. Even when it regards memories and living archives, it is not just a handing down of tradition but something that is enunciated (that sings, sounds, listens) in difference.

This vision of migration reveals that, besides the deprivation brought by the loss of human resources and by affective estrangement, there is a space for transformation and development. The painful separation from kinship and territory is met by potentially positive elements such as new openings and renewals – the creative powers described by Bauman. Uprootings, and subsequent difficult re-rootings in new cultures, are matched by reunions and renewed encounters, enabling self-recognition, and, for second generations of immigrants, the discovery of something that is far and close, something they did not know was in their possession, a subconscious memory that is rejected and accepted at the same time. Going back to the person I met at Fiumicino (later I learnt her name is Ida), we met again in the course of our public events at Gallo, and I came to understand that the movement back and forth is essential to her life, suggesting that in migration there are not only pain and lack but also choices and spaces of freedom.

With the expression "between earth and moon," Sara Marinelli evokes the condition of being in-between the new and the old country – an expression used in some autobiographies by Italian emigrants of the first half of the 19th century where Italy is simply referred to as "the old country."[7] Her video documentary singles out those aspects of the Gallese culture that are mirrored in its Italian-American "double" and explores the imagery of the country the migrants have left behind through the voice of different generations: between here and there, the two generations become four, with overlappings and contradictions. Thoughts and feelings about the foreign land, the "other planet," and about the place of origin, the "earth," emerge; twisting the old proverb that home is where you hang your hat, a voice says, "But I hang my hat both in Gallo and in New York." In the words of another, the local culture finds a correspondence in the elsewhere: "My parents were born there; it's a very special place because it's my culture, let's say, even if culture is here too." Successively, displacement is gestured to in the descriptions of the first arrival, experienced as a "clash of civilizations."

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[7] *Between Earth and Moon – American Gallesi* is the title of Marinelli's research project on the diaspora of the Matese population in the United States. More specifically, the project concerns the "transplant" of the Gallese population in New York and finds its best expression in a video documentary and a series of photographs on the Italo-American community of Gallese origin, portrayed during a ritual moment of encounter and celebration in occasion of the fair of Sant'Antonio, the patron saint of Gallo. See Marinelli 2008 and her video *Tra terra e luna* (*http://www.azionematese.net*).

The deepest displacement stems from being suspended between two languages. The mastery of the new language in some is confronted by the uncertainty in others, more aged perhaps, who cannot decide in which language to speak and with whom; this mirrors a world split between two cultures, at the same time showing the richness and the identitarian varieties deriving from such displacement. The Maghrebin writer Abdelkèbir Khatibi investigates the dilemma of bilingualism in *Amore bilingue* (*Love in Two Languages*): "Bilingualism? It is my good fortune, my personal turmoil, but also my beautiful capability to forget. A capability which, strangely, I do not feel as a defect; it is as though it were my third ear" (Khatibi 1992, 5, my translation). Elsewhere, he writes about separation, about a language that has turned crazy, and about the inversion between the sun and the moon as they change their grammatical gender from one language to another. The same perception of the unsettlement of natural elements is voiced by Domenico Delli Carpini, in one of Marinelli's interviews: "I left Gallo on July 16th 1969: the same day that Armstrong arrived on the moon. I believed that the moon was Gallo for me, but then I found myself on another planet, which are the United States of America" (Marinelli 2008, 10).

The passage to the new idiom is more difficult for the women, who, contrary to their husbands, stay at home even when they work or help in the family business, and do not have so many opportunities to learn the language. Nevertheless, there are autobiographies of Italian emigrant women, mostly manuscripts that only rarely find publication, and interviews preserved in the archives of women associations and union organizations or in libraries.[8] On the other hand, in contemporary immigration to Italy, many women speak and write as is confirmed by books of interviews (see, among others, Crisantino 1996, Salih 2004) and by the many poetic and prose texts, written in Italian by migrants and being published these days.

In this context, music and sound are ideal means for the expression of such mobility, revealing the difficulty of representing and cataloguing complex cultural phenomena. Even in the most accurate ethnomusicologic archive, music, song, and performance inhabit a space between past and present, local and global, in a relation of contiguity and osmosis, exchange, and transformation.[9] A similar stress on the contradictions within migratory movements is

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[8] I am referring again to the aforementioned interview of Malio Stagnaro, who speaks a lot about his mother Maria Zolezzi. She emigrated to Santa Cruz in 1889 to join her husband, spent all her life working as a dress-maker (she sowed nets, rain coats, and aprons for fishing), and as a midwife, a job she had learnt "in the old country" (in 1912, there were 60 Italian families who came from Riva Trigoso in Liguria, and the community economy was based on reciprocal assistance). Without any previous education in Italy, she found it difficult to learn English. She suffered from home sickness all her life but never managed to travel back to Italy. Her story, her feelings reach us through her son's voice, the male voice that is often dominant in these archival documents.

[9] In "Matese Songlines," Serena Guarracino writes: "Melody, appropriated in individual and collective performance, is at the same time "norm" and "translation," identity and hybridity, consonance and counterpoint … " (Guarracino 2008, 142).

played by the role of Internet in these communities, as a link between those who leave and those who stay: the hybridity of the former, split between two cultures and languages, finds a resonance in the thoughts and desires of the latter, directed to the dream of a better life in a distant place. The Internet role is that of encouraging exchange and entanglement, nourishing the recovery of memory on one side and the communication with the new world on the other.[10] The in-between condition is a rule: whether here or there, the loss and the nostalgia for the other half will always be felt, and they will always be prey to home-sickness…

Our project has a tangible outcome on the Web. Its website is a testimony of our work, in its written and visual form; it shows the videos, music, and pictures produced during many encounters and celebrations, alongside the artworks in the territory.[11] Here landscapes often give way to "facescapes" (Deleuze).

A Narration of Places, Migrations and Emotions

Elsewhere, I have drawn attention to the importance of the "narration" of the landscape as a psycho-geographic space, to the conversations and bonds that grew during the events of the project and their circulation among the different areas of the Matese (Curti 2008). The formation of an archive for these Matese villages was intended to construct and reconstruct a network of interwoven memories, to respond to the emergence of nostalgia and repair a loss (of energy and people in migration), as well as to open up stimuli, directions, and paths towards the future. It also offered unconditional hospitality to new contributions and new presences.

The encounter of art and the territory began for me soon after my first introduction to the project, with participation in the travelling play *Verdi* performed by a theater group called "Nuova Complesso Camerata" (Letino, summer 2005). That play tangibly started the story of Letino for me, with its streets and stairways, its ascents and descents (a "sculptural path" as it has been called), its open spaces and squares, its balconies, verandas and hallways. All its spaces gave form and substance to that part of Italian history that the play spanned, an all-comprehensive look at some crucial historical passages of the last century, between folk and avant-garde style, music and food, with the full participation of a local audience. Arriving high up at the Letino castle, we witnessed three (possible and impossible) endings of *Othello*, the archetypical narration which – between Verdi, Shakespeare, Pasolini, and perhaps Carmelo Bene – had dominated the last part of the play. It was up there that,

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[10] Annalisa Spedaliere gave attention to the dynamics of identity in her study of the place occupied by new technological platforms in the Matese (Spedaliere 2008, 96-113).

[11] *http://www.azionematese.net* . The portal intends to communicate activities and events as well as allow the cataloguing and archiving of data; it is also a place of encounter, an open forum for interactive exchanges emphasizing the mobile and in-definite character of the project.

during the interaction with the audience on Desdemona's fate, a child of tender years decreed with a sob that Desdemona could not be revived, thereby choosing the definitive finale.

Again the territory was the basis for the Californian eco-architects Helen and Newton Harrison, who participated with their project "Dominio del Sentiero" (Dominion of the Path). They began by looking at the two water basins of Letino and Gallo, underlining the differences between the two valleys and linking the different structures (one long and the other oval) to two ecosystems. "Looking at the designs of the old farmland /Seeing the farms of Gallo /Tending to the oval /Seeing the forms of Letino /longer and narrower," they write in their poetic rendering of the project, which involved rediscovering and rebuilding an old path from the castle of Letino to the lake of Gallo. The itinerary finds a connecting passage in a large natural amphitheatre, "a space for entertainment and gathering" on the exact border between the two towns. Inspired by the shepherds' slow walk that allows a vision of things that would not otherwise be seen, the path comes out of an interchange between physical, biological, and social/aesthetic systems.

Their design exhibition, an art installation itself, with its maps, writings, photographs, and interviews, created a virtual documentation of the path, describing the eventual stages of the encounter between wilderness and architecture, nature, and culture. The part of the work that was realized is a space with gardens and stone seats before the castle, a platform at the highest point for "seeing" and marking the beginning of the path to come. The maze sculpted in the ground evokes the zigzagging of the path and, more generally, the coming and going between here and there, between walking and stopping, staying and moving, memory and identity, the past and the construction of the future: the thread that links all the projects.
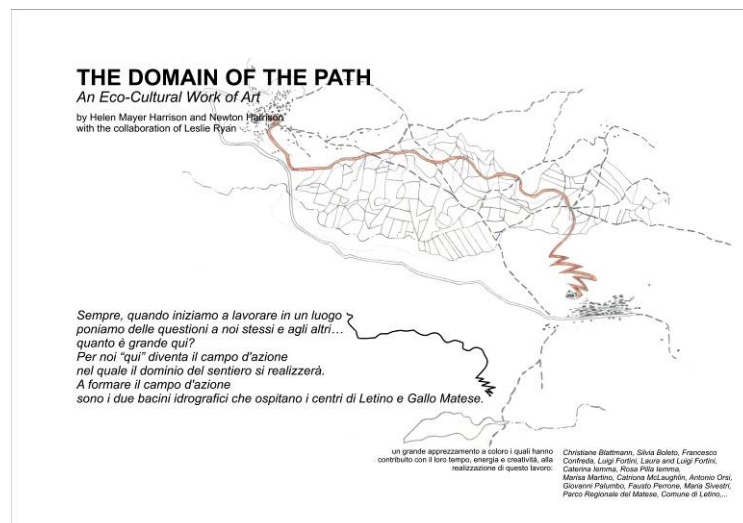
From the highest point we move to the lowest point, the Castle of Prata Sannita, a sort of entrance to the itinerary of the five villages. It is there that the international group of artists/architects from Vienna, feld72, created what I would call "the gateway of hospitality," turning a part of the Prata castle into the "million donkey hotel" with an ironic reference to the title of the Wim Wenders film. An abandoned space, charged with monumental, historical value, is transformed into a virtual hotel through a laborious, collective building process that was in itself a creative laboratory. The rooms are open for use, ranging from the designers, who together with their collaborators and a formidable team of 40 to 50 local residents built them, to visitors attracted by the performance and wishing for an experience suspended between past and present. The spaces furnished with local materials are an art installation: squares designed by the light in the floor; the "flying bed" that slides on tracks over the

valley and the river beneath; the silver bead curtains that animate the interiors – plastic as "the stuff of dreams." They become a potential home for conferences and presentations, socializing, and parties.

In Capriati al Volturno, the architects and sculptors Anna Crescenzi, Tina De Filippo, and Renata Petti of the Laloba group, with the participation of twenty people from the town, sought to illustrate the connection between nature and identity by creating small fossil structures that, like signs, lead to the large installation near the lake, a "fossil fish," five meters high and fifteen meters long, made of interwoven branches and metal plates.

Time in space is the main motive of Luigi Spina's photographs that have accompanied and illustrated the project since its start. The incredible vibrant quality of his seemingly static views, "sculptures in time" as Andrei Tarkovsky would say, records the flow of time through the slow shift in light: as, for example, in the beautiful dawns at Campofigliolo or in his travelling group photographs that transport the pictures of the residents and their words from one village to the next. Each group looms large on the walls of a village other than their own, and if they want to look at themselves, they have to move. Creating contacts and new cohesions is the goal of this exchange, as well as that of the many workshops that Spina led with the local residents and people from nearby towns. The workshops did not only teach techniques but also how to "be" in the landscape, to observe and to live in it; the teacher's expert photographs became those of his apprentices.

Finally, we are back to the migration theme with Michele Iodice and his group: the installations of gigantic nests at the Letino castle, meant to combine solitude and sociality in a simultaneously open and closed structure, nests as points of birth, hospitality, life, and departure for the elsewhere…

From its inauguration, the aim of the project was to narrate a landscape and, at the same time, to give life to an exchange: artists, urban planners, architects, singers and musicians, scholars and experts inhabited the landscape and were inhabited by it. Our proposed earthography was both a way of writing/narrating the territory and a way for us to be narrated/written over by the territory.

The story of the places was told through the art installations, theatre and musical shows, films and videos projected in squares and schools, as well as through analyses and reconstructions of events in the history of these villages. Among them were banditry and anarchism, an essential part of the local historical memory. This led to a meeting on a surprisingly crowded Saturday evening in the main Letino square, with the external "experts" (historians, journalists, cultural experts) being echoed and taken up by local participants in the ensuing discussion.

The events that constituted this narrative were never intended to be an end in themselves, rather they found a further meaning in the wish to revitalize the territory by encouraging a kind of qualified tourism and favoring its economic and natural development. Artistic languages were interlaced with local ones in the workshops, the seminars, the meetings, and the many parties that concluded the collective effort. Each of the events saw the active participation of one part of the population and the interest and curiosity, if not the enthusiasm, of the other. Hopefully, it provided a way for all of us in our located differences to look again at ourselves and the immediate territory through "foreign" eyes.

The intertwining of images and memory, their circulation uniting (and sometime dividing) different places found an important continuation in the projects on migratory movements and the communicative network linking them, with its stress on the relation between migration and memory and on the co-existence of mobility and rootedness: "routes and roots." The connection between the external world and the local residents found here a less abstract meaning, along a path connecting past and present; modernity, technology, and tradition; the here and the there; the local and the global.

In conclusion, and going back to what my words at the very beginning, I wish to recall the image of the "Madonna delle Nevi" at Gallo Matese. This is a statue of a Madonna with black skin and Middle Eastern features, which is taken out of the church once a year on a procession through the town to the lake. It is a trace from the archives of a blurred historical memory and can perhaps be taken as a reminder of the recent migrations from the southern coasts of the Mediterranean to its northern shores: a potential counterpoint to the long wave of migration from the Matese mountains. A shared condition of exile and displacement may help these marginal southern Italian citizens of the so-called "unitarian nation" in finding a way of relating to these new Italians.

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