Part II: Case Studies

Ties of Affection: Family Narratives in the History of Italian Migration

DIANE VECCHIO

AT THE AGE OF SEVENTEEN, Giuseppe Verrico left the village of his birth, Santi Cosma e Damiano for America. He had been called to the United States by a half-brother living in Cortland, a small town in central New York. In that same year, 1921, Donato Vecchio emigrated from Castleforte, a neighboring village of Santi Cosma e Damiano, bound for the same American destination. Donato had been called by his sister Angiolina, who had immigrated to Cortland in 1915, to join another emigrant from Castleforte, her future husband.

Theorizing migration as a process that connects people in social networks with personal and economic motives has great potential for personalizing the immigrant experience. In this essay I reconstruct the motives, strategies and experiences of immigrant families by tracking the social networks created by male migrants from two villages in south-central Italy to a community in central New York. Similar to Samuel Baily's "village outward approach"[1] that focused on Italian immigrants to Argentina, this study employs a "family outward approach" of Italian immigrants to the United States.[2]

By recreating the social networks that brought Italians to America as well as their patterns of settlement and community building in the United States, my essay explores the role of social networking in migration, transnational links with the homeland, and the role of gender in creating Italian identity in American society. Transnational connections created and maintained not only social networks of migration but also social networks that forged employment opportunities in America where male-female partnerships assumed responsibilities for earning money for the family.[3]

This community study, focusing on regional patterns of migration, demonstrates that Italian males shaped social networks of labor migrations to Cortland, while Italian females developed family and communal life by creating a culturally transformed Italian identity in America.

The research for this paper is based on analysis of ship manifests and other records of nearly two thousand passengers emigrating from Santi Cosma e Damiano and Castleforte to the United States.[4] Research was conducted on both sides of the Atlantic using Italian records housed primarily in the *comune* of Santi Cosma e Damiano, as well as oral interviews conducted with members of the Verrico and Vecchio families in Italy and in the United States.

SOCIAL NETWORKS AND MIGRATION

Scholars of immigration have investigated the possibility that Italy's migrants formed an evolving collection of transnational multi-sited social networks that resembled diasporas. Most of these networks emanated from particular village communities, where the decisions to emigrate were made.[5] Strong village attachments help explain the evolving social networks that brought Giuseppe Verrico and Donato Vecchio to the United States in 1921. Giuseppe's half-brother, Bernardino, had been one of the first Italians born in Santi Cosma e Damiano to immigrate to central New York.[1] "Come to Cortland," he wrote, "you can find a job here—there is a factory that is hiring."[6]

The letters received from Bernardino drew Giuseppe and other family and fellow villagers to Cortland, where a colony of Sancosmesi[7] had been developing since 1900. The letter that linked Giuseppe with Bernardino across two continents involved a process that was repeated time and again in an international context of labor migration during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In a similar pattern of migration identified by John Briggs in his seminal work on Italian emigration to three American destinations,[8] brothers connected with brothers, uncles with nephews and sisters with sisters, as word of factory employment spread outward, in this instance, from Santi Cosma e Damiano to the neighboring village of Castleforte.

Bernardino resembled thousands of emigrants who played a crucial role in migration systems that were sustained for years, even decades. Determining where the first link in chain migration begins is like piecing together a puzzle, but it appears that Bernardino was originally summoned to New York City by an older brother who was called by an uncle in 1898. Bernardino became instrumental in extending the chain of immigration to Cortland, starting with his half-brother, Giuseppe, their *paesani*[9] from Santi Cosma e Damiano and Castleforte, as well as other family members from the nearby town of Minturno.

Sailing with Giuseppe Verrico on the *Argentina* in the spring of 1921 were three fellow villagers who made up part of the network of migrants heading for Cortland to work in one of the numerous factories that manufactured tools, machinery, boats, and sheet metal. The Wickwire Brothers Wireworks employed the largest number of immigrant workers of all Cortland establishments, with Poles, Ukrainians, Irish, and Italians manufacturing wire mesh, galvanized fencing, barbed wire, and nails. Silk mills and factories that produced bloomers and corsets, overalls, and fishing line employed large numbers of immigrant women, while both genders worked seasonally for the Cortland Canning Company.

Arriving at the train station in Cortland in 1921, Giuseppe's traveling companions, Rocco Gaetano and Cosmo Porchetta, were met by, respectively, their uncle and father, a mason who left Santi Cosma e Damiano in 1903 and eventually settled in Cortland after initially migrating to New York City. Giuseppe was met by Bernardino, who took him into his home and helped him get a job at Wickwire's, where they paid an Irish foreman $25 for the job.[10]

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the village of Santi Cosma e Damiano and the neighboring village of Castleforte became the center of social networks of migrants creating colonies in New York State that would continue until the 1960s.[11] Emigration to the United States can be traced to 1883, but significant numbers of immigrants did not leave until 1898. During that year, fifty individuals left Santi Cosma e Damiano for the United States, with the largest group departing on March 22. On that day, twenty-four male "laborers," ranging in age from 20 to 58 years, the majority of whom were married, departed Italy for New York.

The immigrants were representative of the majority of Sancosmesi who were *contadini*; only a few villagers could boast of a higher status. *Comune* records dated 1898 list several artisans and merchants who provided specialized services for the local villagers, including several tailors, barbers, a midwife, a *fabricatore* (manufacturer), and several *possidente*—wealthy landowners who employed several of the young village women in their homes as domestic servants.[12]

A growing number of *contadini* continued to emigrate from Santi Cosma e Damiano and Castleforte until World War One brought a temporary halt to European immigration. While many of the immigrants were agricultural laborers, others, particularly those from San Lorenzo[13] and other areas in the vicinity of Castleforte, were small landholders who hoped to improve their family's economic and social position through labor migration. During these years there were also a small number of

male migrants from both villages who were tradesmen and skilled laborers, working as barbers, tailors, shoemakers, bakers, and masons. Similar to many other Italian migrants during the two principal decades prior to World War One, the immigrants from the two villages were overwhelmingly male and never intended to remain in the United States.[14]

Donato Vecchio was one of those many immigrants who never planned to remain. As noted, he had been called to Cortland by his sister, Angiolina, who had immigrated six years earlier. Angiolina promised him a place to live, while her future husband promised help getting a job at the Wickwire Wireworks.

Donato's journey demonstrates the intricacy of migration through transnational-type connections of kin, in-laws, and fellow villagers. Sailing with Donato in 1921 was his brother-in-law, Giuseppe Vozzole, a cousin, Raffaele Romanielli, and another fellow villager, Giuseppe Colletta.[15] With the exception of Romanielli, who was linking up with "relations" in Ellwood, Pennsylvania, the other migrants were journeying to Cortland.[16]

The decision to emigrate reflects a collective choice made within the province of kinship networks in the Vecchio-Vozzole-Romanielli family. Their strategies were moneymaking ventures that reflect what Loretta Baldassar has described as *sistemazione*, setting oneself up (and one's family).[17] This was likely the plan implemented by the three families. However, the men migrating in 1921 were not the first in their families to engage in labor migration abroad. From at least 1900, kin members of the three interrelated families were involved in labor migration and repatriation. Social networking to the same American destination continued for decades. Many returned to Italy, others did not. Enough of them kept a foot in both Italy and the United States to sustain transnational networks for years to come.

The Italian immigrants worked in the United States for a decade and invested their American earnings to improve their lives and social position in Italy. Vozzole and Romanielli eventually returned to Italy, built impressive homes in San Lorenzo, and remained there for the rest of their lives. That had also been Donato's plan, to return with the money he earned in the United States to increase his landholdings in Italy, but the rise of Mussolini and the Fascist state prompted him to rethink his family's future in Italy.[18]

Bernardino Verrico continued sponsoring relatives and fellow villagers from Santi Cosma e Damiano. In June 1913, sixteen-year-old Pietro Laurelio listed the home of his uncle Bernardino in Cortland as his American destination. In that same year, Carmine DiLanna also left Santi Cosma

for Cortland to reconnect with his brother, Luigi. Their sister, Cecilia, was Bernardino's wife.[19]

Italian males were instrumental in organizing social networks of labor migration to Cortland that continued for six decades. While males led migrations of future American laborers to the United States, the Italian women who followed them helped establish family and communal life, reflecting a culturally transformed Italian identity in America.

GENDER AND MIGRATION

In the early years of Italian immigration to Cortland, women made up a very small percentage of migrants. Transnational social networks initially established by male migrants helped connect future immigrant women with jobs in Cortland. And yet, unlike Italian males, the women who migrated from the two villages probably would not be considered "labor migrants," since they initially came as wives, sisters, or daughters of immigrants already established in the United States. Examining the status of women and their relation to men as well as their relation to labor is complex because, while many women initially emigrated to reunite with male relatives, they nonetheless became laborers soon after arriving in the United States.

Several examples from Cortland illustrate this point: Bernardino Verrico's wife, Cecilia DeLanna, left Santi Cosma e Damiano in 1907 to join her husband in Cortland, but only after he was settled with a steady job and a place to live.[20] Cecilia may not have come over as a labor migrant, but she became a laborer after she arrived. In fact, Cecilia became one of the few women who worked in the predominately male Wickwire mill.[21] She was later joined by Filomena Cinquanta, who left Castleforte in 1911 with her daughters to join her husband in Cortland. Filomena, who had worked in the fields in Italy during her husband's absence, made the transition from agricultural labor to factory labor in the United States. The transition of women from domestic or field work in Italy to factory labor in the United States also raises important questions about the concepts of femininity and masculinity in Italian American life and suggests that life in America often altered traditional Italian notions of gender.

South Italian women typically left their native villages in far smaller numbers than did men. For example, in a random sampling of 1,762 immigrants coming from Castleforte and Santi Cosma e Damiano to the United States between 1892 and 1924, only 131 (7%) were women (fourteen years of age and older).[22]

When they did leave, most women left as permanent migrants following the paths of fathers and husbands who had emigrated earlier. In 1913, Filomena Mignano and her daughters left Santi Cosma e Damiano for Cortland. After years as a *vedove bianca*,[23] she joined her husband who had left Italy ten years earlier. Their lengthy time apart was a result of Raimondo's years of sporadic employment. Finally settled in Cortland with a permanent job and a prospect for his family's future, Raimondo reunited with his wife, and Filomena took a job at Wickwire's[24] to help provide for the family. Emilia Palazzo and her three children finally rejoined with husband and father Donato Vecchio in 1937, after Donato had spent fifteen years in the United States as a labor migrant, making frequent trips back home.[25]

Not all female migrants were married, however, and it is hard to know what opportunities and advantages they saw in emigration. Regina Cinquanta was twenty-three and single when she left Castleforte to join her brother in Cortland, and Fiorenza Vozzole was only eighteen when she left Italy in 1912 to join her sister who had emigrated earlier. Both women worked in the United States, but it is not known whether they, too, like their male counterparts, sent money back home to help support their families. It is worth speculating whether migration motives were gendered, or if women, too, had aspirations of earning money in America to assist needy families back in Italy.

Angiolina Vecchio's motives for migrating may have been typical of some young women who left Italy alone. In 1915, she emigrated, unaccompanied by either kin or friends, to be with the man she loved. When she arrived in Cortland, she moved in with her future husband, an act that defied traditional Italian values and concepts of honor and shame. Interestingly, Angiolina and Antonio Giungo became wife and husband two weeks prior to the arrival of Angiolina's mother, who traveled alone from Italy to the United States to reunite with her daughter in Cortland.

GENDER AND COMMUNITY BUILDING

Material about family life and women's activities in particular challenges some aspects of social roles and gender dichotomies in immigrant life. The role of women in creating ethnic communities in American society has been, in many ways, overlooked. Certainly, families were important in the adjustment process of immigrants to American life, but stable family life and community building among Italians did not begin to take shape in Cortland until the arrival of Italian women. Life for Italian migrant men was characterized by temporary and transient patterns of living.[26] With the

arrival of women, immigrant homes were established, creating a foundation for family life and community building.

Immigrant women transformed the physical and private location of home to accommodate the physical and public location of business, reflecting how migration often prompted cultural change.[27] In Cortland, as in many other towns and cities across the nation, women provided boarding services to immigrant males, ran small grocery stores that provided ethnic foods to the Italian community, and established neighborhood restaurants that recreated Italian food ways. Italian women's activities affected both communal and economic life and demonstrate how "migrants were tied by bonds of shared residence and mutual assistance."[28] This is particularly evident by the number of Italian males who found housing by boarding with Italian families.

In Cortland, several immigrant men boarded in the home of Angiolina Vecchio and her future husband, located on the south end of town. It was only blocks away from Wickwire's, where the majority of Italian men were employed. By 1925, Angiolina was providing boarding and lodging services to five men, three of whom were either related to her or from her native village.[29] Immigrants from Santi Cosma e Damiano and Castleforte lived together in homes of *paesani* in a residential clustering on both the south and east ends of Cortland, where Italians had settled. Most Italians who immigrated to Cortland were from Italy's southern regions of Molise, Sicily, Lazio, Campania, Abruzzi, and Apulia. There were six wards in Cortland by 1925, and 98 percent of the Italians lived in the Third, Fifth, and Sixth wards. Italians from Castleforte and Santi Cosma e Damiano settled in the Third and Sixth wards and were clustered at the south end of town, on Crawford Street, Pine Street, Scammell Street, and South Main Street. On the east end of Cortland they grouped together on Hyatt Street, Bartlett Avenue, and Comando Avenue. Boarders followed networks of kin and paesani who preceded them. They lived in their homes and in neighborhood clusters.[30] In Cortland, this led to brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, and *paesani* all living in the same neighborhoods.

Italian women began taking in boarders in 1905 when there were only twenty-seven assembled Italian households[31] in Cortland. In that year twenty-five of twenty-seven households of Italian women (93 percent) provided lodging to boarders, ranging from one to twelve boarders per household.[32] The practice of taking in boarders was one of the most common ways immigrant women could earn money at home. The needs of newer migrants for room and board before their own families were established meant that women could be economically productive through extending the services they were already providing for their own families.

Taking in boarders reveals a literal blurring of public and private spheres of activity in the daily lives of Italian women. This economic enterprise was, in fact, a sharp break with the Italian past and reflects Italian women's willingness to adapt to a new economic environment in the United States. The practice of taking in boarders did not exist in Italy or Sicily, since a household and its house was defined by the nuclear or extended family, usually consisting of grandparents.[33]

Closer scrutiny of this business venture also suggests the risks involved to a family's honor by taking in boarders. With the majority of boarders either single males or men whose wives remained in Italy, prospects for unwanted sexual advances or romantic relationships between boarders and the women who provided these services were heightened.

Sources reveal that clandestine affairs often occurred in boarding households. Cecelia Verrico, Bernardino's wife, took in boarders from Santi Cosma e Damiano for many years. A romantic relationship evolved between her daughter and a boarder that, fortunately, resulted in marriage. However, many parents would not allow such relationships in their homes. The daughter of one immigrant recalled that "the father of the household told the boarder he had to move out before he could consider courting his daughter."[34] In another instance, "Francesca," who lived in rented rooms with her immigrant parents on Cortland's south end, recalls that her father moved the family into their own home because he feared that his wife and daughter would be vulnerable to sexual advances by males boarding in the same household.[35] In 1918, at the age of sixteen "Antonia" was forced into marriage by her father, a Castlefortani, after a romantic tryst with a boarder from their home village ended in pregnancy.[36]

Taking in boarders fell strictly within the woman's domain. She offered room and board, which included meals and laundry services. For immigrant women who took in boarders the toil seemed endless. Cecilia Verrico's daughter recalled her mother's responsibilities:

> She would have to wash all of their clothes by hand, and they worked at the wire factory or at the railroad. Their clothes were filled with grease.
>
> Meals were nothing special. They ate what we ate; beans, greens, homemade bread, and my mother would often have to bake four or five loaves of bread a day to feed the family and the boarders. She washed dishes late into the night while my father and the boarders drank homemade wine and played cards.[37]

The number of boarders a woman took in could contribute substantially to the family's income. Rose Verrico (Giuseppe's wife) recalled that in 1925 a single male paid approximately fifteen dollars a month for room and board. The same male was a wire weaver earning twenty-four dollars a week at Wickwire's. Therefore, a woman taking in three to four boarders might earn nearly two-thirds of a working-class male's full-time salary.[38] As the number of single male transients in Cortland declined, fewer women took in boarders: in 1915, 40 percent of Italian households were taking in boarders, but by 1925, only 12 percent of Italian households did so.[39]

Providing services for these boarders was more than an economic venture for women; it served an important social and cultural function for the Italian community as well. The same women who took in boarders often acted as matchmakers for the single boarders who shared their homes. Immigrant wives and their husbands hosted Saturday night parties where "greenhorns" were welcomed into the larger community of transplanted Italians. Many single migrants who never intended to remain in the United States did so because of matchmaking efforts by Italian women, who introduced daughters of earlier migrants to newer immigrants from their *paese*.[40] Young men attending Saturday night parties were introduced to eligible young women in hopes that a romantic interest might be sparked. That is precisely what happened when Cosmo Porchetta, who immigrated to Cortland in 1921, was introduced to, and fell in love with, Bernardino Verrico's daughter. A year later they were married.[41]

The recreated community of Sancosmesi and Castlefortani helped integrate newly arrived immigrants into a fusion of Italian-American identities. Migrants arriving in Cortland joined a tightly-knit, well-organized community of *paesani*, who boarded together, worked together, and socialized together. In a very short time, the Italians in Cortland had established largely homogeneous ethnic neighborhoods. Italian streets blossomed with ethnic grocery stores and Italian restaurants. Through all these entrepreneurial endeavors, immigrant women played an important role that ultimately maintained Italian ethnic identity in Cortland.

Very little has been written about Italian women's business enterprises and how they served the immigrant community.[42] Though boarding was an important way of earning money, immigrant women also engaged in other forms of commerce, including grocery and restaurant operations. Most grocery businesses were conducted at home, while the family lived above or behind the grocery store. Some women also ran businesses that were not home-based, though still located within the ethnic community. Carmela Ferro's grocery store was located on the corner of South Main and

Scammell Streets, while Mary D'Angelo's grocery was located a block south of Ferro's store. Both women converted the front rooms of their homes into business ventures, blurring the private and public spaces of domestic life with economic activities. Canned tomatoes, pasta, and fresh loaves of Italian bread lined the shelves of Carmela Ferro's front-room store, and Mary D'Angelo offered her customers salami, capicola and imported cheeses that she cut to order.[43]

Italian women in Cortland participated in the family and community economy through food enterprises and working as proprietors and cooks in their own restaurants. Women who operated neighborhood restaurants assumed multiple chores, combining cooking with serving patrons and dishwashing. Neighborhood restaurants occupied a small space, with a few tables and chairs, similar to Italian trattorias. Typically, there were no menus, and women served whatever they happened to cook that day or what was fresh, according to the season. Pasta with a simple tomato sauce was a staple of all neighborhood restaurants. Women often prepared greens, such as escarole sautéed in garlic and olive oil and minestra or pasta fagioli with homemade bread.

Italian restaurants in Cortland were located on nearly every street in the Italian neighborhoods. Maria Di Iorio (Giuseppe Verrico's aunt and Carmela Ferro's sister-in-law) emigrated from Santi Cosma e Damiano to join her husband, Gaspare, who had settled in Cortland several years earlier. Eventually, Maria started a small neighborhood restaurant on the first floor of her home with the family's living space located on the second floor of the building. The Melodyland Restaurant originally was established when Gaspare decided to turn his butcher shop into a restaurant and bar. But Gaspare could not get a food and liquor license because he had been convicted of bootlegging during Prohibition. Maria applied for the restaurant and bar license in her name. With that license and family recipes, the Melodyland opened in 1932 and seventy years later was still serving the Cortland area five days a week.[44] It is one of the few remnants of Italian identity still alive in Cortland's south end.

Maria Patriarco, an emigrant from Castleforte, also ran a bar and luncheonette several blocks south of the Melodyland. Male laborers employed by the railroad, the wire factory, and a nearby sheet metal factory regularly met at the Owego Restaurant for lunch with other working-class Italian men.[45] On Saturday night, Maria opened her restaurant to Italian musicians, who shared their music with *paesani* from the surrounding neighborhoods.

Italian restaurants were essential to the development of the ethnic community. Through their cooking, Italian women sustained food traditions that had originated in their local *paese* and provided "a structure upon which a coherent group identity could be built and maintained" in America. Italian women, while preserving regional and ethnic food traditions, were instrumental in creating an important part of communal life and ethnic identity.

WAGE-LABOR AND WORKING-CLASS IDENTITY

Transnational communications linked Italian women in Italy with job opportunities in the United States much the same as it did for males, revealing that social networks were gendered as were employment opportunities. When Angiolina Vecchio first arrived in Cortland she found employment as a corset worker.[46] Located three blocks north of the Wickwire factory, on the south end of town, the Crescent Corset Company provided employment opportunities for female migrants. Angiolina was one of the first Italian-born women working at the Crescent (as it was commonly called) to communicate with other women in Italy about jobs in the factory. The Crescent Corset Company was established in the early 1900s and specialized in women's undergarments and foundations. The jobs consisted mainly of sewing, a skill most Italian women brought with them from Italy.

Italian women who found employment at the Crescent Corset Company created a group solidarity that was pervasive for decades. Italian women, more than any other ethnic group, dominated the work force at the company, which had grown to seven hundred workers by the early 1920s. Nearly every Italian woman who immigrated to Cortland and worked outside of the home did so at the Crescent Corset Company.

The use of the Italian language was one of the important strategies in which Italian women engaged to generate a sense of solidarity and identity, marking them off from other workers.[47] For example, Assunta Curri (the American-born daughter of Bernardino Verrico) was employed by the Crescent as a floor supervisor from 1925 to 1971. In an interview she explained that the Crescent was a perfect workplace for Italian women "right off the boat." Assunta was an ideal floor supervisor because she could speak Italian. Whenever an Italian immigrant appeared for a job, she would be directed to Curri, who would put the newly arrived immigrant on her floor where Curri could act as an interpreter.[48] The use of the Italian language by so many of the women who worked at the Crescent created a sense of solidarity among them, fusing working-class values with ethnic identity.

Kinship networks were instrumental in creating employment opportunities for immigrant women as they were for men. Most young Italian women seeking employment at the Crescent did not appear alone to apply for a job. Rather, they were introduced by a friend or relative who worked there who requested the company to hire the niece, sister, or cousin. Nicolina Giuliano, who emigrated from Castleforte in 1952, arrived in Cortland on a Friday afternoon and started working at the Crescent on Monday morning. Her cousin, Maria Patriarca, had emigrated from Castleforte several years earlier and helped her get a job on the day of her arrival.[49] These patterns of securing employment for other family members were common among immigrants who maintained strong ties of kinship in the United States.

While Italian women workers dominated the Crescent Corset Company, Italian male workers dominated the Wickwire Brothers Wireworks. The company, which began operations in the 1870s, installed a continuous rod rolling mill, and in 1902 an open hearth steel plant and blooming mill were added. The large output of this new mill made possible the production of nails and coarse wire. By 1910, Wickwire's became the largest factory in town, employing fifteen hundred persons. By the time of World War One, the manufacturing facilities consisted of forty buildings. At its peak in the 1920s, the firm was producing one-quarter of the world's wire cloth.[50]

The labor force of Wickwire's was made up of native-born Americans and immigrant Germans, Irish, Slavs and Italians. Solidarity among Italian workingmen was reinforced by their numbers—by 1938, 75 percent of the workforce was made up of Italians.[51] However, American-born men as well as the Irish held the better positions, and the Irish were usually the shop foremen.[52] Wickwire's wages were lower than other factories in Cortland, but the work was steady. During the Depression, for example, factory owners reduced the workweek but kept almost the entire work force employed. Nonetheless, a potential source of friction between immigrants and other factory workers evolved with the move to organize skilled and unskilled labor. In 1938, the CIO organized Wickwire workers, and the Italian immigrants joined the effort, although interviews revealed that some immigrants were hesitant to affiliate with the labor movement because they did not feel hostile toward the Wickwire family.[53]

Wickwire's labor difficulties were becoming a real problem by the late 1940s and second-generation Italian Americans became leading figures in strikes that continued for a three-month period during 1949.[54] When the strike was over, Wickwire's agreed to provide six paid holidays annually instead of two, and, more importantly, to offer a pension plan and health insurance to its employees.[55] Labor agitation continued throughout the 1950s

and 1960s, however, as employees demanded better wages. In 1968, employees charged that Wickwire's was paying not even the minimum wage. By this time, the factory's workforce had been reduced to four hundred workers. No longer able to compete in a global market, Wickwire's closed its doors in 1972. For a large number of Castlefortani and Sancosmesi who immigrated to Cortland, Wickwire's had been the major link to a labor market that provided immigrants with a reason for coming to America.

KIN, SOCIAL RELATIONS, AND TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS

The connections among the people of Santi Cosma e Damiano and Castleforte and their sons and daughters abroad reveal how migrants developed and maintained familial, economic, and social ties between their country of origin and their country of settlement. One way this was done was through personal correspondence. The exchange of letters between migrants and their families was an aspect of transnationalism that was widely employed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Historian David Gerber characterizes the letter as a type of "early transnational social field that lifted people out of conventional time-space and rendered the national borders that separated them insignificant."[56] It was the letter that acted as a conduit for forging links in migrant networks and it was the letter that transmitted remittances back home.

Italy desperately needed the remittances sent home by emigrants, and remaining family members often relied on money transmittals to supplement meager wages.[57] Giuseppe Verrico sent monthly remittances to his mother until the time of her death in the 1950s. The arrival of American money in Santi Cosma e Damiano during and after World War II, in particular, helped sustain not only Giuseppe's widowed mother but also his nieces, who were orphaned when their parents were killed during an air assault. In addition, the money he sent back home helped to pay funeral expenses when his father passed away and it contributed to rebuilding the village church that was partially destroyed during the war. Though he never returned to Italy, Giuseppe provided support for his mother and other family members through the regular remittances he sent back home.

During the war and immediately thereafter, Sancosmesi and Castlefortani aided their families back in Italy by sending them bundles of clothing, shoes, and non-perishable food items. Interviews conducted with Italians who immigrated to Cortland in the 1950s and 1960s reveal that these remittances literally kept Italian families alive. Sandy Panzanella

recalls that "my mom traveled to Naples in a horse and carriage and sold clothing at the open market that was sent to her from relatives in Cortland."[58]

Immigrant women facilitated the maintenance of social relationships between members of their home villages and newly constructed communities in America. This became part of Italian women's kin responsibilities. Marriage was another important bond in maintaining these relationships. Well into the 1960s, immigrants and their children living in Cortland intermarried with members of families from the same villages.

Church records show that high endogamy rates existed as immigrants and second-generation Sancosmesi and Castelfortani intermarried. Social connections that linked members of the Verricos of Santi Cosma e Damiano (Giuseppe Verrico) with the Vecchios of Castleforte (Donato Vecchio) in the 1920s, for example, resulted in the next generation marriage of their children, Marie Verrico and Alex Vecchio.[59]

Prospective matches were made between Italians in Cortland with those in Italy through letter writing, picture exchanges, and social networking. And if there were no eligible matches in Cortland, female-centered kin networks arranged marriages with the children of fellow villagers who had settled in other towns and cities in the United States.[60] After a series of introductions and visits in New Jersey, Emilia Vecchio's efforts came to fruition with her daughter's marriage to the son of *paesani* from Castleforte.[61]

The roles of immigrant women reveal how gender helped sustain social relations between the country of origin and the country of settlement. Because she was literate, Emilia Vecchio was an important link between immigrant women in Cortland and their families in Castleforte. She read and wrote letters for Italian women, some of whom paid her for her services.[62] The informal institutions of family, household, and neighborhood served the Italian immigrants well as they reconstructed new lives in Cortland.

By recreating the social networks that brought Italians to America as well as their patterns of settlement and community building in Cortland, this essay demonstrates the role gender played in forming social networks of labor migration and facilitating the adjustment of migrants to life in America. Italian communities were established by males and females alike, but gender defined specific roles in migration and settlement and in these ways links were forged with homeland communities. These links demonstrate transnational aspects of the lives of these newcomers, aspects sustained at the same time that they were beginning to incorporate elements of American society and culture into a transformed Italian American identity.

NOTES

1. See Samuel Baily, *Immigrants in the Land of Promise: Italians in Buenos Aires and New York City, 1870–1914* (New York, 1999), 10.

2. The "family outward approach" reveals the immigrant experiences of my maternal grandfather, Giuseppe Verrico, and my paternal grandfather, Donato Vecchio.

3. Susan Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl: Life and Labor in the Immigrant Generation* (Ithaca, NY, 1990), 208.

4. Ship manifests with passengers sailing from Santi Cosma e Damiano, Castleforte, and other nearby villages were taken from Ellis Island records dating from the late 1890s through 1924. See www.Ellisisland.org.

5. Donna Gabaccia and Franca Iacovetta, *Women, Gender, and Transnational Lives: Italian Workers of the World* (Toronto, 2002), 6.

6. The Cortland factory hiring large numbers of immigrants was the Wickwire Brothers Wireworks. Interview with Giuseppe Verrico, January 1978, Cortland, New York.

7. "Sancosmesi" and "Castlefortani" refer to the people from Santi Cosma e Damiano and Castleforte, Italy.

8. John W. Briggs, *An Italian Passage: Immigrants to Three American Cities, 1890–1930* (New Haven, CT, 1978).

9. People from the same village.

10. Giuseppe Verrico interview.

11. Other New York State destinations include Utica and Gloversville.

12. Birth and marriage registry, comune of Santi Cosma e Damiano, Italy.

13. San Lorenzo was part of Castleforte, but on the outskirts of the village proper, closer to Santi Cosma e Damiano.

14. These patterns have been documented by many scholars of Italian immigration. See, for example, John Briggs, *An Italian Passage*; and Donna Gabaccia and Fraser Ottanelli, *Italian Workers of the World: Labor Migration and the Formation of Multiethnic States* (Urbana, IL, 2001).

15. I have found no evidence thus far that he was related to Donato Vecchio, so I am considering him a fellow villager.

16. Ship Manifest, 1921.

17. "Setting oneself up" is explained by Baldassar as the process by which families purchase land and/or homes. See Loretta Baldassar, *Visits Home, Migration Experiences between Italy and Australia* (Melbourne, 2001), 71.

18. Donato Vecchio, a staunch anti-fascist, decided not to return to Italy and, instead, called for his family to join him in the United States. His wife and children emigrated in 1937.

19. Ship Manifest, 1913.

20. Bernardino immigrated first to New York City, which must have proved fruitless. After returning to Italy a second time, Bernardino joined members of the DeLanna family (his future wife's brothers) for Johnsonburg, Pennsylvania. By 1907, he was in Cortland where he settled permanently.

21. Only a handful of Italian women worked in the Wickwire Brothers Wireworks, a factory dominated by heavy industry. However, immigrant women from Russia and the Ukraine tended to work there in far greater numbers than did other immigrant groups.

22. Analysis of Ship Manifests between 1892–1924.

23. *Vedove bianca*, or white widow, is the term used for women who were left behind when husbands emigrated. An excellent study of Italian women left behind is Linda Reeder, *Widows in White: Migration and the Transformation of Rural Italian Women, Sicily, 1880–1920* (Toronto, 2003).

24. The common reference to the factory as "Wickwire's" will be used hereafter.

25. This information was compiled by examining ship manifests and oral interviews with members of the Vecchio family.

26. Italian males boarded with already-established Italian families or in boarding houses where twenty or more men lived together. They frequently moved from one household to another until they either left Cortland for good, or married, or were reunited with recently-arrived spouses.

27. Savita Nair, "Gender, Space, and Power: Indian Immigrant Women in Colonial East Africa (c. 1920–1940)," unpublished paper presented at Furman University Faculty Forum, September 2005.

28. Baily, *Immigrants in the Land of Promise*, 146.

29. 1925 Manuscript Census, Cortland, New York.

30. Louis M. Vanaria, "Settlement Patterns of Cortland Italians: The First Generation, 1892–1925," in *From Many Roots: Immigrants and Ethnic Groups in the History of Cortland County, New York*, ed. Louis M. Vanaria (Cortland, NY, 1986).

31. Household consisting of a husband, wife and children.

32. Diane C. Vecchio, "The Influence of Family Values and Culture on the Occupational Choices of Italian Immigrant Women in Cortland, N.Y., 1890–1935," in *From Many Roots*, ed. Vanaria, 36–45.

33. Donna Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street. Housing and Social Change among Italian Immigrants* (Albany, NY, 1984), 27–28. Gabaccia also refers to anthropologist Charlotte Gower Chapman, who reported that in Milocca, Sicily, "boarding was unheard of."

34. Interview with Rose Carini, August 26, 1992, Milwaukee, WI.

35. Interview with "Francesca", January 2, 2000, Cortland, NY.

36. I learned of this incident when I discovered a gravestone in St. Mary's cemetery in Cortland with the mother and child buried together. After tracing birth and marriage certificates, census data, and other documents, I was able to piece together the information.

37. Vecchio, "The Influence of Family Values and Culture," 37–38.

38. Ibid. 38.

39. Statistics compiled from analysis of the New York State Manuscript Census for Cortland County.

40. Their home village.

41. Tragically, Porchetta died a year later in an industrial accident at Wickwire's.

42. This is a topic that I discuss in my research of Sicilian women who owned and operated grocery stores and restaurants in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. See Diane Vecchio, "Gender, Domestic Values, and Italian Working Women in Milwaukee: Immigrant Midwives and Businesswomen," in *Women, Gender, and Transnational Lives: Italian Workers of the World*, ed. Donna Gabaccia and Franca Iacovetta (Toronto, 2002), 160–85; and Diane Vecchio, *Merchants, Midwives, and Laboring Women: Italian Migrants in Urban America* (Urbana, IL, 2006).

43. Memories of these grocery stores are a recreation of my own experiences as a child visiting my grandparents on the south end of Cortland.

44. *Cortland Standard*, July 2002.

45. Interviews with Marie and Alex Vecchio, September 2000, Skaneateles, NY.

46. Alex Vecchio interview.

47. Carol McKibben, "Beyond Cannery Row: Sicilian Women and Identity Formation in Monterey California," paper presented at the SSHA, November 2005, Portland, OR.

48. Vecchio, "The Influence of Family Values," 39.

49. Interview with Nicolina Giuliano, August 2005, Cortland, NY.

50. John Smith, "A History of the Wickwire Brothers Wire Factory of Cortland, New York," unpublished paper, State University of New York College at Cortland, 1972.

51. Janie Welsh, "A History of Wickwire Brothers, Inc., 1873–1972, Cortland, New York," unpublished paper on file at the Cortland County Historical Society, 23, MS M678 no. 106.

52. American-born men were usually the highest paid males in the factory and held skilled positions as wire-weavers.

53. Interviews with Louis Adessa, August 1978; Giuseppe Verrico, January 1978; and Charles Abdallah, January 1979, Cortland, New York.

54. Italian immigrant men were often hesitant to go on strike fearful they would "lose everything." Most of these men were homeowners and many of them were the sole breadwinners in the family. However, second-generation Italians were more likely to go on strike and demand concessions from the factory. Leading labor activists at Wickwire's during the strikes of the late 1940s and 1950s included men from large Italian families who had fathers and brothers employed at the factory, such as the Berardi family and the Montello family. Interviews with Giuseppe Verrico; Alex and Marie Vecchio.

55. Welsh, "A History of Wickwire Brothers," 25.

56. David Gerber, "Theories and Lives: Transnationalism and the Conceptualization of International Migrations to the United States," *IMIS-Beitrage*: *Transnationalismus und Kulturver-gleich* (December 2000): 31–53.

57. Ibid, 44.

58. Interview with Sandy (Santina) Panzanella, August 2005, Cortland, NY.

59. Giuseppe Verrico and Donato Vecchio boarded together in the early 1920s and worked together at Wickwire's. They provided support for each other as well. When Donato purchased his first home, Giuseppe helped him with the down payment. New York State Manuscript Census for Cortland County, 1920; and interviews with members of the Vecchio and Verrico families.

60. Micaela di Leonardo discusses the significance of Italian women's kinship networks in the context of family, labor, and community in California in *The Varieties of Ethnic Experience: Kinship, Class, and Gender among California Italian-Americans* (Ithaca, NY, 1984).

61. Maria Carmine (Mary) Vecchio married Philip Coviello, the son of my grandparents' *paesani* in 1947. Marie and Alex Vecchio interview.