

THE ARBËRESH CULTURE:  
*AN ACE IN THE HOLE*, IN THE HEART OF CALABRIA

by

Edna Lubonja

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Doctor of Philosophy

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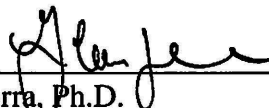
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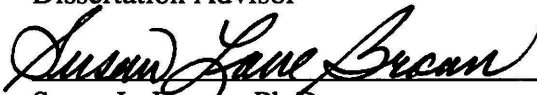
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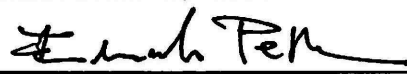
Edna Lubonja


This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the candidate's dissertation advisor, Dr. Ilaria Serra, Department of Languages, Linguistics and Comparative Literature, and has been approved by the members of her supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts & Letters and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

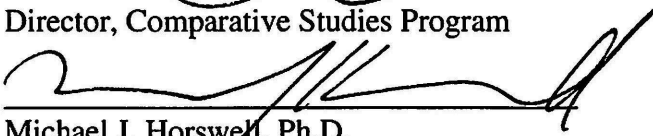
SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:


  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Ilaria Serra, Ph.D.  
Dissertation Advisor

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Susan L. Brown, Ph.D.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Emanuele Pettener, Ph.D.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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Dean, Dorothy F. Schmidt College of  
Arts & Letters

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Deborah L. Floyd, Ed.D.  
Dean, Graduate College

November 15, 2017  
Date

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## ABSTRACT

Author: Edna Lubonja  
Title: The Arbëresh Culture: An *Ace in the Hole*, in the Heart of Calabria  
Institution: Florida Atlantic University  
Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Ilaria Serra  
Degree: Doctor of Philosophy  
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The Arbëresh of Italy founded their communities in the 1400s when they were forced to flee their homeland, Albania, as the country was conquered and ruled by the Ottoman Empire. For centuries, they kept a close community in the Italian villages preserving their language, culture, rituals and traditions. These elements have defined them as “others” in the Italian community over the centuries, but today, they are better described as Italians who *also* embrace the Arbëresh culture.

This dissertation explores the narratives of Arbëresh authors such as Carmine Abate, Anna Stratigò, and Pino Cacoza, who have preserved glimpses of their culture in their writings, thus creating an oasis that I call “the Arbëresh Utopia.” I situate them in the larger context of Arbëresh history, and in the environment where their stories are located. A recent research conducted through interviews in the Arbëresh towns of Calabria, will add an important “lived” tassel of information, by exploring the Arbëresh culture today in a state of what Michel Foucault calls heterotopia. After many years of living in a closed community, the Arbëresh have learned to live by addition.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Arbëresh people, one of the largest minority groups in Italy, have an extensive and fascinating history. As the other linguistic minorities such as Croatians, Friulians, Greek-speakers, Ladins, Occitans, Sardinians, Slovenes, South Tyrolean German-speakers, and Aostans, the Arbëresh add flavor to the Italian mosaic. They are special in comparison to others because they conserve the memory of their arrival and the myth of the tryp at their bases. They founded their first settlements in southern Italy in the 1400s, when land was given to them as a reward for military services. Since then, the Arbëresh have kept to a close community, preserving their language, culture and traditions. Their own choice of exclusivity protected the Arbëresh for centuries, and it left this community undetected by the external observation. They passed their language and rituals from one generation to the next through the oral tradition. Although the Arbëresh culture has been presented with obstacles, many of which could have prevented it from moving forward, it has surmounted for more than five centuries and is still thriving today.

Culture is a system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that the members of a society share in order to cope with their world and with one another and that is transmitted from generation to generation through learning.<sup>1</sup> Claudia Strauss and Naomi Quinn assert that there are five tendencies in cultures: “they can be relatively durable in individuals; cultural understandings can have emotional and motivational

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<sup>1</sup> (Bates and Plog, 7).

force; they can be relatively durable historically; they can be relatively applied in a wide variety of contexts and they can be more or less widely shared” (85). These dispositions of cultures show to be durable through time and generations. As we look at the Arbëresh culture, we can apply Strauss and Quinn’s tendencies as: this culture shows to be resilient to time and the Arbëresh people have kept the traditions going although they are spread throughout southern Italy.

While some aspects of culture, such as language and rituals, are visible and easily depicted in a group of people, other elements are hidden and require deeper exploration to uncover. Strauss and Quinn affirm that in talk, discourse, and narrative, “the fullest and most decipherable records available” (4) can be found. These scholars reinforce the importance of discourse as a key element because, according to them, culture is “both enacted and produced in the moment of interaction” (4) between individuals. Because culture is transient through time and is transmitted from generation to generation, it also changes as a result of older generations passing away. They take with them parts of culture that were never shared with the next generation. The Arbëresh culture went through the phases of change for over five centuries, and it is still alive today. The Arbëresh community can be described by using the expression, *an ace in the hole*, because they kept in silence and remained as a close group until they seized the opportunity to reveal their existence and the language, culture and traditions they embrace.

After centuries of oral tradition, in the recent years, the Arbëresh have been using technology to publish about their language and culture. Most of the publications are based on memories, cultural events, revealing lives of the Arbëresh. Most interesting are

these two web sites: [arbitalia.it](http://arbitalia.it) and [mondoarberesco.it](http://mondoarberesco.it). They are very useful for my research as they provide abundant information on upcoming Arbëresh events, whether they are cultural or literary. The Arbëresh use these sites to discuss local social and cultural events to keep their community as lively and as connected as possible. They are also used to promote their language and culture and to extend their progression to the next generations. These sites recollect the lives of the Arbëresh through stories, poems, games, songs and pictures of cultural events that have been archived by Arbëresh authors.

Arbitalia is the first online Arbëresh magazine directed by Pino Cacoza, a well-known cultural activist, poet, and singer of San Demetrio Corone in Calabria. He has subtitled this online magazine as *Shtëpia e Arbëreshëvet të Italië* (The House of the Arbëresh of Italy)<sup>2</sup>, welcoming all the Arbëresh of Italy. This site serves as an informative portal for upcoming news, new publications and recent cultural events of all the Arbëresh communities of Italy. Furthermore, this site gives voice and space to the Arbëresh writers who e-publish their articles on the Arbëresh life and culture.

Mondoarberesco.it is an Arbëresh online portal directed by Enrico Ferraro from Pallagorio in the province of Crotona, in Calabria. He is an Italo-Arbëresh author who has written many books on the lifestyle and the Arbëresh language of his town. His site also serves also as a publishing house for other Italo-Arbëresh authors. I find his dedication of his web touching as he dedicates his work to his children. He states: “Ai miei figli. A Francesco che conosce la lingua degli avi, a Rita e ad Antonello per farmi perdonare di non avergliela insegnata” (“To my children. To Francesco, who knows the language of the forefathers, to Rita and Antonello who need to forgive me for not

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<sup>2</sup> All the translations from Italian or Albanian into English are mine.



teaching it to them”). Strong is the remorse that two of his children do not speak the Arbëresh language. But the dedication of this website to all of them is great gesture and a patrimony of the Arbëresh culture and language.

Enrico Ferraro has done broad research on the writings and publications of the Arbëresh. He has written extensively on the history and has mostly focused his writing on the linguistic aspect of the Arbëresh of Pallagorio, a town next to Carfizzi. He has put together a long list of Arbëresh bibliography, which informs of anything Arbëresh whether it is literary, linguistic, folkloristic, historic, ethnographic or artistic. Many of these authors have written about their own towns. They write from memories and the oral traditions the most important and specific elements that recollect their Arbëresh culture such as poems, rhapsodies, costumes, vallje and more. There are few notable names in Arbëresh culture, included in Ferraro’s list.

Among many others, we can find Giuseppe Acquafredda, an author who has written in the early 1990s about the history and the culture of Spezzano Albanese, a town in the Province of Cosenza, Calabria. Emmanuele Demetrio has written about the culture and the vallje of the Arbëresh town of Civita. Donato Michele Mazzeo has written on the Arbëresh everyday life of Barile, an Arbëresh town in the region of Basilicata. Antonio Argondizza is an author who has written about Mongrassano, a town of Arbëresh descent in the province of Cosenza that has lost the Arbëresh language, but whose people identify as Italo-Arbëresh. Ferraro adds his own research from April of 1977 that in a town named Zinga in the province of Crotona, people were of Arbëresh descent but they have been completely Italianized. However, he discovered that for the wedding rituals, although they sing in the Calabrian dialect, the Albanian melody is still conserved. This example

shows that in the towns where the first Albanians arrived, even when it seems as if everything has been erased with time, some element of culture still remains to reveal the people's origin.<sup>3</sup>

The list continues with Antonio Bellusci. He is a priest from Frascineto, an Arbëresh town in the province of Cosenza who has also written numerous books on traditional sacred songs, the funeral rituals in Frascineto and mythic stories and popular Arbëresh legends. Francesco Altimari is a professor in the University of Calabria. He has written many books and articles based on Albanian literature and linguistic aspect of the Arbëresh towns of Calabria. Mario Bolognari is a professor in the University of Messina and an author of many books on the diglossia in the Arbëresh communities of Calabria. Bolognari has also researched on the migration and memory in the Arbëresh of Calabria. Domenico Cassiano is an author who has written on the Risorgimento in Calabria, looking at the Italo-Albanian protagonists. He has also touched on the Arbëresh culture in Calabria. Giuseppe Crispi is another author who has written extensively on linguistic and folkloristic memory of the Albanian studies. Girolamo De Rada a well-known Arbëresh poet of the 19<sup>th</sup> century who wrote many popular Albanian poems and rhapsodies. Italo Elmo has written on the costumes, rituals and Arbëresh cuisine. Ernest Koliqi has written about the popular Albanian poetry.

Many of these writings have been published in local newspapers or local printing houses and their publicity has not reached the Italian mainstream print. Nevertheless, they are important for the Arbëresh community and they serve as documentaries for the

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<sup>3</sup> See link: [http://www.mondobarberesco.it/archivio/cantonuziale\\_inzinga.htm](http://www.mondobarberesco.it/archivio/cantonuziale_inzinga.htm)

younger Arbëresh generation. The list of names is lengthy, and without excluding anyone, I invite the reader to take a look at *mondoarberesco* for the full bibliography.<sup>4</sup>

In this introductory literary review, it is important to mention the work of Giuseppe Tommaso Gangale (1898-1978), a researcher of Arbëresh descent from Cirò, in Calabria. Giovanni Belluscio dedicated an article titled “Giuseppe Tommaso Gangale per la rinascita dell’arbërisht nella Calabria centrale: l’utopia dimenticata ... l’utopia realizzata” (Giuseppe Tommaso Gangale for the revival of Arbërisht in central Calabria: The forgotten utopia ... the fulfilled utopia), where he praises Gangale’s great contribution on the recuperation of cultural material from the elderly. During the years of 1950-1970, Gangale worked in towns of Zangarona, Caraffa di Catanzaro, Vena di Maida, Andali, Marcedusa, San Nicola dell’Alto, Carfizzi and Pallagorio. His research method included a recollection of “canti, racconti, fiabe, poesie, rapsodie, preghiere ... la registrazione della lingua viva, ricerca di campi lessicali, aspetti grammaticali” (“songs, stories, fables, poems, rhapsodies, prayers ... recordings of everyday language, research on lexical field, grammatical aspects”). The purpose of these gatherings was to put them together for the “produzione di materiali didattici” (“creation of educational material”) to be used in the local schools of these towns for learning purposes of the Arbërisht.

Gangale took upon himself the task to make Arbërisht a written language, so as he was approaching eighty years old, he wrote in an article “Lingua arberisca restituenda”<sup>5</sup> (The return of the Arbëresh language) published in 1976 the following:

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<sup>4</sup>[http://www.mondoarberesco.it/bibliografia\\_arberesca/Ferraro\\_Enrico\\_Bibliografia\\_arberesca\\_2011.pdf](http://www.mondoarberesco.it/bibliografia_arberesca/Ferraro_Enrico_Bibliografia_arberesca_2011.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> We can see Gangale is using Latin in his title, reminding us of Dante’s *De vulgari eloquentia*. Along the same lines as Dante, Gangale is making the point here that the language of the Arbëresh people is Arbëresh and not the Albanian the Albanian’s of Albania speak today.

Gli albanesi d'Italia non sono schipetari (albanesi d'Albania), dal momento del loro distacco essi hanno seguito una propria strada, hanno per di più una loro origine al di fuori degli attuali confini dell'Albania, hanno una tradizione bizantina, hanno una lingua più arcaica della lingua Albanese ... hanno mentalità, usi e costume diversi, quindi, va da se che va rigettata una qualsiasi commistione con la lingua e cultura Albanese della madrepatria, e cominciare dallo stesso alfabeto.

The Albanians of Italy are not Albanians of Albania; from the moment of separation, they have followed their own way, they have their own origins outside the borders of Albania; they have the Byzantine tradition; they have an archaic language than Albanian ... they have a mentality, customs and costumes that are different, therefore, we have to proceed rejecting any commingling with the Albanian culture and language of the motherland, starting with the alphabet.

With this statement, Gangale is clearly making the distinction of the Arbëresh and the Albanians. The Arbëresh people were connected to the language, customs and religion of the Old Arbëria. On the other hand, the people in Albania went through many changes as a result of the Ottoman Empire invasion. The language evolved, and the rituals and customs changed. For children's education, Gangale wants to introduce in schools their spoken language and the reflection of their Arbëresh culture, not standard Albanian from Albania.

Gangale contributed greatly in the preservation of the Arbëresh language and culture in the area of Central Calabria. He researched historical information that was

hardly studied during that time. He contributed in passing on the treasures of the Arbëresh culture to the next generation through recordings and gatherings he made. He published educational material for the learning of the Arbëresh language, and was actively involved in saving and preserving Arbëresh manuscripts of value.

It is important to note here that the writers and poets of the Arbëresh literature have contributed to the genesis and evolution of Albanian literature as well. Anton Berisha, the author of the on-line publication *Antologia della letteratura Arbëreshe contemporanea*, states that: “La letteratura arbëreshë fa parte organicamente della letteratura albanese tout court” (“The Arbëresh literature is an organically part of the Albanian literature tout court”).<sup>6</sup> Whether it is the content or the poetic value, the Arbëresh authors appear with great importance in all the histories of the Albanian literature. For most of the XVIII century, Arbëresh authors and poets kept the folkloristic religious motives as inspiration to their writings. Berisha mentions Niccolò Brancato’s (1675-1741) collection of poems that were a mix of popular and religious motives. He states that the real jump in quality is accomplished by Giulio Variboba from San Giorgio Albanese, in the province of Cosenza, whose religious poem “Gjella e Shën Merise Virgjer” (The Life of the Virgin Mary), written in 1762, represents “l’opera più originale della letteratura albanese antica” (“the most original work of the antique Albanian literature”).

During the next century, Arbëresh literature was enriched by civil and political contents. The well-known nineteenth century author Girolamo De Rada (1814-1903), from Macchia Albanese, is known for his rhapsodies that contributed on the study of the

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<sup>6</sup> See link: [http://www.arbitalia.it/letteratura/produzioni\\_letterarie.htm](http://www.arbitalia.it/letteratura/produzioni_letterarie.htm)

Albanian language and the preservation of the folkloristic tradition. Berisha states that a group of Italo-Arbëresh intellectuals such as Vincenzo Dorsa, Giuseppe Serembe, Angelo Basile e Gabriele Dara jr., followed the same path as De Rada. They felt the necessity to reinforce in their writings the Arbëresh identity and its connection with Albania.

In the early 1900s, with the independence of Albania from the Ottoman Empire in 1912, many writings covered patriotic motives. After the Second World War, Arbëresh literature regained vigor and vitality. Berisha affirms that starting in the 50s, and even more clearly in the 60s, and 70s and to this day, Albania showed “un'attenzione sempre crescente per un risveglio culturale e per la valorizzazione degli anni sessanta e della minoranza italo-albanese” (“an increasing attention to a cultural awakening and for the enhancement of the sixties and of the Italo-Albanian minority”). These recent writings are related to current affairs and existential themes of universal value. Berisha mentions some contemporary poets and authors' names such as Francesco Solano, Giuseppe Shirò di Maggio, Giuseppe Schirò di Modica, Vincenzo Belmonte, Cosmo Rocco, Vorea Ujko, Carmelo Candreva, Giuseppe Del Gaudio, Enza Scutari, Kate Zuccaro, Luis De Rosa, Angelo Matrangolo, Pasquale Renda, Carmine Abate, and Pino Cacoza.

### **Carmine Abate: His Place in Arbëresh Culture**

When I started my research, the first name that appeared in the contemporary Arbëresh literature was Carmine Abate. He is an Italo-Arbëresh author that has written extensively on the Arbëresh lifestyle based on his life experience growing up in the 1950s in Carfizzi, an Arbëresh town in the province of Crotona, Calabria. His books were easily accessible as he has been well received into the Italian mainstream publishing houses.

We can compare Abate with the Sardinian author Grazia Deledda for example. She portrayed the life, customs and traditions of the Sardinian people in her writing but the language she used was standard Italian. Another comparison could be the Friulian author from the area of Gorizia, Delfo Zorzut and his collection of short stories. He also tried to gather popular legends and traditions to keep alive the language. But what is unique about Carmine Abate and his writing is that he stays true to the Arbëresh lifestyle that his novels can almost be called autobiographical and he also includes the Arbëresh language in his writing.

The first book I read was *Il ballo tondo* (*The Round Dance*). This book pulls the reader into the circle of Arbëresh life of the 1950s and his infusion of time from the Arbëresh antiquity to present provides the bigger picture. This first novel left such an impression that I was encouraged to read the other books. Abate touches on different themes such as identity formation and identification struggles when multiculturalism is present. At the same time, he is clearly rooted and aware of the Italian literary tradition. His characters: Costantino in *Il ballo tondo* (2000), and Giovanni in *La moto di Scanderbeg* (2001) could recall Elsa Morante's character of Arturo from *L'isola di Arturo* (1957), as they retrace their childhood and adolescence. These "bildungsromans," run through the most significant stages of growth and maturation of a teenager to adulthood. Arturo was a dreamer who lived his life in the absence of his mother. Abate's characters instead, are dreamers who live most of their teenage lives in the absence of the father. The characters undergo change as they live the present through memories. The use of everyday language is a common ground for both of these authors.

Abate is also clearly indebted to Italo Calvino and his novel *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*. Calvino also used everyday language to describe the partisan resistance in the 1940s through the perception of the character *Pin*. The facts and the struggles of war are described through the eyes of a child. Abate also uses the same techniques in his novels. He describes the struggles of the South through the point of view of the young characters. As Calvino's *Pin* takes the reader through the war landscape, Abate's young characters take the reader through the Italo-Arbëresh landscape filled with curiosities. We can also depict Abate's application of everyday language of the Italo-Arbëresh of Calabria.

Another important theme in Abate's novels is migration. We often find that the father figure is absent as he is away working abroad to provide for the family back home. The immigrants in Abate's novels struggle with the consequences of migration. They feel as if they do not belong to either place. They feel foreign at home and also abroad. This is a general immigrant condition that Italians themselves have felt when they migrated. As an example one could read important Italian American works such as Pietro Di Donato's *Christ in Concrete* or Jerre Mangione's *Mount Alegro*. These classic books of Italian American literature describe the struggles of migration, assimilation in the new land and they remind themselves of the reminiscences of the past.

However, what is unique about Abate, and the core of my interest in his novels, is that he gives life to places in Calabria and to the Arbëresh community of whose existence to the Italians and the rest of the world were unaware. He sheds light on a part of Italy never fully seen before. I selected his writing as a source of Arbëresh cultural representation, because his novels reflect the life of the Arbëresh from the 1960s and forward. Through the characters in his novels, Abate reflects on his own experience in



growing up as an Italo-Arbëresh in Calabria, enjoying the family life and the Arbëresh communal living, but also struggling with the economic issues of the South.

### **Structure of the Dissertation**

This dissertation uncovers the Arbëresh culture through the lens of Carmine Abate and his novels, other Arbëresh authors and poets from the region of Calabria, and through testimonies of local Arbëresh people from the region of Calabria. The outline of this dissertation will continue as follows: first, I will briefly touch on the history of the Arbëresh people to explain their journey to Italy. The history of their establishment in Italy is significant, because it differentiates from the other minority groups. Their existence today reflects their memory and their past. The present and past are inseparable for this community. This section will unveil the beginning of the Arbëresh community and it will be a basis for the rest of this dissertation. In particular, I will discuss the importance of the figure of George Kastrioti Scanderbeg for the Arbëresh community. The Arbëresh consider him as their savior from the claws of the Ottoman Empire and that they are in Italy saving their rituals and traditions because of Scanderbeg. Another important historical knot is the participation of the Arbëresh to Italy's Risorgimento.

Thus, we will discuss significant Arbëresh personalities who have fought for and participated in Italy's unification. After covering the historic progression of the Arbëresh community, the reader will be informed of how the Arbëresh communities cope today, engaging with the dominant Italian culture and the passed time that works against their favor. The last part of this section will also discuss the Arbëresh literature through the years, until today.

The second chapter will focus on the Arbëresh and their place in the Italian publishing context. This chapter will discuss concepts such as Minor literature and Ethnic literature. The purpose of this chapter is to consider the category that best fits an author such as Carmine Abate and other Italo-Arbëresh authors who are born in Italy but also embrace another culture they have inherited for generations.

The third chapter will discuss the concept of Arbëresh Utopia and how this concept is developed in Carmine Abate's trilogy *Le stagioni di Hora* ("The Seasons of Hora"). Utopia will be used to describe the bubble in which Arbëresh culture strove for centuries, arriving to us today, almost intact. To promote the ideals of society, the elderly have an important role in informing and talking to the younger generation about the legends, stories, rhapsodies, poems and popular sayings, to bring the Arbëresh utopia forward. For centuries they lived in the microcosm of a perfect Arbëresh society where all the members bear a perfect moral code and every violator is harshly punished by the community: this is the case of immigrants who leave the town for economic reasons, but upon their return, are seen as foreigners who brings modern ideas, contradicting the moral codes of the Arbëresh utopia.

Utopia is an impossible dream, it is the force of illusion that allows for reality to be changed and shaped. Utopian communities are creations of worlds where spiritual intentions are as important as historical circumstances. Utopia is a place, state, or condition that is ideally perfect in respect to reality. Utopia rises from dissatisfaction with reality and criticism of existing society. Some of the discontent reasons that lead to utopias are politics, laws, customs and social and economic conditions. In a utopian society, all the members live in a harmonious state and they function together as a closed

community where all the citizens embrace social and moral ideals. Fredric Jameson states that totality, closure and autonomy are ultimately the source of alienation which lead to utopian cities, utopian revolution, and utopian communes.<sup>7</sup> The Arbëresh founded their communities out of turmoil. They were led to leave their homeland in order to save their language and traditions in a foreign land. The new land they arrived in was different and at times rigid. Therefore, the Arbëresh created a mental utopia where the Arbëresh society will be ideal in maintaining a common religious philosophy, the language and the rituals they brought from the lost Arbëria.

Carmine Abate portrays the Arbëresh utopia in literature. He builds his novels in a mythic place he calls *Hora*.<sup>8</sup> He creates a literary utopia without referring to any specific town and to all of them at the same time. In fact, any Arbëresh can find himself in Abate's books. He reveals the Arbëresh utopia from personal experiences and stories from his compatriots. The use of utopia in literature often serves to help the reader envision the problems, paradoxes, or faults entrenched within the existing reality. Abate himself is not necessarily an outsider to the utopian society. Therefore he does not use utopia in literature to attempt to show to the reader the various diverging factors contributing towards the failings of the existing society or to criticize the prevalent legal norms as Jameson refers in his article. Abate's "utopia" is free of any criticism. He portrays the Arbëresh utopic life of the Arbëresh communities in Southern Italy. As a member of one of the Arbëresh towns, Carfizzi, Abate embraces the Arbëresh utopia but is also realistic about the problems it causes along the way as time passes. He seems to

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<sup>7</sup> Jameson references Thomas More and Ernst Bloch's *The Principle of Hope*.

<sup>8</sup> Hora is an Arbëresh word which means a place, a community. Piana degli Albanesi in the Province of Palermo in Sicily is a commune that in Arbëresh is called *Hora e Arbëreshëvet*.

accept the changes as they happen in the course of life and this is also visible in his novels. His view of not forgetting the past but also immersing into the present and accepting the multicultural options the life journey offers, will be discussed in the last section of this chapter through Abate's latest novel *Il banchetto di nozze e altri sapori*.

The fourth chapter will discuss the ways in which Arbëresh culture holds on to its utopia through written and oral narratives. This section will cover writings of Elsa Musacchio and Barbara Renzi, Anna Stratigò, Sara Bell and Pino Cacoza. Their writings are based on memories, research and oral narratives of their family members. The last section of this chapter will discuss recent documentaries as a source of cultural representation. The documentaries portray the visual culture through the performance of the *vallje*, the rituals and the use of traditional costumes that defines the Arbëresh.

The fifth chapter will be dedicated to the “confessions” of the Arbëresh of Calabria I had the pleasure of meeting during the summer of 2016. This experience was uncanny for me as an Albanian, to find the Arbëresh community in Italy so lively. Some people who had never visited Albania and lived their whole life in Italy, knew songs from my hometown and specific cultural expressions I could not have imagined. This is precisely why many of them describe the Arbëresh and the Albanians as like twins raised by two different mothers.

I use the word confession as the locals reveal their memories, their past and their culture throughout the years. The locals' testimonies will provide more information as how they live their lives today, over six centuries past, and how they feel about the future of their community and their culture. Some of the themes that will be touched in these interviews are the cultural preservation, memory, identity and much more.

The sixth chapter will explore the recent changes in Arbëresh culture. The past generations tried to keep the community together and preserve the language and traditions, but we cannot say that the Arbëresh utopia is still the same as they had constructed. As the younger generation is immersing more and more into the Italian lifestyle, speaking more Italian than Arbëresh, and constructing a life away from the Arbëresh town, the Arbëresh utopia is slightly approaching its end or perhaps what Michel Foucault calls heterotopia. Throughout their longevity, we can see that the Arbëresh went from a closed community, preserving their Arbëresh utopia, to an open community that is trying to hold on to its past but also look into the future. The community was constrained not to live in a bubble anymore but live by addition and be a part of the larger community.

This dissertation will conclude with final thoughts on the presupposed future of the Arbëresh community- an adventure that I personally wish will not exhaust itself but rather will continue to transform and persist.

## HISTORY OF THE ARBËRESH PEOPLE

This chapter traces the historical context in which the Arbëresh utopia was formed, from its beginning in the fifteenth century until today. We notice here that history and legend, in the case of Albanian history, coincide in these centuries. We have few written documents from this time,<sup>9</sup> and the bulk of our information comes from oral tradition.



Figure 1 This map dates back in the XV century showing the fleeing of the Albanians towards Ital

<sup>9</sup> Marin Barleti *Historia e Jetes dhe e Veprave te Skenderbeut* 1967; Kasem Bicoku and Jup Kastrati *Gjergj Kastrioti Skenderbeu: Bibliografi 1454-1835* 1997; Koco Boxhori *Lufta Shqiptaro-Turke ne Shekullin XV, Burime Bizantine* 1967; Nelo Drizari *Scanderbeg, His Life, Correspondence, Orations, Victories and Philosophy* 1968; Naim Frasheri *Histori e Skenderbeut* 1967; Odhise Grillo *Historia e Skenderbeut* 2001; Luigi Marlekaj *Scanderbeg nelle Tradizioni Popolari Albanesi* 1969; Fan Noli *Historia e Skenderbeut (Gjergj Kastriotit), mbretit te Shqiperiese 1412-1468* 1921.

As we can see from the map, the original Arbëreshë people came from the ancient Arbëria, a territory that is today's central and southern Albania. Today's Arbëreshë are descendants of Albanian warriors who fled their homeland Arbëria, as it was invaded by the Ottoman Empire.<sup>10</sup> Some settled in Greece and they are called Arvanites. The regions with a strong traditional presence are found in southeastern Greece. The rest, the Arbëresh, crossed through the Adriatic Sea and arrived in southern Italy where they were given lands to work and live by the King of Naples, Alfonso D'Aragon. Historian Robert Elsie<sup>11</sup> asserts that "sporadic groups of Albanians had found their way to Italy as early as 1272, 1388 and 1393," (*Histori e Letersise Shqiptare* 139) but the main Arbëresh settlements were established in the fifteenth century with the Albanian troops who went to help King Alfonso with a revolt in Calabria.

In the 1400s, the Albania we know today was not a united nation, but was divided into principalities. The Ottoman Empire was progressing through the Albanian territory and encountered limited resistance as the Albanians were fighting, "without adequate resources in men and material" (Zavalani 68). Their hope depended in all from their captain, and today's national hero, George Kastrioti Scanderbeg, and his expertise in war. George Kastrioti Scanderbeg was a native Albanian who had been captured by the Turks as a young boy. He was trained in the court of the sultan to be a great warrior. Sultan Murat sent Scanderbeg to Albania as governor of the province.

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<sup>10</sup> Engjell Sedaj explains that the name Arbëresh derives from the names *Arbanon/Arbanum/ Arbën* which date back to the Middle Ages. It was an Albanian principality in the XV century, where the vicinity of Kruja takes place today (53).

<sup>11</sup> A foreigner to Albania but someone who has done extensive research on the Albanian history and has published many books on it.

Although Scanderbeg was trained by the Turks, he never lost his burning desire to fight against them and liberate Albania from the invaders. Scanderbeg's main goal was to "regain the land his father lost and to unite the country" (Artemida Kabashi 10). Also Tajar Zavalani explains that Scanderbeg had a "calculating mind" (68), and was just waiting for the right time to strike against the Turks. Scanderbeg is portrayed with goat horns on his helmet – which reminds of a story testifying his military shrewdness; a legend in fact says that:



Figure 2 The Sculpture of the National Hero Scanderbeg

Durante la lotta contro i turchi, Skanderbeg e i suoi soldati vennero accerchiati da forze preponderanti. Per uscirne l'eroe ricorse alla astuzia. Ordinò ai suoi uomini di riunire un branco di capre, alle cui corna vennero legate delle torce accese e di notte furono spinte contro le formazioni nemiche. I turchi credendo di essere assaliti alle spalle fuggirono togliendo l'assedio.

During the struggle against the Ottomans, Skanderbeg and his troops were surrounded by overwhelming forces. To get out of this situation, a trick reoccurred to the hero. He ordered his men to gather a



herd of goats, whose horns were related of lighted torches and at night were pushed against the enemy formations. The Turks believed they were being assaulted from behind so they ran away removing the siege (*Arbitalia*, Adriano Mazziotti).

### **Scanderbeg and the Beginnings of the Arbëresh Community**

The figure of Scanderbeg is extremely important in the creation of the Arbëresh utopia, as this hero became a type of founding father for his countrymen. Historians affirm that Scanderbeg's brilliant mind was vigilant at all times during his military campaigns in his land, as he balanced two different dangers: the Turks progressions and the Venetians' self-serving mercantile interests in the seaside towns of the Albanian Northern Coast. He knew he could count on an army of warriors who bowed to him and supported all the decisions he made. However, he needed financial help to support the costs of war. Scanderbeg had full support from the pope as Western European countries recognized his crucial position as a defender of Christianity. As historian Matteo Sciambra indicates, Pope Calixtus III referred to Scanderbeg as his "*vero diletto filio*" (real beloved son) in his *Il "Liber Brevium" di Callisto III: La Crociata, L'Albania e Scanderbeg*. The Vatican acknowledged Scanderbeg as an important "commander against the infidel and appointed him Captain-General of the Holy See but Scanderbeg was more commonly known by the popes as *Christ's Athlete*" (Kabashi 17).

Scanderbeg had also close connections with the King of Naples, King Alfonso, who was an opponent of the Turks and of the Venetians. In March 26, 1451, a formal treaty was signed in Gaeta between Scanderbeg and the King of Naples, where Alfonso became the suzerain of Scanderbeg and his confederates, who were to pay him an annual

tribute.<sup>12</sup> Since then, both leaders trusted and helped each other in difficult situations. In 1448, the King of Naples, Alfonso D' Aragon, turned to Scanderbeg for help in defeating a revolt in Naples. Scanderbeg responded by sending some of his warriors under the leadership of Demetrio Reres. As a reward of gratitude, the King granted the warriors the deserted land on the Calabrian mountainous tops. The year 1448 is the date of the foundation of the first Arbëresh communities in the Catanzaro province: Amato, Andali, Caraffa di Catanzaro, Carfizzi, Gizzeria, Marcedusa, Pallagorio, San Nicola dell'alto, Zagarise, Arietta, Vena di Maida and Zangarona (Giuseppe Carlo Sicilia 4). The strategic location worked in favor of the Arbëresh. Always fearful of the Turks, they enjoyed the elevated position of the mountain tops, where they had a 360° view of all the surroundings. They settled in these areas and never went back to their long lost homeland.

In 1461, Scanderbeg and his troops sailed back to Italy for another expedition, this time to help King Ferdinand, Alfonso's son. Scanderbeg had given his *besa* (the pledged word of honor), and although his own country was at war with the Turks and in a desperate position, "he could not abandon the son of his most faithful ally in his hour of need" (Zavalani 82). Scanderbeg and his troops of some three thousand "hand-picked horsemen" were the protagonists of the siege of Barletta and called it a victory. Once again, more land was given to the Albanians in reward for their role in battle. This is how the Arbëresh communities started to enlarge in Southern Italy.

The situation in Arbëria was worsening and Albanian warriors had difficulties in defeating the Turkish Army. The head of the Turkish army, Mehmet II was gaining

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<sup>12</sup> See Zavalani p. 76.

power battle after battle, and was threatening the gates of Kruja.<sup>13</sup> Scanderbeg fought for his stronghold until the last minute of his breath. His determination to save his land and people never faded. When he saw the near future of his land and his aged body slowly deteriorating, he supposedly said to his son these words, captured in famous verses:

Abandoned flower, flower of my heart,  
Take your mother and three of your best ships,  
Leave quickly from here,  
Because if the Turk knows of it,  
He will kill you and will shame your mother (Kabashi, 22).

Albanians were suffering a great number of casualties and they had already lost many noblemen. In January 17, 1468, Scanderbeg died of a fever in Albania: “he died a broken man, never to witness his son’s success” (Kabashi 11). Nevertheless, his fellow warriors recognized in Scanderbeg their model, for being strong, trustworthy, victorious, fearless, and for valuing highly the *Besa*, the pledged word of honor of the Albanians. Standing by the pledged word of honor is a characteristic that defines the Albanian people during Scanderbeg’s times, but also today. The Albanians inside the country’s boundaries and in the lands of the diaspora felt deeply for Scanderbeg’s passing: for them, it was as if they had “lost their father” (Zavalani 86). His fame, as one of the greatest warriors, was known all over Europe. Zavalani reports this anecdote: “it is said that when Mehmet II learned of Scanderbeg’s death he exclaimed: ‘Woe to Christendom, which has lost its sword and its shield! May the world never see another lion like him’” (86). Thus Scanderbeg became the “focus of an ethnic identity, whereby Albanians realized that they

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<sup>13</sup> The stronghold castle where Scanderbeg stayed.

were a distinct group of people with a unique heritage” (Kurt 338). Albanians praise his fight for Christianity, his role in the formation of the state of Albania, and his bravery, among his many qualities. He became and is still a legendary figure for all Albanians, including the Arbëreshë.

After Scanderbeg’s death, Kruja fell under Turks’ hands and soon after, the Ottoman Empire conquered Shkodra, the historic fortress of Rosafat. Once the Albanian territory was completely invaded, the Ottoman Empire imposed its administrative system. The majority of the people were forced to convert to the Muslim religion. The Empire dominated this territory for five hundred years. The last waves of refugees who managed to escape from the Turkish invasion were from southern Albania. They left between 1468 and 1478<sup>14</sup> and settled in Basilicata, Molise, Apulia, and particularly Calabria.

Between 1470 and 1478 Scanderbeg’s niece, Elena Kastrioti, married the feudal lord of Calabria, Antonio Sanseverino, and as a result more waves of refugees arrived and populated the Arbëresh communities of San Cosmo Albanese, San Demetrio Corone, San Giorgio Albanese, Macchia Albanese, Spezzano Albanese, and Vaccarizzo.<sup>15</sup> The last wave of 1478, populated the towns of Calabria owned by Sanseverino: Acquafredda, Castroregio, Cavallerizzo, Cervicati, Civita, Falconara, Firmo, Frascineto, Lungro, Mongrassano, Plataci, Rota Greca, San Basile, San Benedetto Ullano, San Lorenzo del Vallo, San Martino di Finita, Santa Caterina Albanese, Santa Sofia D’Epiro, Ejanina, Farneta, Marri and San Giacomo.<sup>16</sup> Other waves of Albanian continued to cross the Adriatic Sea in the centuries up until 1744, when the last group arrived and settled in the

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<sup>14</sup> See Robert Elsie p. 39.

<sup>15</sup> See Sicilia p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> See Sicilia p. 4.

towns around Pescara, in Abruzzo. In total, by this time, there were over one hundred towns populated by Albanians. According to Zllatku, around 200,000 Arbëresh people inhabited the Italian territories. This number constituted one fourth of the Albanian population at the time.

Although the Arbëresh were scattered in a vast area in Southern Italy, their identity remained the same and its preservation allowed them to “imagine themselves as a group” (Bucholtz 369). What united them was their common origin, the veneration for their hero, Scanderbeg, and their rituals and traditions. The practice of their rituals, the performance of their culture, and the ideology the Arbëresh brought with them from their homeland, operate together to create a unique Arbëresh minority community in Italy, regardless of their geographical separation.

The new life in the Italian territory was not easy for the Albanian refugees. They fled their country with almost no resources. Poverty was a great concern. As Rexhep Zllatku states, the Arbëreshë confronted other mishaps in the new land by the fact that they spoke a different language, had different beliefs and a different mindset. The feudal lords, the bishops and the priests started to castigate them by imposing higher taxes.<sup>17</sup> The relationships between the Arbëresh groups and the Italian inhabitants were very scant. They had a bad perception of each other which did not allow cultural mixing. An old Italian saying, still known today, confirms the uneasiness the Italians felt towards the Arbëresh. It states: “if you see an Albanian and a wolf, kill the Albanian and let the wolf

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<sup>17</sup> “duke gjykuar se Arbëreshet , meqe kane nje gjuhe dhe nje besim tjeter do te kene edhe nje mendim tjeter, feudalet, kisha, peshkopet e prifterinjte filluan ti ndjekin- me taksa me te renda, me burgojse e me cfare jo” (12).

live.”<sup>18</sup> This proverb was well known to the Arbëresh of San Demetrio Corone as it was mentioned to me by many people I encountered in town. To reverse the token, neither did the Arbëresh feel at ease with the Italians. As a result, the relationship between the Arbëreshë and the Italians remained weak until the nineteenth century.

Poverty and segregation created a closer connection within the Arbëresh communities. They overcame hard times as a united group by saving their language, customs and traditions their great-grandfathers brought with them from Arbëria. Oreste Parise affirms that the Arbëresh have passed on the songs they used to sing “*rreth vatrës*” (around the hearth). *Rreth vatrës*, they told stories of their sufferings of exile, their difficulties of living a miserable life, but also the joy of being surrounded by love. Around their own hearth, the Arbëresh constructed the invisible walls to defend their own identity.<sup>19</sup> The Italian language did not penetrate in the Arbëresh environment and the Arbëresh saved their mother tongue and passed it on to the next generations. Even though the majority of the Arbëresh never returned to see their long lost homeland, the longing, the memory of their family members left behind, and their history are portrayed in the rhapsodies, poetry and songs they still sing and perform today.

This attachment to the roots reaching to the other side of the Adriatic Sea, is also testified by inscriptions such as this one found on the small bell of the church of Santa Maria del Carmine in Pallagorio written by Francesco Lorecchio in 1907:<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> “Si vidi lu gjegjiu e lu lupu, ammazza lu gjegjiu e lassa vivu lu lupu” (se vedi l’albanese e il lupo, ammazza l’albanese e lascia vivo il lupo) (Giuseppe Carlo Siciliano 103).

<sup>19</sup> See Parise p.16.

<sup>20</sup> See link: [http://www.mondoarberesco.it/archivio/iscrizione\\_campanapiccola\\_pallagorio.htm](http://www.mondoarberesco.it/archivio/iscrizione_campanapiccola_pallagorio.htm)

Santa Campana Canta per ogni dove Le lodi della Madonna E lontano lontano su l'altra sponda del mare Con la nostra bella lingua Salutaci l'Albania Dille che ai pallagoresi è di decoro amare  Come la luce degli occhi Quell'antica madre	Holy Bell Sing far and wide The praises of the Madonna And far far on the other shore of the sea  With our beautiful language Greet for us Albania Tell her that the people of Pallagorio, are proud to love As the light of their eyes That antique motherland
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Table 1 Published in mondoarberesco.it. Italian has been translated by Edna Lubonja.

### **The Arbëresh's Contribution to the Risorgimento**

In the Nineteenth century, Arbëresh intellectuals such as Girolamo De Rada, Zef Serembe, Giuseppe Schiro and others, were somehow able to keep their ties with the homeland. They kept a friendly relationship with intellectuals in Albania who worked for the deliverance of their country from the grip of the Ottoman Empire. At the same time, they played an important social role in their given land in Italy, and showed great interest for the unification of Italy. Rexhep Zllatku asserts that the Nineteenth century was a “wake-up call” (12) for the Arbëresh. They actively contributed to the Italian revolutionary movements for the country's unification, during the years 1837-49.

Many notable Arbëresh participated in the Italian Risorgimento. As we read in the studies by Oreste Parise, many Albanian personalities participated in the fight for freedom.<sup>21</sup> Among them was Francesco Crispi, a well-known figure of Italian history, future Prime Minister of the united nation, and a true inspirational figure in the venture of the *Mille*, the famous expedition of one thousand voluntary soldiers under the lead of Giuseppe Garibaldi, in 1860. Vincenzo Stratigó from Lungro led a group of five hundred

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<sup>21</sup> See “I Protagonisti albanesi nella lotta per la libertà” pp. 85-128.

Arbëresh volunteers to fight in the Risorgimento. Stratigó is an important figure, as Zllatku states, someone who “was fighting, writing poems and at the same time, stimulating the Italians and the Arbëresh in the fight for unity” (15).<sup>22</sup> Other important Arbëresh public figures took part in Italian Risorgimento: Vincenzo Dorsa, a refined intellectual, a scholar of ethnology and economy; Pasquale Baffi, a minister of the Partenopean Republic and a martyr of 1799; Pasquale Scura, an Arbëresh minister after unification; Domenico Mauro, a good friend of Girolamo de Rada and a key-figure among the Calabrian heroes of the Risorgimento; General Domenico Damis from Lungro, Major Janar Plaku, Gavril Dara, and even many students from the College of St. Adriano in San Demetrio Corone.

Rexhep Zllatku states that the Risorgimento was feeding a great hope for the Arbëresh. General Giuseppe Garibaldi reminded them of their national hero, as poet Zef Serembe, who sang in Arbëresh: “Këmishkuqi trim me fletë, Skënderbeut tone i ngjet” (“The redshirt<sup>23</sup> a brave warrior, he resembles our own Scanderbeg”; Zllatku 15). When one of Garibaldi’s soldiers, Giulio Cesare Abba, passed through Arbëresh territories, he described them in his memoirs of the expedition, *Diario di un garibaldino*. He captured them as dignified and well-mannered people, proud of their origins, singing their traditional songs and dreaming of their lost homeland, Arbëria. Abba recalls in his diary that the Arbëresh started singing mournful words in their ancient language as they were facing the East. One of the well-known Arbëresh song mentioned is O Bella Morea. This song is a nostalgic lament for a lost homeland, which by then, had become only an

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<sup>22</sup> “Stratigoi luftonte dhe njekohesisht shkruante vjersha per ti nxitur italianet dhe arbëreshet ne luften e bashkimit.”

<sup>23</sup> Referring to Garibaldi.



imaginary place where the mortal remains of their ancestors are buried.<sup>24</sup> If we read through the lines of Abba's description, we seem to gather that the Arbëresh supported and fought for the Italian unification given that they never got the chance to accomplish it in Albania. They fought in their new country for a better resolution.

As it turned out, the Arbëresh shared the same disillusion at the end of the Risorgimento, as the rest of Southern Italy. Oreste Parise affirms that the passage of Garibaldi in Calabria was "toccata e fuga" ("hit-and-run"),<sup>25</sup> and did not bring any lasting change or amelioration on the condition of the peasant farmers. Zllatku states that: ("Southern Italy became a colony of the North and the agrarian question was never solved"; my trans.; 15).<sup>26</sup> Calabria was left undeveloped and very poor which brought a total disappointment. Zllatku quotes Vincenzo Stratigó who in 1874 expressed the disappointment of the Southerners, and the Arbëresh among them: "Si stava meglio quando si stava peggio" ("It was better when it was worst"; 16). The only recognition the Arbëresh received were Garibaldi's words of gratitude for supporting the Risorgimento and for giving their lives in the fight.

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<sup>24</sup> *Da Quarto al Volturmo: Noterelle d'uno dei Mille* (From Quarto to Volturmo: Notes by one of the Thousand)

"Era il 1860:

...

*O bella Morea,*

*Da che ti lasciai non ti vidi più!*

*Quivi trovai mio padre,*

*Quivi la madre mia,*

*Quivi i miei fratelli sepolti ho lasciati.*

*O bella Morea,*

*Da che ti lasciai non ti vidi più.*

...

Fiera e costumata gente, orgogliosa della sua origine, che ne' suoi canti serba vivo il sentimento di quattro secoli, e sogna ancora che uno del suo sangue possa, quando che sia, ricondurla nella vecchia patria lontana".

<sup>25</sup> See Chapter "Gli Arbëresh e Garibaldi" pp 69-76

<sup>26</sup> "Jugu Italian u bë koloni e Veriut, koloni ne te cilen nuk u zgjith ceshtja agrare"

In the course of the XIX century, we see both a resurgence of Arbëresh culture and its threats from outside forces. This century is known as the enlightenment period for the Arbëresh, especially in the second half. A number of writers led by Girolamo De Rada “established the first roots of the Arbëresh literature in their own language, they raised their voice about their existence and rooted for saving their language and culture” (Zllatku 16).<sup>27</sup> Before this century, only a few other Arbëresh writings were documented, among which the document that Robert Elsie considers the first written piece of Italo-Albanian literature: “*E mbsuame e krështerë* (Christian Doctrine) by the Sicilian archpriest Lekë Matrënga” (*Histori e Letërsisë Shqiptare* 143) at the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>28</sup>

The unification of Italy in 1861 influenced the Arbëresh communities and endangered their cultural existence. The Italian language was imposed in schools in the Arbëresh towns, as Italian was considered the standard language. Arbërisht was spoken only inside the homes or among close groups of friends who were all and only Arbëresh. These changes affected the use of the Arbëresh language to varying degrees: it meant the loss of the Arbëresh liturgy in many churches; the loss of Arbëresh in schools; and for some communities, it meant the complete oblivion of Arbëresh language. After the unification, the relationship between the Arbëresh and the Italians became stronger and the towns started to mix. The border-lines were no longer so defined. Many Arbëresh married with Italians and, as a result, the dominant language spoken at home, was Italian.

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<sup>27</sup> “vune themelet e para te letersise artistike ne gjuhen e tyre amtare, ngriten zerin per ta mesuar arbërishten dhe per ta ruajtur qenien e tyre”.

<sup>28</sup> The purpose of this religious piece written in the Arbëresh language was serving the Arbëresh community, thus bring “Christianity closer to his people in southern Italy by using their language” (143). The religious byzantine ritual was part of the Arbëresh culture that the populations brought from the homeland.

Events of the Twentieth century also menaced the unity and identity of the Arbëresh. Their communities were involved in the southern Italian exodus towards the United States and other countries, a factor that negatively affected the preservation of their language and culture. Many towns were deserted and families were separated. Furthermore, the rise of Fascism in the Twenties and Thirties was another factor that threatened minority groups. From 1922 until 1943, no one in Italy could talk about minorities, their existence or about their rights.<sup>29</sup>

Despite all the factors that worked against the Arbëresh, their language and culture still exists today, even if beleaguered. When describing his study on the Arbëresh today, Zllatku mentions a wise Albanian quote: “Lumi i qetem te mbiten” (“the quiet river can choke you”; 18) that hints to the inevitability and danger of Italian assimilation through time. He also explains the current Arbëresh situation with this Italian expression: “Si salvi chi può” (“everyman for himself”; 18) – hinting to the urgency of a concerted action. By using these expressions, Zllatku contends that the time has already done damage, and it is the responsibility of every Arbëresh to contribute to carry the language and culture forward.

### **The Arbëresh Today**

Today, there are fifty Arbëresh towns scattered throughout southern Italy, and many of them have kept their customs, traditions and the Albanian language.<sup>30</sup> An interesting comment made by one of the interviewees is that the Arbëresh were identified as Albanians up until the early 1990s. With the new wave of Albanian migration after

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<sup>29</sup> See Zllatku p. 18.

<sup>30</sup> The Arbëresh speak the old Albanian language, today it can be described as an Albanian dialect called Arbërisht.

Albania's break of communism, the Arbëresh identify just as Arbëresh and no longer with the term Albanian, to make this clear distinction. They are not the same type of minority. The Arbëresh have passed their old customs from generation to generation through the oral tradition. Cultural events such as Easter, Christmas, Saint name-days, weddings, the remembrance of the dead, among others, are dates that the Arbëresh celebrate, united together as a community. These events are celebrated through performances, singing and dancing in their traditional costumes.

Given that they come from a history of oral tradition, the Arbëresh minority has seldom written or made their life and existence public, and they kept this trend as a result of the limitations of being a minority. Nevertheless, from time to time, the Arbëresh communities took initiatives to revitalize their cultural life and make small but significant changes. 1957 was an important year because it saw the beginning of the publication of the journal "*Le pleiadi, rivista culturale, sociale ed artistica*" (Pleiads, cultural, social and artistic magazine), according to Robert Elsie in the book *Histori e Letersise Shqiptare* (The History of Albanian Literature). The journal, directed by Ernesto Koliqi, encouraged "not only a re-examination of the specificities of Arbëresh culture, oral literature in particular but also an awareness for Albanian Literature as a whole" (669).

In 1968, the year that marked the fifth centennial of the death of Scanderbeg, there was a flourishing of ventures in almost all of the Arbëresh communities. The two Eparchies of Lungro and Piana degli Albanesi organized, meetings, debates, conferences, organizations and associations. Many streets, piazzas and schools were named after the Albanian National Hero, Scanderbeg. Also, local journals were published in Arbëresh such as *Zjarri* (Fire) di S. Demetrio Corone (1969); *Gjelle (vita) e Gjuha Jone e Bukur*

(Food and our own beautiful language); *Katundi Yne (Paese Nostro)* (Own town); *Zeri i Arbëreshvet* (The Arbëresh's voice), etc.<sup>31</sup> Altimari also mentions that in 1969 the formation of U.C.I.A.<sup>32</sup> (Union of the Italo-Albanian Communities) in Cosenza was one of the first real political, democratic and representative organizations of the Albanian communities in Italy. This organization had eighteen municipal administrations who worked for the defense and promotion of the Arbëresh culture.

### **Arbëresh Literature Progression**

Literature by Arbëresh scholars started to flourish since the end of 1800. Alberto Straticò, wrote a 280-page manual, *Manuale di letteratura albanese* (Manual of the Albanian Literature), providing substantial coverage of the oral literature towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, poet Agostino Ribecco, wrote romantic lyrics; Domenico Antonio Marchese produced three short collections of Albanian verses in 1915. These authors are known by the Arbëresh community, but they never made it further to the larger Italian public. Regarding this literary production, Robert Elsie affirms:

Modern Arbëresh literature remains a small literature but one with a long and worthy tradition. It is the art of a minority and about 90,000 speaking struggling to preserve their ethnic, linguistic and cultural identity, and endeavour which seems increasingly doomed to failure as the twentieth century draws to a close. Its development has been inhibited in modern times by the exclusively rural and domestic use to which the Albanian language is still restricted, the result of a glaring absence of formal

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<sup>31</sup> Francesco Altimari p. 27.

<sup>32</sup> Unione delle Comunità Italo-Albanesi (28).

education in Albanian, and by the lack of a unified literary language.

*(Histori e Letërsisë Shqiptare 676)*

Elsie's bleak observations about the future of Arberesh literature imply its failure.

However, activities and events of the recent years have suggested the opposite for the Arbëresh community, thanks to their efforts to keep their language, culture and literature alive.

I believe the Arbëresh have benefitted by the wave of ethnic-revival that passed through Italy starting from 1989. The turning point was 1989: in that year Jerry Masslo, a South African refugee, in Naples, was assassinated and the ripples that it caused changed the position of the Italian public on questions of minorities. According to Graziella Parati, this was the year Italy lost its status as a “monocultural and monoracial country” (2005, 169). Masslo's funeral became a political event and public demonstrations occurred demanding rights for minorities. One of these demonstrations took place on October 7, 1989, significant day for Italy, “dating the first major antiracist event” (Ferracuti 10). That day thousands of people marched to claim the end of the inhuman conditions in which they were constrained to live. Another important year concerning the question of minorities is 1992, when the *CGIL* (The Italian General Confederation of Work) became a ‘multiethnic union,’ as it realized that many of its members were not only Italian, but workers of all provenances (Ferracuti 10). These events inserted minorities living in Italy in the larger picture of Italian history and identity.

As outcome of these consecutive events, in the early 90s, a wave of publications from new authors from different backgrounds were published. Many of them wrote nonfiction stories of migration themes, portraying Italy from a different perspective. The

Arbëresh were also touched by these waves, which led them to be more open about their existence and to reveal themselves to the world outside their boundaries. Numerous contemporary Arbëresh authors started to appear on the national scene: Giuseppe Shirò di Maggio and Giuseppe Schirò di Modica, poets from Piana degli Albanesi in Sicily; Vincenzo Belmonte from Calabria; Cosmo Rocco; Vorea Ujko and Francesco Solano from Frascineto in Calabria; Carmelo Candreva from Cerzeto; Giuseppe Del Gaudio from San Nicola dell'Alto; Enza Scutari, one of the most significant contemporary voices in the Arbëresh culture born in Cosenza but is mainly linked to the community of San Costantino Albanese in Potenza; Kate Zuccaro from Civita, Cosenza, Luis De Rosa from Molise, Angelo Matrangolo, Pasquale Renda, Carmine Abate from Carfizzi, Pino Cacoza from San Demetrio Corone, Anna Stratigò from Lungro in Calabria. All these new authors are poets,<sup>33</sup> with the exception of Carmine Abate and Anna Stratigò. These authors have written and published about their Arbëresh life but they have also touched on different existential themes of universal values.

A meaningful literary production among Arbëresh authors is the writing of “family stories”. This family-oriented production is especially important in the Arbëresh community who needs to preserve family history and put it down on paper for the next generation. Anna Stratigò recently published a book *Casa nostra: storia ed episodi di vita familiare* (Our Home: History and Episodes of Family Life). Two Arbëresh-Sicilians, Leda Melluso and Giuseppina Li Cauli, wrote about their family history through stories and events recovered and retold through the memories of others. The two authors explain the main reasons they decided to put this project together. This is what Giuseppina says:

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<sup>33</sup> Since the Arbëresh come from an oral tradition, poetry is a major form of literature they produce.

“la prima ripercorrere la storia del mio popolo e la voglia di saperne di più, la seconda che, grazie a questo lavoro, mia figlia ed i miei nipoti non dimentichino mai le loro radici” (“first, to trace the history of my people and the desire to know more; the second is that thanks to this work, my daughter and my nephews will never forget about their roots”; 11). The authors of family stories use a simple style of writing to portray their identity, and to maintain the memory of the oral tradition: songs, stories, poems and ballads. Although some of these pieces have been modified through the years, they still remain important because “testimoniano i valori della civiltà albanese: Lealtà, Coraggio, besa (la parola data)” (“they indicate the values of the Albanian people: Loyalty, Courage, keeping one’s promise”; 18).

The following chapter will discuss Carmine Abate whose novels I consider an important voice for the references of his culture and traditions. His contribution towards the Arbëresh and Italian literature has been recognized by the people of his community and beyond.



THE ARBËRESH AND MINOR LITERATURE. CARMINE ABATE, AN ITALIAN  
AUTHOR OR AN ETHNIC AUTHOR?

As mentioned in the introduction, Carmine Abate is a contemporary Italo-Arbëresh author born in 1954 in Carfizzi. Carfizzi is a small village of the Arbëresh community where Abate spent his childhood. He grew up speaking Arbëresh and following the traditions of his family. He studied in Italy, at the University of Bari. Soon after his studies, Abate immigrated to Germany just like his father and the rest of his fellow compatriots in search of a better living. Today, he lives and works as a professor in Besenello, Trentino, in the north of Italy. However, Carfizzi holds a special place in his heart and he frequently travels there to visit his family.

In recent years, Carmine Abate has been recognized for his writing and his contribution to Italian literature. He has received numerous awards. Among them, in 2012 he won the 50<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Premio Campiello*, an annual Italian literary prize with his novel *La collina del vento* (The Windy Hill). His first novel, *Il ballo tondo* (The Round Dance), was chosen as one of one hundred most memorable books in the Italian prose of the 1990s. *Il ballo tondo* was first published in 1991, soon after the demonstrations in Naples in 1989. In his writing, Abate presents the lifestyle of an Italian who grows up in an Arbëresh town in Calabria, embracing the Arbëresh culture and traditions.

Reading Carmine Abate's novels, we cannot but disagree with the barthesian idea of the "death of the author". Roland Barthes argued that the critical attention should shift

from the author function to the writing itself. He suggests that the book becomes the reader's interpretation without counting the author. He stated: "the author enters into his own death, writing begins...it is language which speaks, not the author" (875). According to this statement, Barthes intends to diminish the preeminence of the author's will and the author's intentions when analyzing a text. He invites the reader to focus on the text. In the case of Abate, this seems utterly impossible to do. There is a strong connection with the author and his writing. The author is always present, in every edge of the text. Although his novels are not considered to be autobiographical, the essentiality of the narration comes from the author's personal life experiences. Not only has Abate stated that he writes from memories, but he often uses his name, Carmine/Carminù, for the character in his novel. The last book published in 2017, dedicated to food, is almost autobiographical in the sense that it has been written based on his life story from memories of being a child, all the way to adulthood and then as a father.

On the other hand, it is particularly useful to use the name of author Carmine Abate almost as separate category that keeps his work together and give it its special colors. Michel Foucault argued that "the author's name performs a certain role with regard to narrative discourse, assuring a classificatory function ... a name permits one to group together a certain number of texts, define them, differentiate them from and contrast them to others" (907). In the case of Carmine Abate, it is particularly important to differentiate him from other authors because his novels describe a part of Italy never seen before. His novels display a part of Italy where people embrace the Southern Italian culture along with the Arbëresh culture.

In treating Abate's work, I believe Mikhail Bakhtin's theory is equally useful. The Russian critic allows space for the author to participate in his own writing. He clarified the position of the author in the novel by stating: "the novelist stands in need of some essential formal and generic mask that could serve to define the position from which he views life, as well as the position from which he makes that life public" (161). Bakhtin thus gives back to the author his/her own dignity and agency, even overbearing agency, including "the right to betray to the public a personal life, down to its most private and prurient little secrets" (Bakhtin 163).<sup>34</sup> Abate includes many little secrets, and infuses his own everyday life experience into his characters in his novels.

When one mentions Carmine Abate's name, the first thing that comes to mind is his strong connection with his Arbëresh roots, and how he shares his life experiences in his novels by giving voice to characters, and through them he incorporates other Arbëresh voices never heard before. Through his writing, Abate sets a certain discourse and indicates the status of the Arberesh society and culture to the Italian audience and more. He portrays the life of the Arbëresh people following the traditions of their ancestors and living the Arbëresh utopia. Abate's novels can also be described by what James Clifford calls an *ethnographic fiction*, which is determined by six elements he lists in the book *Finding Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* "contextually; rhetorically; institutionally; generically; politically and historically" (6). All of these points are present in Abate's novel. He is perfectly inserted in his context as his writing draws from his

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<sup>34</sup>"They grant the right not to understand, the right to confuse, to tease, to hyperbolize life, the right to parody others while talking, the right to not be taken literally, not to be oneself; the right to life a life in the chronotope of the entr'acte, the chronotope of theatrical space, the right to act life as a comedy and to treat others as actors, the right to rip off masks, the right to rage at others with a primeval (almost cultic) rage—and finally, the right to betray to the public a personal life, down to its most private and prurient little secrets" (Bakhtin 163).

social environment. He utilizes in the text both languages that represent this community; he writes from within the Arbëresh's everyday life but also touches on the issues that come from the outside larger society which affects the within; his writing is a full representation of cultural reality in which the Arbëresh are confronted every day and finally, the novel portrays the historical changes through time. Clifford says that ethnographic truths can be "partial and incomplete" (7), and we cannot take as truth just an experience or a one-sided story. But, I propose that in Abate the ethnographic truth is as impartial and complete as it can ever be. He incorporates a collective number of voices put together to arrive at a valid point to call it 'finding culture'. Abate can be considered a source to find elements of culture because most of what he writes is personal experience or stories told by the members of his community, as he says, the world he knows best.

Abate started to write about his roots in the early 90s. Just because the voice of the Arbëresh was not previously heard, does not mean they did not exist. As we have seen, they lived in silence, preserving their language and traditions under the dominating larger Italian society. The movement of antiracist events that took place in 1989, represented a kind of *tabula rasa*, a *carta bianca* (white paper), as described by Angelo Ferracuti, which was to be filled with stories of Italy told from different perspectives, outside the traditionally closed margins. At last, according to Ferracuti, it seemed that Italy realized that the immigrants living in Italy had to be given their rights, since, after all, they were part of the Italian nation and they positively contaminated Italy with their language and culture. These immigrant authors were considered to be part of the category of minor literature. Carmine Abate is included in this category. The question I would like to raise here is what minor literature is, and who fits in this category.

## What is Minor Literature?

According to a famous essay by French critics Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, minor literature is not the literature of a minor language but the literature a minority writes in a major language.<sup>35</sup> Three elements characterize this type of literature: the deterritorialization of a major literature through a minor literature written in the major language from a minority position; the political nature, and the collective value that this type of literature holds.

Carmine Abate is one of these authors included in the realm of minor literature. First of all, his first collection of stories was published not in Italy, but in Germany in 1984 with the title *Den Koffer und weg*. Second, he is included in collections of minority authors such as Ferracuti's *Permesso di Soggiorno: Gli scrittori stranieri raccontano l'Italia* which is a collection of short stories written by minority authors such as Bakolo Ngoi, Barole, Bravi, Butcovan, Dondero, Gaye, Komla-Ebri, Kuruvilla, Lamri, Masri, Metref, Mubiayi, Wadia and Wen. All of these are authors who have come to Italy as immigrants and eventually have been immersed in the Italian literary scene. Ferracuti presents them as authors that finally were given the chance to reveal their existence. The wall that was previously constructed to keep the *stranieri* out of the literary scene has now fallen. I consider Ferracuti's choice of inserting Carmine Abate in the same group with the authors mentioned above questionable, because he does not respond to the same characteristics.

Another misunderstanding of Abate's position in the literary cannon, according to my view, is contained in Rosanna Morace's critical book *Le stagioni narrative di*

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<sup>35</sup> Deleuze p. 16.

*Carmine Abate: Rapsodie di un romanzo-mondo.* In it, she also defines Abate as a migrant author, when she writes:

Abate è scrittore migrante innanzitutto perchè per lui l'italiano è lingua d'adozione, imparata sui banchi di scuola a partire dai sei anni, e l'arbëresh è la lingua madre e il veicolo di comunicazione familiare. D'altro canto, le comunità albanofone sono state riconosciute come minoranza linguistica e tutelate da apposita legge dello Stato italiano nel dicembre 1999, e dunque il fatto che Abate sia nato in Italia non dovrebbe trarre in inganno coloro che lo ritengono scrittore italiano tout-court, nè tantomeno può essere dirimente il fatto che la sua lingua letteraria sia l'italiano, dato che tutta la letteratura d'immigrazione italoфона è prodotta nella lingua d'adozione.

First of all, Abate is a migrant author because for him, Italian is the language of adoption, learned in school, at the age of 6. Arbëresh is the mother language and the vehicle of familiar communication. The Albanian-speaking communities were recognized and protected by the laws of the Italian state as linguistic minorities starting from December of 1999. The fact that Abate was born in Italy should not trick those who consider him an Italian author, nor should the fact that his literary language is Italian, given that the minor literature is produced in the major language (21).

Morace supports her argument and all of her affirmations about Abate are true and valid. However, I would disagree with the fact that Abate falls under the literary

sphere of minor literature. First of all, Carmine Abate comes from a family of over five generations of Italians. He was born in Italy and he is an Italian who embraces both cultures: the Arbëresh as a family tradition and Italian as the language of the country that is his home.

When we look at Italian literature and its progression, the minority groups living in Italy were in an underprivileged position in front of the dominant world. They were somewhat dis-abled<sup>36</sup>, they had no place to express their existence. This is a particular notion of “disability” that Tobin Siebers describes with these words: “disability is not a physical or mental defect, but a cultural and minority identity” (4). It is the larger society which imposes over the smaller social and cultural groups what are the rules and the norm. The disabled-ness of being a part of the literary world for minorities in Italy was in fact, the effect of the larger social control that limited them in the eyes of the mainstream public. The ideology of ability, in other words, what is considered of norm, was already an established literary tradition, strong of centuries of works punctuated by the canonical founders of the Italian literature, figures such as Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Ariosto, Manzoni, Montale, and Calvino among others. In particular, Manzoni’s novel *I promessi sposi* (The Betrothed) was the model to be achieved for excellent writing, simply by the fact that Manzoni wrote and rewrote it with the purpose of purifying the language, the standard Italian we know today.

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<sup>36</sup> The disability here is presented as a consequence of the Arbëresh being marginalized because of their different beliefs and embrasion of the Arbëresh culture and traditions, in opposition to identify simply as Italian

The establishment of superiority of literature can also be explained by what Edward Said calls *Orientalism*. According to Said, Orientalism is a cultural and political fact,

a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts; it is an elaboration not only of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) but also of a whole series of “interests” which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description. (20)

We can use this description of the phenomenon of Orientalism, as a force by which a major culture controls and manipulates what it recognized as a distinctly different world. Political, cultural, intellectual and moral power work to enforce positional superiority of minorities. Said looks at the Occident imposing power of domination and various degrees of complex hegemony over the Orient. He states that “Orientalism is the exaggeration of different, the presumption of Western superiority, and the application of clichéd analytical models for perceiving the Oriental world” (13). Orientalism irrationalizes the Orient as weak, feminized and denotes them as “other”, in clear distinction from the contracted strong and masculine West. Along the same lines, the collective Italian conscience divides North as being strong and the South as being weak. In a way, Italian literature “Orientalizes” Abate. A southerner, as it pushes him to the margin of the canon, and considers his work as minority literature. Therefore, Abate is being marginalized and considered “other”.



As we have seen, minor literature was not even considered, and stories of immigrants were not made public until the last twenty-six years. The previous segregation of minorities in the Italian literary and public world can be explained by the process of stigmatization, marks cultural minorities as *others* and separates them from the larger society. The separation has a negative connotation and as Rosemarie G. Thomson asserts in her study of disability, it is the “dominant group that has the authority and means to determine which differences are inferior and to perpetuate those judgments” (31). The larger Italian community ignored minorities and they were not considered worthy of being a part of the literary scene, due to “an interactive social process in which particular human traits are deemed not only different, but deviant” (Thomson 31). The difference and the cultural distinction immobilized these minorities into silence.

Furthermore, Rosemarie G Thomson talks about the cultural intolerance of anomaly. This intolerance strives for “simple colors,” and “purity” and rejects what does not conform to these values. These abstract value systems that “structure elements into the pure and the corrupt, the legitimate and the illicit, might easily be transformed into the ideology of human racial purity that deems some people impure, unbeautiful, or unfit” (33). Time has shown that the ideology of ability is fluid and changes with time and place and this is what happened with the minorities in Italy.

Lennard Davis sees disability as a social construction, a product of the mainstream society. Even if speaking in a different context, he notices that any kind of impairment is a lack but it is the environment “without ramps” that “turns that impairment into a disability” (50). Davis argues that disability is located in the observer. For us, this means shifting the focus of this argument to the larger community, the

Italians, who excluded the minorities because of their differences. Along the same lines, Graziella Parati's book *Migration Italy: The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture*, affirms that minor literature "talks back" and addresses native Italians by "revising the stereotypes presented in the press." She also affirms that minor literature is used as a means to talk to the other migrants' origination from different parts of the world and it is utilized to unify rather than to separate: it addresses other others by representing their experiences that are parallel to the ones described. Finally, Parati underlines the linguistic contribution and minor literature, as it "approaches language as a malleable entity permeable to other languages."<sup>37</sup> Parati reinforces the importance of minor literature as a tool of expression that contributes to the "global migration." It also talks back to the natives, in order to promote acceptance and unity: although these people belong also to another culture or language, they live in Italy and in some way or other, have to be integrated.

Literary critic Angela Biancofiore addresses the appearance of these new voices in Italian literature by stating "gli scrittori migranti portano alla nostra letteratura il loro sguardo 'straneo', esterno e interno al tempo stesso: l'apporto più consistente è questo sguardo nuovo sul nostro presente" ("the migrant authors bring to our literature their "foreign" gaze, external and internal glance all at once: the most significant contribution is this new outlook on our present"). The writing of migrant authors writing is such that it portrays its own existential experience about who is being questioned, but it also provokes questions.

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<sup>37</sup> See Parati Chapter 2.

In sum, rather than “minor literature,” I would instead propose that Abate belongs to the subgroup “ethnic literature”, the discipline that gives a voice to the ethnic groups and the traditionally marginalized. This subgroup is more appropriate for his profile. During my visit to a number of Arbëresh towns in Calabria in the summer of 2016, I gathered important information that supports my argument. When I asked the Italo-Arbëresh living in the towns of San Demetrio Corone, San Cosmo, Macchia, Vaccarizzo, Carfizzi and Lungro, how they identified themselves and if they feel a part of the Italian nation, 98% of them responded that they identify as Italo-Arbëresh and they do feel to be part of Italy. Some mentioned that they contributed to the unification of Italy and are now over five generations born and raised there. What was interesting is that they did not identify themselves as Calabrians, as if their Arbëresh identity were a substitution of their regional identity. We should thus propose to consider the Arbëresh as a subgroup, just as any other regional Italian group.

Like other regions or pockets of culture (the Greek, the Catalan, and the Ladino speaking communities), the Arbëresh are another variation of the Italian mosaics, for topographical, historical and linguistic reasons. Their testimony shows that they feel Italian, they are Italian and they should not be marginalized. They still save the rituals and the traditions their very first ancestors brought with them from the motherland but today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, they identify as Italians – with a peculiar regional flare.

Furthermore, while Abate never commented about his inclusion in the sphere of minor literature, he instead clearly stated the multiplicity of his identities. His position as an Italo-Arbëresh who has also migrated as any other Southern Italian to Germany for a better life. He reflects on his condition as an immigrant outside of Italy which he

considers his home. Abate himself, came from a family that immigrated to Germany for better living conditions, and as he grew older he also migrated there. Living between two or three worlds, growing up with more than one culture, speaking different languages, acquiring new gazes, knowing people of different places can't be other than wealth. The most difficult but inevitable feat is the following: living with one foot in the North, the other in the South and the head in the middle, without suffocating the soul.

As he confesses about his own life experience, Abate not only justifies his writing but also turns around the supposed disability of minor literature, into the ability of providing awareness of how much value it can add not only for minorities but for everyone else as well. Abate proclaims to live as a hybrid figure: a man whose body and mind wanders from one place to another; someone who accepts the difficulties of assimilation, and sees multiculturalism as wealth because it allows the person to choose the best of every place. He realizes that the pure identity is somewhat lost, but what is gained is the charm of intertwined multiple identities.

Last, but not least is the consideration that the word *ethnic*,<sup>38</sup> in comparison to the word *minor*,<sup>39</sup> has a more positive connotation. Treating the American tradition, scholar Nina Baym argues for the positive role of ethnic literature. She states that ethnic literature “testified to an enlivening interaction between traditions, affirming the imagination’s freedom to draw from many sources” (1136).<sup>40</sup> The multicultural background contributes a number of insights and it confirms what Abate himself stated in his testimony, that

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<sup>38</sup> According to Webster’s dictionary: *ethnic* means large groups of people classed according to common racial, national, tribal, religious, linguistic, or cultural origin or background.

<sup>39</sup> Tends to have a negative connotation of lesser value or importance.

<sup>40</sup> Note: Baym focuses her argument on American ethnic literature but it can also be applied in the case of the Arbëresh.

being part of more cultures is enriching. As family tradition, the Arbëresh continue to speak their Arbëresh language in groups of close friends and inside their homes. Also, as a community they find ways of promoting their ethnic background with the purpose of preserving and passing it to the next generation as a treasure from the past. They gather in Arbëresh events such as *festival della canzone Arbëresh*, *rassegna del costume Arbëresh*, *vallja* etc.

In the following chapter, I intend to discuss the concept of Arbëresh Utopia to demonstrate how this vision has helped sustain the community together for centuries. I will especially focus on Carmine Abate's collection *Le Stagioni di Hora* (The Seasons of Hora). In this collection Abate portrays the life of the Arbëresh in Italy, and through the characters he threads his own experience living in Carfizzi, an Arbëresh town. The concept of Utopia will also serve as a mechanism through which Arbëresh literature transcends the box of minor literature by grasping the universal through the particular.

## ARBËRESH CULTURAL UTOPIA AND CARMINE ABATE'S NOVELS

### **The Arbëresh Utopia**

We can affirm that the Arbëresh society has lived a utopia for centuries. Its members have kept the same living model the first refugees brought with them from their lost homeland – a model that does not exist anymore, not even in the original land. They “embody the aspirations of people in another society” (Levitas 28): they live in Italy but inside closed margins, preserving the old Albanian language, the rituals and customs of a no longer existent Arbëria.<sup>41</sup>



Figure 3 Scanderbeg's stronghold castle in Kruja, Albania

The picture above shows the Castle of Kruja, the stronghold of Scanderbeg, still standing today. I say no longer existent, because the ancient Arbëria was invaded by the

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<sup>41</sup> Arbëria was one of the Albanian principalities during the times of Scanderbeg, where the Castle of Kruja stands today in Albania.

Ottoman Empire which imposed many changes. Many people lost their identity and religion, as the Turks converted most of the population in the Muslim religion. Therefore, Arbëria was lost in Albania.<sup>42</sup> Today, the Arbëresh still refer to that long-gone region of Arbëria and utilize it as the spirit of what is Arbëresh. This country that does not exist anymore in history, still stands in the conscience of those who consider themselves Arbëresh. It is still the homeland of the people that speak Arbëresh, the ones that continue to follow the rituals and the traditions, those that run from a family of Arbëresh descent, and that live in any Arbëresh town in Italy. The geographic location of Arbëresh towns and their isolation made possible the creation and maintenance of the Arbëresh utopian community.

If we use Lyman Tower Sargent's list of causes that lead to the formulation of utopias, we could conclude that the Arbëresh fall under "the model to be achieved" (8). The Arbëresh follow the traditions they brought with them at the time of separation from the old Arbëria they left behind. The Arbëresh created a community where deep bonds were formed and all of the people had the same objectives: to rebuild the lost Arbëria in the new land. Victor Turner suggests that this is what happens when there is time and separation from the social obligations to process and adjust to change.<sup>43</sup> As the Arbëresh never made it back to their lost homeland, they dedicated their time in reconstructing their own Arbëria in the new land. They dedicated centuries to this task. The fate of the Arbëresh utopia relies on the older generation to pass on the treasures of their Arbëreshness to the next generation. This permanent transition continues until the Arbëresh become integrated into the Italian community.

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<sup>42</sup> I was told by the Arbëresh of San Demetrio Corone that Arbëria was resurrected in Italy.

<sup>43</sup> See Turner's *Ritual Process* pp 94-97.

Today, the Arbëresh community can be said to be in a liminal state. Victor Turner describes this condition as “ambiguous” where “liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (*The Ritual Process* 95). The lack of clarity leads to behaviors that are normally passive, accept arbitrary punishments and it is as though one is “being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life” (95). As mentioned previously, this liminal state derives from the changes provoked by the Italian larger community through the years. As a result, today the Arbëresh utopia is in an endangered state. The liminality of the Arbëresh will be developed further in the last section of this research, but now I will describe the role of Carmine Abate’s work in keeping the utopia alive.

#### ***Le Stagioni di Hora*<sup>44</sup>: Carmine Abate’s Puzzle of History-Myth-Present**

Carmine Abate best portrays the Arbëresh utopia in three novels: *Il ballo tondo* (The round dance, 1991), *La moto di Scanderbeg* (Scanderbeg’s motorcycle, 1999) and *Il mosaico del tempo grande* (The mosaic of big time, 2006). These novels were collected and released as a single volume titled *Le Stagioni di Hora* in 2012. Hora is the place where the stories unfold and where the Arbëresh utopia is deeply rooted.

In *Le Stagioni di Hora*, Abate’s writing travels through different times, slipping and sliding from the Arbëresh antique rhapsodies, the children’s lullabies, and the traditional weddings songs, threading past and present to an infinite story. Memory acts as a glue to this ideal trilogy. The recovery of memory has a collective character and it is

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<sup>44</sup> The Seasons of Hora.



linked to the question of reconquering identity. Vera Horn uses Lucilia Delgado's explanation to say that:

Attraverso una inter-relazione dinamica, storia e memoria sono i supporti delle identità individuali e collettive. La memoria è, altresì, l'elemento che permette il riconoscersi dell'individuo come persona e come membro di una comunità. In questo modo, la storia e la memoria, intessute nella trama della ricostruzione temporale e spaziale, contribuiscono al consolidamento della coscienza del senso di appartenenza. Il riscatto della memoria è specialmente fruttuoso per il riconoscimento dei legami identificativi, giacché contribuisce alla percezione dei significati e delle esperienze.

Through an inter-dynamic relationship, history and memory are the support for the individual and collective identities. The memory is also the element that allows the recognition of the individual as a person and as a member of a community. This way, history and memory, woven into the plot of the temporal and special reconstruction, contribute to the consolidation of the consciousness of the sense of belonging. The recovery of memory is especially fruitful for the recognition of identity, since bonds contribute to the perception of the meanings and experiences (405).

Abate gives us a colorful picture of the lives that unravel between past and present of three young Arbëreshë: Giovanni, Costantino and Michele. They are the depositories of the oral culture they receive from three parallel father-figures: the adventurer Scanderbeg, the wise grandfather Lissandro, and the talkative and exuberant Gojari.

Through the stories and wisdom of the elders, the Albanian tradition is protected and passed on to the younger generation, challenging time and its progress.

Another element that unites the three novels is emigration, intended as a forced separation, loss and uprooting from the native land. Abate considers the emigration of the early refugees of the 1400s all the way to the emigrants of post-war Italy and that of the new refugees. Vera Horn describes the process of emigration, specifically in *Il ballo tondo*, as both a fracture and a wound: “frattura per l’emigrante; ferita per il figlio che resta – ferita per l’emigrante; frattura per il figlio che resta” (fracture for the emigrant; wound for the son who remains – wound for the emigrant; fracture for the son who remains; 403). Eventually even the departures are cyclical because the youngsters, as they become adults, are on the verge of leaving their town as work is scarce. However, this part of life, that at times becomes inevitable, is not described always as negative, but it is perceived as occasion for growth and social enrichment. At the same time, we can observe that the escaping characters always expect a return back to the homeland; a return that recalls the past and brings the characters back to their roots.

Carmine Abate’s writing style is hybrid, as he makes use of the Italian language with a few drops of Arbëresh, in a mixture that is typical of multicultural literature. Stefania Giovando writes in the article *Identità e memoria nell’opera di Carmine Abate*, that Abate’s intention is to denounce the injustice of the constraint to emigrate,

recuperando nel contempo la memoria dell’identità personale, attraverso una felice sintesi linguistica, per cui le frasi e le parole in *La moto, Il ballo, L’aquila e i due mari*, in tedesco, arbëresh, calabrese o germanese si inseriscono naturalmente e spontaneamente nel tessuto linguistico italiano,

senza stridori, senza forzature, compiacimento o ammiccamenti folcloristici, ..., nato per raccontare storie incantevoli ed avvincenti.

Recovering the memory of personal identity, through a successful synthesis of language, whereby the phrases and words in *La moto, Il Ballo, L'aquila e i due mari*, in German, Arbëresh, or Calabrese fit naturally and spontaneously in the Italian linguistic fabric, without screeching, no forcing, complacency, or folkloric winks, born to tell charming and exciting stories (Giovando 387-388).

In an interview for *World on Line* with Fulvio Panzeri, Abate responds to his use of multilingual and to his relevance of his double identity by stating: “gli ‘altri’ sono visti dappertutto come dei potenziali pericoli e ci si dimentica che appena uno fa un passo e attraversa un confine diventa l’altro; è assurdo perchè più culture arricchiscono tutti” (“The “others” (referring to minorities) are seen everywhere as potential hazard and one forgets that the moment one takes a step ahead and crosses a borderline becomes an “other.” It’s absurd, because more cultures enrich us all”). Abate values his “otherness” as superlative. Looking to find oneself in one place or multiple places does not mean impassable closure, but, on the contrary, it opens for strong and intense desire for communication with one another. In this sense, the separation from the homeland for Abate opens doors to encounters with other people and other cultures which is seen as an opportunity to learn about other cultures, other habits, other languages and other foods as opposed to misfortune. Being open to others leads to new horizons and new realities. But Abate never forgets about his roots and tends to go back and show how he values his connection with the past.

### ***Hora* and Carfizzi (Myth and Reality)**

*Hora* is an Arbëresh word that means a commune. *Hora e Arbëreshëvet* includes all the Arbëresh communities in Italy who speak the language and conserve the traditions of their forefathers. Rita Librandi describes *Hora* as “un paesino immaginario che condivide molte caratteristiche con Carfizzi e che, soprattutto, è attraversato negli anni dai problemi dell’emigrazione e dagli effetti di un inserimento difficile della modernità post-bellica” (“an imaginary town that shares many characteristics with Carfizzi and that above all, is going through years of immigration problems and the effects of integration in the post-war modernity”; 2). One could argue that what is portrayed in this novel, is just one story, not enough to engage all the Arbëresh who are spread throughout southern Italy. This argument can be countered by the fact that the Arbëresh, no matter where they are situated, all share the same background and because they kept a close community for centuries and share the same experiences. The cultural inheritance of the past plays a big role as the base for identity formation and representation. *Hora* is a mythical place, “un luogo-non-luogo” (“a place – no – place”) as identified by Franca Eller, which identifies all the Arbëresh, not considering their physical place, but more so, their heart and soul. Abate uses *Hora* to reference a town or a village, a place where people speak Arbëresh and they share the same cultural values. In the collection, *Hora* is represented as the landscape of the soul which lives in a suspended timeframe, a utopia.

The novel’s *Hora* is the literary transfiguration of Carfizzi, Abate’s hometown. In reality, as I was driving through the narrow roads of the Calabrian countryside, trying to find Carfizzi and meet with the author Carmine Abate, I found myself thinking through the lines of his novels I had already read. The mental picture I had stuck on my mind

from reading his detailed descriptions of Hora became a vital picture right in front of my eyes. To reach Carfizzi took about forty minutes from the sea, but for someone who was not familiar with the area, this place was hard to find. As I was driving up and down the hills and mountains, I would see the town of Carfizzi at an angle, and at the next turn I would lose sight of it – almost a vision in a dream. The following photo is Carfizzi’s view from the other side of the mountain.



Figure 4 This picture is taken during summer 2016 as I was on my way to meet with author, Carmine Abate.

The geographical location where Carfizzi stands (and for that matter, all the Arbëresh towns in Calabria) portrays the strategic minds of the first Albanian warriors who found a location where they had a 360° view of their surroundings.



Figure 5 The sign of Carfizzi, Calabria

Finding Carfizzi was like entering a maze, going through the colorful green and yellow fields and beautiful country scenery. Finally, a sign of Carfizzi written in Italian and Arbëresh popped in front of me, which lead the way to the town.

As I was getting closer to the entrance of Carfizzi, I passed a hill full of windmills.



Figure 6 Windmills by Carfizzi. This picture was taking during summer 2016.

This view made me think right away about Carmine Abate's novel titled *La collina del vento* (The Windy Hill), that focuses on the story of the vicissitudes of Arcuri's family over a century. The landscape the author describes in this novel is precisely this area between Carfizzi and Cirò Marina. These places and the scenery I visited, the symbols that are found in every street corner and piazza, every detail Abate writes in his novels were there, present and visible.



Figure 7 This picture was taken during summer 2016 from the balcony of Parco Letterario Carmine Abate. This photo is taken from the veranda of Parco Letterario<sup>45</sup> Carmine Abate in Carfizzi overlooking the surrounding mountains and close by villages, all the way down to the sea.



Figure 8 The statue of Scanderbeg found in the main piazza of San Demetrio Corone, Calabria. The statue of Scanderbeg in every entrance or piazza of every Arbëresh town weaves a common thread and symbolizes the Albanian background of these towns. The picture above was taken in the summer of 2016). The statue of the well-known Arbëresh author of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Girolamo de Rada, at the entrance of Macchia tells everyone who

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<sup>45</sup> Literary Park as they have named it, but it is a literary library that portrays all of the Abate's work.

enters the town that this is his birth town. Streets named after De Rada, Scanderbeg and other heroic Arbëresh figures, remember those who have constructed these towns with their efforts and sweat. As I was walking through the narrow streets, Abate's novels were going through my mind as my view was confirming places and spaces one by one.



Figure 9 Statue of Gerolamo De Rada and the street dedicated to his name. These pictures were taking during summer 2016 in Macchia Albanese, Calabria.

As a matter of fact, Fulvio Panzeri states that Abate always has in mind the South and Calabria when he writes his novels. In an interview with Panzeri for the *World On Line*, Abate declares that this occurrence happens naturally “instintivamente direi perche e` il mondo che conosco meglio, essendo il mio luogo d’origine” (instinctively I would say because it is the world that I know best, being also the place of origin). Abate also asserts in this interview: “non dimentichiamolo, attraversato dal plurilinguismo e dal multiculturalismo, un microcosmo vitalissimo, che ha in sè, come tutti i luoghi autentici, i grandi temi della letteratura: l’amore, l’odio, la morte, il bene e il male, il mistero, la magia...” (Let’s not forget, experiencing multiculturalism and multilingualism, Hora is a lively microcosm that as any real place, in Hora the great themes of literature are present, such as love, hate, death, good and evil, mystery and magic...). There is no distinct line



between past and present or vice versa. The stories arise from listening to the elders and through memories of family members and others who pass their language, rituals and traditions to the next generation through the oral tradition.

In fact, Abate's novels are inspired from the author's life stories, from memories of his youth growing up in the Italian South of Arbëresh descent. In an interview with Martinelli, Abate admits that when he started to write, he had himself in mind, his own story, "parlava di suo padre e di suo nonno" ("he was talking about his father and his grandfather," *Alto Adige*). He also declares that he owes the pleasure of writing to the farmers of his own town Carfizzi, whom he describes as "narratori cantastorie omerici" ("Homeric storytellers"; *Alto Adige*). His novels develop from the collection of his memories and memories of others in his town. Lastly, Abate himself defines his stories as "impegno e affabulazione, impegno e belle storie" ("narrative pleasure, commitment, and beautiful stories"; *Alto Adige*). He says that the appropriate themes of his novels are those that relate to the collective memory and give voice to the voiceless.

Abate presents the collective message that all Arbëresh communities can somehow identify with the characters in the novel *Il ballo tondo*. When the narrator says: "più o meno la stessa cosa è successa a tanti bambini di Hora" ("more or less the same thing happened to all the children of Hora"); and "A casa parlavamo *si neve*, come noi, in Arbëresh, e poi a scuola, dall'età di sei anni, cominciavamo a imparare il *litisht*, cioè l'italiano" ("At home we all spoke Arbëresh and in school we started to speak Italian at the age of six"; Abate 13) have so much to say about the collectiveness of the community. First, it shows that any child living in any of the Arbëresh communities can identify with the main character, Costantino. Second, the use of the pronoun "*neve, noi*"

(we) written both in Arbëresh first and then in Italian, informs that Arbërisht was the first language these people encountered at least until the age of six. The emphasis of *We* in this case, distinguishes them from *them*, the Italians.

This novel clearly shows that the use of the Arbëresh language and the culture the Arbëresh people embrace distinguishes them from the Italian larger community. Librandi affirms that *Il ballo tondo* “sfiora le storie secondarie che da secoli si aggiungono alla storia più grande degli antenati albanesi senza condurle a un’autentica conclusione, forse perché possano trovare nuovi sviluppi in narrazioni future o forse perché le storie del popolo arbëresh non trovano mai compimento” (“touches on the secondary stories of the Albanian ancestors that have been added to the larger story without leading them to a real conclusion, perhaps because they can find new developments in future narratives or maybe because the stories of the Arbëresh people never find fulfillment”; 3). Librandi is referring to the fact that stories are being told and retold with time. At the end, what is important is the continuation of telling these stories in an uninterrupted narration threading past and present all at once.

All characteristics of the Arbëresh culture are imbedded in Hora, the place where Abate sets his stories of the first Albanian warriors who made it their home for the generations to come. The connection of place and culture is so strong and is made explicitly clear throughout the novel. The strong connection of man and his environment is what Edward Hall calls an action of “molding each other” (4). Little Costantino, the main character, never leaves this town, “he is completely immersed in the community, in the culture and the tradition of Hora” (Morance 110). The same scenario we find in *La moto di Scanderbeg*. Scanderbeg, the son, is rooted in Hora and his perception of the

antique, the old and the past only changes when the figure of his father who works abroad comes back and brings new ideas and new objects not found in Hora. Scanderbeg's father brings modern ideas from abroad which contradict with Scanderbeg's familiar, communal Arbëresh life.

The grandfather figure is the most grounded person and the most connected to Hora – the most direct link with the mythical past. Since southern Italy was very poor and work was always lacking, many left elsewhere to find better jobs. The grandfather, Nani Lissandro, in *Il ballo tondo* seems to be irritated by this fact. He tells Costantino “se occupiamo la terra... e ce la spartiamo, allora la Merica<sup>46</sup> è qua, anzi è meglio, perché qui sono seppelliti i nostri morti, questa è la nostra terra” (“If we occupy the land and we distribute it evenly, then America is here, on the contrary it is even better, because here are all of our buried ancestors, this is our land”; Abate 82). The grandfather hints to his grandson that America is already in their town, if efforts are made to boost the economy. But especially, the goal is not elsewhere, rather it is where the family dead are buried. He promotes his land and demonstrates how tied he is to it.

The same attachment to the hometown is found in Anna Stratigò's book of memories. Anna states that when any of her family members would go somewhere to visit outside of Lungro, it was a big deal. Their security was put into question. They did not feel at ease. Her aunts would go to visit a family member in the metropolitan cities, such as Rome or Naples, and they were hesitant, even a bit scared because of all the news about “ladri, delinquenti, maniaci, sequestratori” (“thieves, stealers, maniacs,

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<sup>46</sup> Merica here represents America as it was seen as a salvation from hunger for many Italians who migrated in the early 1900s. For the people who remained in their birthplace, America was seen as a place that withdrew people for the hunger of money but separated families and divided them.

kidnappers”; 65). The familiarity of their close community made them hesitant towards others and other places, even if they were close in proximity. On the other hand, the house where she resides today and the place where all her family members came from, always had the door open. Family and friends would come in and out. Singing and special events were also a part of the house.

The above examples show that spaces such as the secluded towns in the high mountains and the walls of the house, are places that keep the Arbëresh together in a community. These spaces function also as places where the Arbëresh language, culture and traditions are maintained.

### **Past-Present in *Il Mosaico del tempo grande***

The third novel of Hora trilogy is the novel *Il mosaico del tempo grande*. This novel holds the subheading *L'inizio di tutto* (the beginning of it all, referring to the beginning of the Arbëresh community in Italy). Carmine Abate utilizes his usual writing technique of integrating time and stories as if they all happen simultaneously. In this novel, there are three main stories and three main voices that tell and retell stories of past and present. One story is Antonio Damis's affair which happened around the '70s. Second, legends and tales of the past are told in gossip and storytelling form at Gojari's *bottega del mosaico* (mosaic shop).<sup>47</sup> The third storyline starts in chapter 3, “La fuga” (“The escape”), and goes back to what Abate calls *Moti i madh* (“The big epoch,” referring to the Scanderbeg's time and the arrival of the first Albanians in the Italian land). These three spatial and temporal narrative levels intersect, chase each other, and superimpose one another all the way through the end of the novel.

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<sup>47</sup> A nickname for someone who has a mouth of gold, someone who tells a lot of true and precious stories.

The novel's treatment of the timeline is especially unique as it shifts from present to past and vice versa. In the essay "Narrative Time," Paul Ricoeur states that "the recollection of the story governed as a whole by its way of ending constitutes an alternative to the representation of time as moving from the past forward into the future, according to the well-known metaphor of the arrow of time" (45). Going back in time inverts the so-called natural order of time. Therefore, by reading the end in the beginning and the beginning in the end, we learn also to read time itself backward, "as the recapitulating of the initial conditions of a course of action in its terminal consequences" (Ricoeur 45). In this way, a plot establishes human action within memory. Hence, memory repeats the course of events according to an order that is "counterpart of time as "stretching-along" between a beginning and an end" (45). Carmine Abate used this technique in this novel to emphasize the importance of memories and reminiscence for the Arbëresh community today.

The primary need to identify with a cultural and historical tradition is closely bound to preserve and hand down the memory to the next generation. Vera Horn states in the article "Memoria e reinvenzione della patria nella narrativa di Carmine Abate", that "la rievocazione del passato storico di Hora, in chiave mitica o favolosa, corrisponde alla fondazione di un'identità e alla formazione di una coscienza identitaria con salde radici nella terra e nella memoria" ("the re-enactment of the historical past of Hora, portrayed in a mythical tone, establishes a foundation for an identity and a consciousness of identity with firm roots in the land and in memory"; 412-413). The recovery of history in this novel begs for a retelling and rereading in the present to bring it forward to the new generation.

Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of *chronotope* is particularly interesting to analyze in relation to Abate's novels, particularly this one where the two fundamental components of any narrative - position and movement in space - interrelate with the passage of time. Bakhtin defines chronotope as the narrative intersection between time and space that sustains a literary work: "spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, and becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (84). This concept expresses the inseparability of space and time. In the novel the space of Hora is inseparable for its time dimension. Moreover, Bakhtin also states that chronotopes "serve for the assimilation of actual temporal (including historical) reality, and permit the essential aspects of this reality to be reflected and incorporated into the artistic space of the novel" (252). This intersection of axes is well connected and threaded in Abate's novel through past and present time, and the old Arbëria entrenched in the "new Arbëria"<sup>48</sup> that create the fusion of time and space. Hora becomes a time capsule recollecting all the Arbëresh treasures.

The destiny of emigration throughout the centuries connects the Arbëresh, the Calabresi and the Albanians, the three microcosms, into an atemporal macrocosm. As stated by Morace, this is a representation of a phenomenon that entails the history of humanity, rendering everyone as brothers, disregarding their place of birth.<sup>49</sup> By no chance, this novel refers to the mosaic of time. Indeed, all the pieces put together, the incorporation of past-present and vice versa, contribute to create the Arbëresh cultural mosaic. Stories of the past are captured in the present. Thus time becomes metaphysical,

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<sup>48</sup> Referring to *Hora*.

<sup>49</sup> See Morace p.159.

something close to what Walter Benjamin calls Messianic time in the “Theses on the Philosophy of History”, a simultaneity of past and future in an immediate present. The past has a claim in the present.<sup>50</sup> Bakhtin’s chronotope explains how time has stood still for the Arbëresh. The fused stories from the past in the present and the intertwined order or events show that the 500 years passed have been erased, and past and present are linked simultaneously.

The story of the birth of Hora as an Arbëresh town starts from Chapter 3, titled “La fuga,” and is told by the narrator who heard it from Gojari. The priest Dhimitri Damis, the ancestor of Antonio Damis, is one of the first people who arrived in Italy at the end of the 1400s and seems to be the leader of the refugees says. As he lands, he says: “Dobbiamo ringraziare Shën Jani Pagëzor che siamo ancora vivi. E liberi. Questo importa. Non ci siamo persi e non lo saremo fino a quando conserveremo memoria di chi eravamo e da dove veniamo” (“we should thank *Shën Jani Pagëzor* (John the Baptist) for being alive and free. That’s what’s important. We did not get lost and we will not be as long as we preserve our memories of who we were and where we come from,” *Il mosaico* 44). Other references mentioned in this section such as we left Hora and arrived in Hora... “Hora jonë e Hora jonë sono ormai attaccate l’una all’altra, come una persona con la sua ombra” (“our Hora is our Hora, at this point, both Hora’s are attached with one another, as a person with his own shadow”; *Il mosaico*, Chapter 3 p. 29) indicate that the first Albanians, at least in the reality of this novel, did not see the space and the distance as an obstacle. Their struggle and assimilation in the new land made them more united

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<sup>50</sup> See Benjamin 254.

and gave them a feeling of a community, an imagined community,<sup>51</sup> as Benedict Anderson suggests. They encouraged themselves by telling stories, by talking with the rest of the community and sharing their memories with the purpose of keeping them alive and saving their culture and traditions.

The first group who arrived and constructed their town has a special name for their countrymen: the first people are known as “l’oro del paese” (“the gold of town”; 51). They are considered precious, an inheritance to be protected, because they were those who gave everything to construct the church, the windy hill<sup>52</sup> and those who survived in the new land by not surrendering their *besa* (the promises word), the dignity and the future of this community. Papàs Dhimitri Damis’ words cannot explain better the reconstruction of the Old Arbëria to the new one. The following words are what he tells his people:

è giusto il tempo in cui dobbiamo costruire una vera chiesa, degna di noi e della nostra Fede. Sono passati quasi trent’anni dal nostro arrivo, e nessuno di noi che ha un po’ di sale in testa può realisticamente pensare di ritornare al nostro paese. Hora jonë è ormai questa, per sempre: qui sono nati i nostri figli, sono seppelliti i nostri cari. Basta: metteremo la prima pietra della nostra chiesa sul nostro passato. Ormai questa terra è anche la nostra e i vicini lëtirë hanno capito di che tempra siamo fatti, cominciano a stimarci e a commerciare con noi. I nostri figli e nipoti hanno bisogno di certezze e di sogni, di sentire i loro piedi su una terra amica.

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<sup>51</sup> “It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6).

<sup>52</sup> Referring to Hora.



It is the right time to build a real church, worthy of us and our faith. Almost 30 years have passed since our arrival, and no one of us who has somewhat of a brain can really think of going back to our country. By now, our Hora is here, forever. Our children are born here, and here are buried our loved ones. Enough: let's put down the first rock of our church here and leave behind our past. By now this land is also ours and the Italian neighbors know our temperament. They will start to appreciate us and connect with us. Our children and grandchildren need certainty and dreams. They need to feel their feet in a friendly land. (104)

His words are reassuring: Arbëria will be constructed in the new given land. This is how the Arbëresh utopia starts, by the motivation of the first ancestors who used their sorrow and longing to commemorate, tell stories and live the life as they would have lived it in Arbëria.

In *Il mosaico del tempo grande*, Dhimitri Damis has a son, Liveta, who goes back to Arbëria to give a hand to his oppressed brothers in the other Hora. There, he encounters the old Tanush Zenebishi, the warrior who fought next to Scanderbeg, who tells him that he needs to go back to his Hora and points across the sea. He says: “Sono andati tutti là, i vivi ... hanno ricostruito Hora qua dietro la collina. Un piccolo paese di poche case, isolato e sicuro come un nido d'aquila” (“all the survivors left ... they reconstructed Hora behind the hill in a small village of a few houses, isolated and secure as an eagle's nest”; 209). He is referring to the people who left and re-constructed an Arbëria in Italy. The old Arbëria was lost because of the invasion of the Turks who

burned and destroyed everything. This passage thus confirms once more the rooting of the Arbëresh utopia, and its dimension as a model to be achieved.

In the novel, when a group of folkloristic dancers arrive from Tirana for a show in Hora, the Arbëresh felt intensely the joy of the reunion with their compatriots. They identify them as “our own scattered blood,” the expression *gjaku jone i shprishur*. The story told by Gojari to the youngsters of the town follows the surprise the Arbëresh felt in front of the Albanians:

Dunque non si erano tramutati né in turchi né in statue di pietra né in polvere. Parlavano ancora la nostra lingua anche se con un accento diverso, quasi straniero. Bisognava fare molta attenzione per capire le loro parole, che però erano spesso identiche alle nostre: *fjale*, *gjuhe*, *buke*, *vere*, *uje*, *bukur*, *mire*. Avevano le stesse storie mitiche di Scanderbeg, I canti ugualmente struggenti, gli sguardi luminosi spiccati...

Therefore, the Albanians were transformed neither in Turks nor in dust and stone statues. They still spoke our language, even though in a different accent, almost as foreign. We had to pay attention in order to understand their words. Often the words were identical as ours: *fjale* (word), *gjuhe* (language), *buke* (bread), *vere* (wine), *uje* (water), *bukur* (beautiful), *mire* (good). They shared the same mythic stories of Scanderbeg, the same melancholic songs, the identical enlightened looks... (70)

The Arbëresh feel the blood connection with the people that were left on the other side of the Adriatic and although some aspects of their language are different, they can

understand each other and they connect with each other on so many common grounds. But when it comes to the closed confines of the Arbëresh community, only the Arbëresh matter. In fact, when Antonio Damis goes in search for the beautiful Drita, one of the Albanian dancers who came from outside the circle of trust and left Zu Maurelja's daughter, everyone in town wants to kill him. His betrayal is never forgiven.

The above stories are collective memories that have made their way around town. Everyone knows and keeps them as precious treasures and retells them to the next generation for them to be remembered and known. The rhapsodies such as *Kostandini i vogel*, sung to the children and to the grandchildren add to the collective memory, the story they convey. They are bits and pieces that create the mosaic of the Arbëresh identity. Stories of the past generations and family connections are important for the Arbëresh because they become components of their utopian Arbëresh community. The closeness of the community makes the gossips circulate much faster. Everyone knows who left the town, who came in to town, especially when someone unknown or unfamiliar joins the community. The thread of time and the fusion of stories is fulfilled through the transition of testimonies from the older generations to the younger ones. Therefore, the reference of the *tempo grande*, does not incorporate only the past but its progression and its traces in the present as well. In fact, Gojari says to the youngsters who were so curious to hear his stories that there is nothing to add, just “collegare il passato al presente nel modo più possibile, senza forzature. Solo così il tempo grande avrà un senso” (“connect the past to the present in the most spontaneous way possible, without forcing it. Only this way the macrocosm will make sense”; 357).

### **Nani Lissandro: Linkage of Grandfather-Grandchild**

Another characteristic of Arbëresh culture present in Abate's novel is the importance of having a boy born into the family. The Arberesh community is patriarchal. To have a boy is significant because he bears the roots of his family and will continue to bring forward the last name of the family for generations to come. This is even more important in a cultural group that strives to perpetuate its ancient ways. In the novel *Il ballo tondo* Abate attempts to rediscover the importance of cultural identity and finding oneself. The author also suggests that recollection is the means that subdues the lapses of time and the changes in society. He exemplifies this concept by weaving the story to little Costantino and his strong connection with his grandfather, Nani Lissandro. The Arbëresh community is a voluntary and intentional community which is sustained by the joint efforts of its elderly devoted members to continue passing on the stories and their culture and language to the following generation to provide continuation of the community.

The *impaziente* "anxious" (*Il ballo tondo* 12) arrival of the birth of the boy, Costantino, after *Zonia* (Mrs.) Elena had two girls, reveals the importance the boy holds. Later in the story, as Abate takes the reader through Costantino's *bildungsroman*, we learn that the two male figures such as the grandfather, Nani Lissandro, and the father, called *il Mericano*, are the two most influential people that construct his identity. Here we come back again to the point that Strauss and Quinn make when they discuss the individuals consequences of historical durability. They state that individuals are "motivated to enact and reenact the public world of objects and events that they knew, reproducing patterns of experience from which the next generation learns" (112). Costantino is being pulled backwards by his grandfather who feeds him mythic stories of

the past. On the other side, the father pulls him into reality and tells him what he should do to move forward in life.

The grandfather is more influential in Costantino's formation, because his father is mostly absent. Therefore, the grandfather is the only male figure in the house and, through his mythic stories of the past, gets Costantino's full attention and curiosity. Nani Lissandro serves as the repository of their family origin and his job is to pass on to his grandson the language, the customs, the rituals and the history of their family and identity. Costantino is the younger generation of the Avati family and he bears the weight of bringing forward the family traditions.

A key episode is when Nani Lissandro takes Costantino to the Marina where the first Albanian Warriors landed. Nani recalls these memories from his parents and grandparents. He is now passing them to his grandson. Costantino tries to grasp this mythic journey:

Al di là dell'orizzonte, un giorno d'agosto come oggi, il mare è quieto, salpano tre galee di profughi: la prima è carica di giovani, la seconda di ragazze e la terza di pane e vino. Sbarcano sul lido della Marina, preceduti dalla grande aquila a due teste che li ha guidati e protetti giorno e notte, da quando sono stati costretti ad abbandonare, l'Arbëria, invasa dai turchi. Noi abbiamo lo stesso *gjak*, lo stesso sangue, di quelle genti.

Beyond the horizon, an August day like today, the sea is quiet, three galleys of refugees leave: the first is full of youngsters, the second with girls and the third one with bread and wine. They disembarked on the beach of the Marina, preceded by the big two-headed eagle who led them

and protected them day and night, since they were forced to abandon Arbëria, invaded by the Turks. We have the same *gjak*, the same blood as those people. (*Il ballo tondo* 17)

Nani Lissandro is telling this story to inform Costantino how the first Albanians got to Hora, thanks to the very first refugees who escaped their homeland, not to fall into the hands of the Turks. Telling his grandson that they also have the same blood reinforces the connection and the importance of continuing the same traditions of their ancestors. As Strauss and Quinn state, sometimes “people act intentionally to pass on practices and beliefs that they value—to insure that certain of their own enduring schemas will become the enduring schemas of the next generation of individuals” (113). Nani Lissandro is using this technique to make sure his grandson knows their history and where they come from. He continues to tell his grandson that the first thing the refugees did as they disembarked was eating and, as he tells the story, he says “Anche noi abbiamo pane e vino. Dunque mangiamo, ti va?” (“We have bread and wine also. So, should we eat?”; *Il ballo tondo* 20). This gesture catapults them back in time, reliving the moment as the first refugees did in that very same place. Nani Lissandro is a character that is trapped in the past and he is feeding Costantino the same thoughts: the past is the present, in their words and in their gestures.

### **Zonia Elena: Women’s Role in Arbëresh Culture**

On the other hand, among the Arbëresh, women have to conform to several rules imposed by the community. In the novels we find some interesting female figures that epitomize the roles of Arbëresh women. The first important female character in Abate’s novel is Costantino’s mother in *Il ballo tondo*. Zonia Elena is a typical Arbëresh woman,

a devoted maternal character. She is a gossip, also a typical trait of women in the Arbëresh communities where words circle the town before the person whom is being talked about knows what is going on (as when Orlandina, Costantino's sister, was to be married and everyone in town was talking about it, meanwhile Orlandina had no idea).<sup>53</sup> Zonia Elena is also known to be a great housewife who cooks for her family and fills the kitchen with flavors and delicious aromas. She is also in charge of her two daughters, Orlandina and Lucrezia, who are described as young and beautiful, ready to be married.

Lucrezia and Orlandina do not appear to have such an important role in passing down the culture as does Costantino. Instead, they have to conform to other Arbëresh cultural norms. They had to be married to a nice gentleman, as the father's ultimate wish. Every time he comes back to Hora and looks at his daughters, he makes plans for them. Orlandina's previous relationship with a man from Hora ended badly, according to the father, as a result of the man's family, who thought his daughter "non era alla loro altezza, non era, perche' loro hanno due ettari di terra in più, hanno vacche e case..." ("She was not at their level; she wasn't because they have two more hectares of land than she had and they have houses and cattle..."). In the Arbëresh communities, what the family or even the rest of the community thinks or believes is more important than the relationship between the actual couple. This is the reason their relationship did not work. After Orlandina returns home once from her broken marriage, she has a bad name, and no one would marry her within the community. The marriages were preferred within the Arbëresh community. Leaving the women unmarried was not an option. It is the father's

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<sup>53</sup> See *Il ballo tondo* "Al paese tutti parlavano del prossimo matrimonio di Orlandina e lei non ne sapeva niente" p. 44.

duty to find the girls nice men to marry.<sup>54</sup> In Orlandina's case, the father has to look for someone outside the community to marry his daughter whom he describes as "una ragazza che si puo bere in un bicchiere d'acqua...ha in dote il corredo che sta tessendo e ricamando da se" ("a good girl [literal translation: "a girl that can be drunken in a glass of water," a girl who conforms to the perception of the Arbëresh society...] which is sewing and embroidering her own dowry"; 36). Out of choice, but under the circumstances the society framed her, Orlandina has to marry a foreigner, as the community called him, an Italian from the northern Italian province of Trento.

Arbëresh women are a good collant for cultural traditions and spread them in their families through their daughters. Two other authors of Arbëresh descent, Elsa Musacchio and Barbara Renzi write about their own memories of the people of Portocannone, the region of Molise. In their book, *The Space of Memory: Language and Culture of Portocannone, a Small Albanian Village in Italy. Gjaku Jonë i Shëprishur*, the memories and the emotions keep coming back and are finally put onto paper. They describe traditions such as establishing the sex of an unborn child by guessing when looking at the shape of the abdomen of the pregnant woman: "if it was round it would be a girl, if it was pointed it would be a boy" (17). They say that, when the baby is born, the father shoots two rifle shots if the baby was a girl and three rifle shots if it was a boy. Having to shoot an extra shot confirms the importance of a baby boy being born and the continuation of the family's last name to the next generation. Usually when the baby is born, a brooch with the three cardinal virtues "faith, hope and charity is clipped on the baby's clothes to protect the new-born from the evil eye" (17). Elsa Musacchio says that now girls have

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<sup>54</sup> See *Il ballo* p. 34.



more freedom, but in past times they couldn't decide about their marriages: "the marriages usually were decided by parents who promised their children when they were very young, and the girl couldn't object" (19). She remembers a poem heard by Teresa Spagnoletti (an Arbëresh woman from her hometown), which shows the change in the way girls are raised:

Keto kapile ce jane nan i	The girls nowadays
Do behen gjithë fij de Mari	Want to become the Virgin Mary's daughters
Venjen te qaca mbrem e menat	They go to the church in the morning and in the evening
Bet nganonjen aten namurat	To tease that boyfriend
Behen gjithë ciprje e dhurin	They powder their faces and put on perfume
Bet nganojen aten trim	To deceive that boy
Kapile rrini me dekor	Girls, behave with decorum
Ke vjen trenduni e ju vun kuror	Because the end of the month is coming, and you will marry

Table 2 Originally published in Elsa Musacchio and Barbara Renzi's 2012, *The Space of Memory: Language and Culture of Portocannone, a Small Albanian Village in Italy. Gjaku Jonë i Shëprishur*. It as been translated in English by Edna Lubonja.

The poem reflects on the now and then. They have to behave well according to the rules of the time. Now the girls are free to attract their own men, when before the choice was of the family and not theirs to make.

We can conclude that the women in the Arbëresh culture do not have the same roles in comparison to men. As represented in Abate's novels, they are maternal figures, great cooks, and they do not hold the same responsibility when it comes to the family tradition and preservation of culture. They are to be married, according to the father's

wishes. On the other hand, the emphasis is on the boys who are charged with the responsibility to preserve the blood line.

### **The Perception of Foreigners in Arbëresh *Hora***

Another aspect of the Arbëresh utopia and the closeness of this community is how it reacts to foreigners. The Arbëresh are friendly and welcoming people towards visitors, but they sure know who is an Arbëresh from their *Hora* and who is not. In *Il mosaico del tempo grande* Laura, Antonio Damis's blond daughter, arrives to *Hora*. As she steps down from the bus, the male eyes are looking at her up and down. She looks around the piazza with an incomprehensible expression on her face, a mixture of astonishment as if she just woke up and found herself in an unknown place. The men in the piazza who stare at her, know for sure that she is not from *Hora*.

As one of them tells the rest to go help with her luggage, her smile gives the confirmation that she understood. The youngsters are taken aback and thought maybe she is an Arbëresh from another close by town who stopped at the wrong bus station. The youngsters are thinking “le conoscevamo tutte le ragazze del nostro paese, anche quelle nate in Altitalia o all'estero” (“we know all the girls of own town, even the ones born in the North of Italy or abroad”; 51). The way Laura looks and her accent of speaking Arbëresh or Italian, shows to the locals that she is not from *Hora*. The small *Hora* is a microcosm where everybody knows everybody. Everyone knows every little detail about every person in the community down to a couple of past generations. There is no chance that a “foreigner” will not be identified as soon as they step into *Hora*.

As I was visiting the Arbëresh towns in Calabria in 2016, I encountered the same situation as described above. Even today, after a number of people moved into town from

other towns nearby, after Albanians moves to Italy after the fall of communism and made the Arbëresh towns their home, the local Arbëresh are still vigilant and can recognize the foreigner. When I arrived in San Demetrio Corone, I could feel the men sitting at Bar Centrale and Bar Stilla staring as I was passing by. They were perhaps wondering who I was and what was I doing there, given that they knew I was not a familiar face from their town. However, in a short period of time the people become familiar and inviting. Hospitality for the Arbëresh is sacred.<sup>55</sup> The intimacy of the community, the confidence the people had with one another as they entered into each other's houses as if it was their own, showed me that the notion of community is really strong. The Arbëresh community has a sense of *communitas*, a term described by Victor Turner as “modality of social relationship from an area of common living” (*The Ritual Process* 96). Turner states that the community shares a common experience, usually through a rite of passage, a theme defined by Arnold van Gennep in 1909 as “rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age” (*The Ritual process* 94). As a result, the community is structured equally and gives priority to human bonding within this group. The hospitality and friendship the Arbëresh share with each other showed how the community functions together as a whole.

The people in these Arbëresh towns are very proud of what they have accomplished throughout the years in preserving their culture and language and they are not afraid to show it. I noticed that when the foreigners (the new Albanians who arrived in the early 90s and live in these Arbëresh towns or the other Calabrians who have moved from the closest towns) say that there is no future in this place, the Arbëresh are not

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<sup>55</sup> This is a fact also mentioned in Abate's novels, for example in See *Il ballo tondo* p. 50; *Il mosaico* p. 59.

happy to hear such things. Although they realize that elsewhere the future is more dynamic, their allegiance is deeply rooted in the Arbëresh town. Michele, the main character, in *Il Mosaico*, says that for the tourists there is nothing worth visiting in this place,<sup>56</sup> but for the people of Hora it is the place where the heart finds peace. The origin and the identity of the Arbëresh and the connection they have with the land that their ancestors built make Hora an indispensable locus.

### ***Besa, bir, drita: The Arbëresh Language***

Arbëresh language is a crucial element of Arbëresh identity. As Edward Hall mentions in his book *The Hidden Dimension*, language “is more than just a medium of expressing thought... it is, in fact, a major element in the formation of thought” (1). We form thoughts in the language that we know best and that we can best express ourselves. The novel *Il ballo tondo* clearly differentiates the Arbëresh from other communities because they speak in Italian and Arbërisht simultaneously, using the right tongue at the right moment as needed to express what they want to convey. Rita Librandi affirms that the use of Arbërisht in the text is the author’s desire to provide a good part of what is called basic lexicon, the one belonging to the semantic fields of family or kinship, the places you live every day, the traditional costumes, songs and gastronomy. One can almost follow the thread of an ethnographic documentation. The combining of the Arbëresh language with Italian in this novel shows how important both of these languages are for the people of this community: Arbërisht being the language of the heart, and Italian the language that is necessary to communicate with the “outside” world. Another interesting fact is that the Arbëresh do not speak the Calabrian dialect, and

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<sup>56</sup> Hora, often referred as a hole in the middle of nowhere in the text when seen through the eyes of a foreigner.

neither do they identify as Calabresi. They speak the standard Italian but with an Albanian-sounding inflexion for some words.

As Abate confirmed, in his youth, the community spoke Arbërisht at home, and the children were not exposed to Italian until the age of 6 in school. He reflects this in the novel by infiltrating the Albanian language. Albanian words stand out in the text as they are italicized. Some of these words are *gjak* (blood), *besa* (the pledged word), *gjitonia* (neighborhood), *bir* (son), *coha* (traditional Arbëresh costume worn in weddings or cultural events), *vallja* (round dance), *lahuta* (single string musical instrument – the gusle), and there are also some expressions such as *me vete goja* (my mouth goes there, meaning it comes naturally), *i mire si buka* (as good as the bread), *nje burr nge qan* (men don't cry); *e bukur si drita* (beautiful as the light), *jeta esht si fleta* (life is like a leaf), *vajze me kripe* (literal translation: a salty girl, an expression to say that she has good taste).

Strauss and Quinn explain that the function of similes and especially metaphors in everyday speech is to clarify concepts and make communication efficient. They state: “[Metaphors] do a good job of clarifying for listeners the nonmetaphorical points speakers are trying to get across... along with their high rate of use for this purpose in ordinary discourse—they are excellent clues to cultural schemas that underlie them” (144). And in fact, Abate uses these metaphorical expressions in Arbërisht, not just simply in Italian because they do not express a meaning, but they also charge it with an ethnical connotation. As Strauss and Quinn inform, these metaphors found in talk and linguistic experience, are individual or “idiosyncratic” (149). Spoken communication requires selection, using those metaphors that have cultural prevalence and their meaning

is useful in clarifying with those to whom we talk. Expressions and metaphors are distinctive in essence and they are articulated differently in every language.

In conclusion, as the generations pass, the Arbëresh are still in transition. The new generation tries to hold on to the memories of their elderly to keep the traditions alive. As the new generation emerges into the world, it faces the struggles of tradition vs modernity. Abate shows that as older generations pass away, the traditions are slightly distorted but they are kept alive.

### **Orlandina's Wedding: Rhapsodies, Songs and Performances**

The rhapsodies and the songs are cultural elements that build the Arberesh's lives. They are an important element of the Arbëresh utopia because first, they enclose historical information all the way to Scanderbeg's time; second, they are passed through the oral tradition from the grandparents, to the mothers, and to the younger generation. They are being performed in family events, especially on weddings. Because of the repetition, they are known by the whole community. Abate uses the rhapsody, *Kostantini i vogel*, as a leitmotif of the novel *Il ballo tondo*, from its opening to the two weddings of Zonia Elena and Orlandina. This rhapsody tells the story of Costantino who is about to get married and receives the order to join the army. After nine years in the army when Costantino was about to go back to his Hora, he has a terrible dream as if his beautiful wife to be, is about to get married with someone else. He sighs deeply and God appears. He tells Costantino to take a horse, the one faster than the kite, and return back to his Hora to find his bride. Costantino arrives and finds his bride in the church. He arrives right on time to shout at the priest that he is Costantino, the right one to marry his bride.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> See *Il ballo tondo* pp 9-10.

The rhapsody contains mythical stories of Arbëria and is repeated because it is sung and danced in every Arbëresh marriage. In *Il ballo tondo*, it is referenced in Costantino's parents' marriage, and the marriages of Costantino's. In this way the rhapsody surpasses time and continues to be passed on for generations. The *valle*, a traditional dance where all the dancers hold hands together and form a semicircle, is another leitmotif of the novel, the round dance that starts and ends the novel, reinforcing the closed circle that keeps this community together, holding on to the stings of their history, culture, rituals and language which identifies them. Also, the novel itself becomes a round dance as it starts and ends in the same way. In sum, it can be said that the sound wave and the musicality of the rhapsody travels throughout the text in a unique and single breath.<sup>58</sup>

The moral of this rhapsody is the return back to Hora to save what is of value and important for Costantino. The prominence of opening the novel with this particular rhapsody connects with the rest of the story of *Il ballo tondo*, that Hora is a place that pulls back its people. It recalls the fact that the Arbëresh culture comes from an oral tradition that is being passed on from generation to generation through talk and performance. Claudia Strauss and Naomi Quinn describe this phenomenon of historical durability: "the public world recreated by enactment of the schemas each generation has learned" (111). The authors reinforce the awareness that people are predisposed to behaviors that are familiar and natural. The adults function as influential figures for their children. The schemas repeat as their children grow older.

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<sup>58</sup> See Bovo Romoeuf p.34.

Orlandina's wedding, in *Il ballo tondo*, is described as a typical wedding in the Arbëresh tradition of the 1950s. The wedding celebration lasted two days. On the first day, the house was filled with people from the community, who joined the celebration. The women were invited to Orlandina's room to see the dowry. Later, the couple danced the first tango as the rest of the people applauded and threw confetti and coins over them. The narrator describes this scene "I futuri sposi sembravano trottolo, fuori tempo e di legno, ma erano ammirati con simpatia" ("The couple looked like tops, out of time and made of wood, but they were admired with sympathy from the audience"; 75). This scene portrays, once again, the double play in this novel: past-present, inner-outer views of the community.

The next day, the celebration continues as the house is filled once again with people from the community, and the women sing traditional wedding songs as Orlandina is getting ready to leave the house in her father's arms. Here, Il Mericano tries to quiet the singing down, as he does not want to leave a bad impression on the Trentini who, in fact, are having a great time eating and dancing and watching a "show" never seen before. The celebration does not stop until late at night with the closing of *Kostantini i vogel*, once again part of a tradition that time has not canceled. Il Mericano, the father is an interesting character, because he represents the middle ground, mentioned before. He has been exposed to the "outside" world outside of Hora and, he chooses to act differently at times, as opposed to the other members of his family or of his community for that matter. But as much as he tries to be "modern" and inform Costantino about the world out there, he still cannot forget about his roots and how things are done in Hora.



The father needs to direct the life of his daughters. Another example that shows the Mericano's *dovere del padre* (duty as a father), is when he overheard of his younger daughter, Lucrezia, flirting with the teacher, another foreigner, he found a way to be informed about his whole life story all the way in Ludwigshafen.<sup>59</sup> He sure enough informed his daughter about the person she was falling in love, as it was his "dovere di padre" ("fatherly duty"): "si era informato su quell'uomo... per dirle: Bella di papà, io ti ho avvisata; poi non dirmi che non lo sapevi" ("he got information about that man to tell his daughter: I already warned you, don't you tell me later you didn't know"; *Il ballo tondo* 100). Although the father pretends to be more modern in the eyes of the foreigners, deep inside he is a typical Arbëresh father, who has full authority of his family; especially his daughters.

The end of the novel is also significant, because it reflects on the inevitability of change. The rhapsodies can be slightly modified as they are being passed on to the next generations and so are the rituals and customs of the Arbëresh community. The novel ends with Lucrezia's wedding to the teacher, and its celebrations, in a typical Arbëresh way. Nani Lissandro is present and observing the scene. Everybody, including the father, is dancing and singing the famous rhapsody that started this novel *Kostantini I vogel*. Many of them were following the song simply by "la-la-la" and the whole scenery "era un guazzabuglio di voci controtempo" ("was a mish-mash of backbeat voices"; *Il ballo tondo* 212). The grandfather's expression is crucial right at this moment, because as everyone is having a good time, he starts laughing so hard saying, "sembrano delle pecore che belano. Sembrano degli asini che ragliano pestando le fave nell'aia..."

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<sup>59</sup> See *Il ballo* p. 100.

sembrano delle campane stonate” (“They seem like sheep that bleat. They sound like donkeys that bray crushing beans in the barnyard... they sound like bells out of tune”; *Il ballo* 212). His laughter right before he passes away is bittersweet. On one hand, the grandfather sees in his last moment of life that the traditions he worked so hard to pass on to the next generation are being followed. However, this last scene portrays the inevitable truth that as generations pass and time moves on, the Arbëresh traditions are slowly losing some value with each generations that is being left behind.

The struggle between past and present, old and new, that dominates the father shows also in the way he speaks to Costantino. He tells him:

La ricchezza, dico io, te la dà questa (e si schiaffeggiò la fronte) e queste (e si afferrò le braccia). Imparati bene l’italiano, che è la lingua che ti darà il pane; magari pure l’inglese che un giorno ti potrebbe servire, ma l’arbëresh a che ti serve? E il buffo era che tutte queste raccomandazioni e l’ultima, la più importante, le fece in arbëresh: di fare il padre, *bir*, perchè ormai sei grande e il nonno troppo vecchio.

The wealth, I say, will give you this, (and he hit his forehead), meaning your mind, your knowledge, and these, (and he grabbed his arms). Learn well the Italian language, because it is the one that will give you bread; perhaps even English because one day it might come to help, but where will you use Arbëresh? And the funny part was that after all these recommendations the last and most important one he said it in Arbëresh: to become of a father, son, because now you are big and grandpa is too old. (*Il ballo* 132)

The father's speech is controversial and confusing for Costantino because he reinforces the importance of learning Italian to move forward and become someone to support the family. At the same time, his Arbëreshness appears in the conversation and it emphasizes that the burden of the culture and the family will be on Costantino since the grandfather is getting old and the father is about to leave again for work. This last part also refers to the patriarchal structure of the Arbëresh communities: at all times there has to be an authorial "man/father" figure in the Arbëresh house.

An Albanian reader of this novel cannot help but smile at every page of this book. It all sounds too familiar, the wedding ceremonial celebration, the songs, the dancing, the father figure who is so protective of his daughters and wants to make their life easier by doing his research first, so they would not fall into a trap later on. It is astounding how the Albanians and the Arbëresh still share the same cultural values all the way down to the core and for the Arbëresh the time has not erased much. Culture transcends time but it is the Arbëresh utopia that maintained the community together as the people maintained their identity for over six centuries.

### **Scanderbeg as a Hero in *La Moto di Scanderbeg***

Similarly to *Il ballo tondo*, the second novel of this trilogy, *La moto di Scanderbeg* also portrays the story of young Giovanni who lives in the same town, Hora, with his mother and awaits the arrival of his father who works abroad. This novel also discusses the theme of memory and identity formation through the steps and adventures of the main protagonist. Giovanni is confronted every day with the mythic past of living in Hora and with the modernity his father brings when he comes to town. From Germany,

the father brings objects such as the soccer ball and the motorcycle, seen as foreign, exciting and new for Giovanni and his friends.

The most important element of the novel to prove our hypothesis of the existence an Arbëresh utopia, is the perpetuation of a mythical name. The protagonist, Giovanni, is called by everybody in town by the nickname Scanderbeg, which is also the father's name. His compatriots call Giovanni Scanderbeg because "he didn't let anyone lose his patience; he hated bullies and injustice; and when there was time to fight, there was no turning back. Giovanni explains his nickname in this way:

Era un soprannome di cui andava fiero, perché a quei tempi tutti sapevamo che uomo di valore era stato il vero Scanderbeg, quello del Moti i Madh, del Tempo Grande, i nostri vecchi ci raccontavano che era forte e sperto, che i turchi fino a quando viveva lui avevano tentato e ritentato, ma non c'era niente da fare, l'Arbëria non erano riusciti a occuparla, i nostri vecchi ci raccontavano queste storie e ce le cantavano, quando c'era una festa, cantavano Scanderbeg, che poi era stato lui a dire ai suoi: << Se io muoio e i turchi vi sconfiggono, andatevene in Italia>>. E loro vengono qua da noi e fondano questi paesi nostri e soffrono per secoli sotto i feudatari, come quelli rimasti là, sotto i turchi.

It was a nickname to be proud, because in those times everyone knew about the real Scanderbeg, that one from *Moti i madh*, who was the man of real virtue. Our elders would tell us that he was strong and an expert. Until he was alive, the Turks tried and re-tried to conquer Arbëria, but they couldn't. Our elders told and re-told those stores and they would

sing songs about him when there was a special event. Our elders told us that it was Scanderbeg who told his people “if I die and the Turks conquer our land, go in Italy.” And so they did come here and founded these towns. For years they struggled under the feudal lords as the ones who remained in Arbëria and suffered under the Turks. (*La moto di Scanderbeg* 30)

There are many combined threads that Abate has incorporated in this passage. First, the connection among historical Scanderbeg (*Moti i madh*) - Scanderbeg (the father) - Scanderbeg (the nickname of the son) portrays the ongoing tradition of naming and renaming from important figures of antiquity. The figure of the real Scanderbeg is kept alive by using his name in contemporary times. Also, for Scanderbeg the father and Scanderbeg the son to hold this name announces their identity. Showing the parallelism of the qualities of real Scanderbeg vs Scanderbeg the son reinforces the fact that they are one. The Arbëresh are the descendants of Scanderbeg and they carry the same qualities he had and they continue to preserve them just the same. Using Scanderbeg’s name to call the younger generation and retelling his stories reinforces the collective memory of the Arbëresh.

There are other parallelisms between the modern Scanderbeg and the historical figure, also noted by Morace, “a partire dal fatto che l’uno e sempre in sella alla moto, come l’altro era sempre in sella al cavallo” (“starting with the fact that one is always sitting on the motorcycle, as the other was always seated on the horse”; 135). The motorcycle in the novel has double meaning. For the father it serves mostly as a moving vehicle between Hora and abroad. It is the vehicle that takes him back to his origins. The

constant interchangeable play of the use of the name Scanderbeg ratifies the fusion of time and space all in one big story where past and present are articulated simultaneously.

In conclusion, the trilogy *Le stagioni di Hora* represents Hora as a microcosm where the Arbëresh utopia dominates. The mythic stories of the past are alive in the present; the telling and re-telling of stories, the persistence of Scanderbeg's name, the wedding ritual, the language, the songs, the traditions and rituals supplement the Arbëresh utopia and to the collective memory are relived at every occasion. The older generation is the backbone of the community that can be seen as a treasure box ready to burst with information about their origin and their past. The younger generation is confronted with the struggle of dealing with antiquity and modernity. They are being held at the tip of a two way street and they have to make a decision as to what direction to take. The younger generation is represented at the end of utopia, not because of their own will, but as a result of the outside forces that the larger community imposes on them.

#### **Food as Identity and Memory: *Il banchetto di nozze e altri sapori*<sup>60</sup>**

We should add one more element to the mythical creation of the Hora utopia, and this is best described in Abate's newest novel *Il banchetto di nozze e altri sapori*<sup>61</sup>, published in October 2016. This novel is constructed on the theme of castonomic memory: various food, dishes, and flavors that bring the author back in time. They represent both memories of his identity and formation, his nostalgia for his own land, and also represent the roughness of the unknown in the new land. This book is autobiographical in the sense that his own life experiences are portrayed through food and the pleasure of good company. Food is being used as the generator of the story.

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<sup>60</sup> The wedding banquet and other flavours.

<sup>61</sup> Abate won the *Premio Letterario Nazionale Rotary Vallombrosa* in May of 2017 with this publication

Through food and flavors, Abate allows himself to travel through his life and interweave the stories of the people that surround him.

Food is such an ordinary practice, a common daily occurrence, but, it is also an occurrence that challenges us to look deeper and understand not only ourselves but others as well. The choices we make with food and their preparation involve aspects of a person's identity. In their book, *Food and Culture*, Pamela G. Kittler and Kathryn P. Sucher warn that food symbolizes self-identity and self-expression: "food choice is influenced by self-identity, a process whereby the food likes or dislikes of someone else are accepted and internalized as personal preferences" (3). Another symbolic function of food is "cultural identity" (Kittler 4), that can be a collective identity when and the flavors that "demonstrate affiliations with culture are usually introduced during childhood" (4). These are often called *comfort foods*, simply because they please the psychological need for food familiarity.

Food choices depict a group or a person's background, beliefs, passions, assumptions and personalities. Roland Barthes states that food is not only a collection of products but also a "system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of images, situations and behaviour" (167). This information can be gathered through observation to find out about the mental life of a given society. Food connects people by a common need they all share. Massimo Montanari explains this process by stating: "food is culture when it is eaten because man while able to eat anything, or precisely for this reason, does not in fact eat everything but rather chooses his own food, according to criteria linked either to the economic and nutritional dimensions of the gesture or to the symbolic values

of with which food itself is invested” (6). Food becomes part of culture when it is chosen by its people and through the unique ways it is prepared and consumed.

E.N. Anderson states that “food is used in every society on earth to communicate manages, preeminent among these are one messages of group solidarity” (6). The way we prepare and consume food determines our system of beliefs and representations. As represented in Abate’s novel, food can function to indicate the belief system, religious rules or the complex ideologies of a person or an entire community. Here is how Abate himself presents his novel in Besenello, a comune in Trentino: “Il cibo è fattore d’integrazione...il cibo permette la mescolanza, l’addizione, e non la sottrazione” (“food leads to a factor of integration... food leads to mixing together, addition and not subtraction”; *Il viaggio di Abate con i sapori* 29). Food brings people together in unity. At another presentation for the magazine *Corriere del Trentino*, Abate explains the way he incorporates food in his novel. He states:

Sono partito da un’immagine ed ho preseguito con la stessa urgenza e necessità degli altri miei romanzi. Non avevo tesi da dimostrare ma, raccontando la mia vita, mi sono reso conto dell’importanza degli incontri con il cibo avvenuti nei momenti topici. Potrei fare molti esempi, mio padre che smette di emigrare per fare il fruttivendolo, il mio primo lavoro in Germania in un’industria alimentare, l’avvicinarmi al Trentino attraverso i canederli. Descrivo fatti realmente accaduti che sono letterari, immediatamente metaforici e il cibo diventa una sorta di strumento di integrazione.



I started the book from an image and I continued with the same urgency and necessity as my other novels. I didn't have a theme to demonstrate, but in telling my own story, I realized the importance of encounters with food which happened in decisive moments. I could give many examples, my father who stops immigrating and becomes a fruit seller; my first job in Germany in a food industry; getting close to Trentino through the canederli<sup>62</sup>. I describe real facts that happened whether they are literary or immediately metaphorical. The food becomes a sort of assimilation instrument. (Boschi 13)

Abate maintains that each place, Carfizzi, Germany, and Trentino, has its own flavors. A person born in a place and used to the particular taste and flavors of the region learns and acquires new flavors when visiting or residing in other places. He mentions that this is the beauty of being open to new adventures and new places.

In *Il banchetto di nozze e altri sapori*, Carmine Abate portrays his everyday life growing up in Carfizzi, Calabria through the delicious plates he has tasted from the hands of his grandmother and mother. Later on in life, Abate takes the reader in different places he has visited, always through the lens of food. He seems to enjoy every taste in every place but he always returns back to his hometown to enjoy once again the flavors of Calabria. He takes his children back to Carfizzi every summer, so they can also have the same experience he had growing up. Carmine Abate, the author, becomes also the narrator in this novel.

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<sup>62</sup> *Knödel* in German. They are a type of thick gnocchi.

The first page of the novel opens with French novelist Jean-Claude Izzo's quote that states: "Cucinare, mangiare vuol dire questo: accogliere. Gli amori, gli amici, i figli, i nipoti." ("To cook, to eat it means to be embraced. The loved ones, the friends, the children and the grandchildren"). Abate opens the story by this quote to inform that this is not a recipe book and here food does not represent only a way of killing hunger. He uses meals and food preparation as a time to be together in family gatherings, with friends and in good company. He remembers with nostalgia the times he was being pampered by his grandmother and mother. All of their attention was on Carmine to make sure he was fed with the best dishes the region of Calabria had to offer.

The first chapter of *Il Banchetto di nozze e altri sapori* starts when the narrator is seven years old and he has just overcome a bad illness. Everyone in the family takes very good care of him afterwards, especially the grandmother. She would do everything to pamper her grandson, especially when it came to food. She would make him *la frittatica mare e monti*, a type of omelet made with "olio, cinque uova delle galline nostre, due cucchiariate di sardella, un trancio di tonno e qualche fungo sott'olio, una cipolla rossa, un pizzico di pepe e sale" ("oil, five eggs from our own chicken, two spoons of sardines, a slice of tuna and some pickled mushroom, a red onion and a pinch of pepper and salt"; *Il banchetto* 10). The boy remembers how fast the grandmother's hand would work to prepare the dish and he would enjoy the "profumi [che] cominciarono a stuzzicarmi il naso" ("smells that started to tease my nose"; 11). Among other things, ice cream was an everyday thing, especially on hot summer days and fruits of the area such as prickly pears.

In the second chapter the food presentation comes from the narrators cousin's wedding. A chef from Arbëria as he calls him, comes from Spezzano Albanese to prepare the food for the wedding, including the women who assist in the food preparation. First they start with appetizers, which include all kinds of salamis, eggplant, olives, tomatoes, and melon. The first plate served right after the appetizers is *shtrydhëlat*. *Shtrydhëlat* is a dish made with homemade pasta seasoned with white beans, oil, garlic and chili peppers.<sup>63</sup> The chef also offered a dish made in his town of Spezzano called *Pishk sauce*, floured fried anchovies wrapped in bread with mint, garlic and vinegar.<sup>64</sup> The ingredients used to prepare the food were from the local region.

The narrator mentions that weddings are times when the house is filled with family members and friends and food is constantly being prepared and served for everyone. Wine is also part of every table and celebration, given that the first ancestors who came from Arbëria brought with them wine. He remembers that the children were allowed to drink half a cup of wine in events such as a wedding but “di nascosto, mentre loro erano intenti a ridere e a cantare canzoni arbëreshe, ne bevemmo uno intero che ci rese ancora più allegri” (“without being seen, as the elders were laughing and singing Arbëresh songs, we drank one whole [glass of wine] which made us even happier”; 21). The Arbëresh are more lenient when it comes to the use of alcohol with children, only allowed in family gatherings and special events.

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<sup>63</sup> See *Il Banchetto* p. 21.

<sup>64</sup> See *Il Banchetto* p. 21.



Figure 10 Picture taken from web site prolocodicivita.it : a kulaçi, a desert from the Arbëresh town of Cività.

The three wedding desserts were *peta*<sup>65</sup>, *mustacualli* and *kulaçi*.<sup>66</sup> They are desserts made with durum wheat flour, olive oil, honey and powdered sugar.<sup>67</sup> They are different shapes such as a shield, rectangular, and round and they are decorated with the couple's initials, hearts, flowers, doves and sugared almonds.



Figure 11 Mustacualli, an Arbëresh desert from the town of Cività, used on weddings, as seen on this picture.

<sup>65</sup> *Peta* is a type of focaccia in the form of shield and doves and eagles were added for decoration. *Peta* was inserted in the tradition as a commemoration of war and victories of Scanderbeg. The doves and the eagles symbolize peace. <http://www.prolococivita.it/ricette-calabresi-arberesh.html#nuseza>

<sup>66</sup> <http://www.prolocodicivita.it/gastronomia-civitese.html#tortano>

<sup>67</sup> See *Il Banchetto* p. 23.

*Mustacualli* (as seen on the picture above, also taken from the site [prolocodicivita.it](http://prolocodicivita.it)), is a typical wedding dessert from the town of Spezzano Albanese and acquires a particular role during the wedding festivities. The couple challenges each other by pulling the dessert on each side, the groom using only one hand and the bride using both of her hands. Whoever gets the largest part, symbolically, will obtain the control of the house.

The narrator remembers that food was always in front of his eyes and his mother who constantly repeats “mangia, bir, mangia tutto, così diventi forte quanto papà tuo” (“eat, son, eat everything, because this way you can become strong as your father”; 25). At times, he wants to become a chef, but he knew for sure he was never going to become one because his mother and his grandmother did not teach him. In fact, he says that, for his mother, “era addirittura sconveniente che un mascolo si sporcasse le mani in cucina” (“was even improper for a male to get his hands dirty in the kitchen”; 28). Therefore, all that was required of him was to grow as a prince or “come il maialetto da ingrasso nella zimba” (“as the fattening little pig in the barn”; 28).

He also remembers that every time the father would leave town for Germany, he was very sad and he would miss him. It was food that he found consoling in such stressful moments: walking through the streets of his hometown with his dog, he would smell the aroma of bread that just came out of the oven and that made him forget his pain. Going through the forest, he would find all kinds of berries and by picking them and eating them, he would find some serenity.

Another festivity that impressed the young narrator is Christmas. He remembers waking up every morning smelling new fragrances of sweets and goodies his mother and grandmother were preparing. These preparations also meant that his father was coming

soon from Germany to spend Christmas with the family. Some of the traditional Christmas desserts he mentions are: *Tardilet*, *krustulet*<sup>68</sup>, *qenullilet*, and *skallilet*.



Figure 12 Fried dough Arbëresh desserts.

As we can see from the pictures taken from Arbëresh website referenced above, that traces the Albanian culture in the Civita cuisine, these desserts are different shapes of fried dough and sprinkled with honey and cinnamon. The children would walk around town on the days before Christmas and collect pieces of wood for the big fire they would light in front of the church on Christmas night. Abate recalls that, when his father comes

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<sup>68</sup> <http://pollino.discoversouthitaly.it/blog/enogastronomia/tracce-di-cultura-albanese-nella-cucina-civite.html>

home, they would harvest the winter fruits such as the prickly pears, lampascione (an unusual Italian onion), the last grapes and the cichory.<sup>69</sup> The narrator remembers that grandma used to say that for Christmas there should be thirteen different plates but sometimes they would overdo it and make even more. These plates were also a treat for his father. For an immigrant, the return to his land and his flavor is even more meaningful: he enjoys the return by finding again the lost flavors he could not find abroad.

Besides the holidays, the narrator mentions that they would find any excuse to get together with family and friends and celebrate by drinking and eating. Another event that filled the house with people was the gathering to celebrate the end of work<sup>70</sup>, in German called *Schlechtwetter*.<sup>71</sup> These were times that adults and children had fun in good company, sharing their food, drink and great stories. When a close relative or a friend came to the house, they had to taste some of grandmother's or mother's food even if they were not hungry. Although this gesture might sound somewhat insistent, it is part of the Arbëresh's hospitality to offer everything to the guest, "tanto per gradire un boccone in compagnia" ("just enough to enjoy a bite in company"; 66).

When Carmine graduates from college in Bari, his whole family and a group of relatives and friends went from Carfizzi to the Apulian city to honor him for his accomplishment. He describes the graduation feast as a small wedding: "Il ristorante intuì che quel padre orgoglioso non avrebbe badato a spese e lo accontentò servendoci un abbondante antipasto ... primo ... secondo ..." ("The restaurant owner grasped that this

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<sup>69</sup> See *Il banchetto* p. 41.

<sup>70</sup> "Il banchetto per festeggiare la fine dei lavori assieme alle persone che ci avevano aiutato e ai loro familiari, compresi i bambini" (47).

<sup>71</sup> *Schlechtwetter*- a break period of work because of bad weather.

proud father would not have minded the expenses and so he pleased him with an abundant appetizer ... first ... second plate”; 88-89).

The first time Carminù, as they call him, goes to Germany, he was 16. His father sends him a ticket so he can spend the summer with him. As one might have already guessed, the bags were filled with food to bring to his father from the homeland.<sup>72</sup> I believe this shows the struggle of every immigrant. Although the new place offers a variety of other food and flavors, what the immigrant craves and looks the food of his hometown, the flavors of his kitchen. Looking back at the past is always something you miss that you cannot find in a new place. As with Marcel Proust’s madeleine, smell and taste of some foods are evocative of the past<sup>73</sup>.

The second part of the novel takes a turn. The traditional and the old days of growing up in a big family and always in food’s company have changed. Now, the adult Carmine who works in an Italian school in Germany has become as he calls himself: “patatàro” (“a potato eater”, or as the German’s say *Kartoffelfresser*, a stereotype, sometimes even as an insult for the Germans; 93). He clarifies that this transformation does not mean he has become a German, but “significa essere un uomo con un palato diviso, o forse con due palati, o forse con un solo miscogliato, insomma non so manco io come spiegarmi” (“it means to be a man with a divided palate, or maybe one with two tastes, or even one with a mixed palate, hence I don’t even know how to explain myself”; 93-94). He realizes that times have changed. He is in a puzzled stage where nostalgia, longing and belonging all kick in.

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<sup>72</sup> See *Il Banchetto* p. 80.

<sup>73</sup> From Proust’s book *In Search of Lost time*.



Later, Carmine becomes more accustomed to the constant swings between Germany, Calabria and Northern Italy. In the labyrinth of his life, Calabria and Carfizzi are always his home and where he finds his heart and soul, the place that brings him back to the good old days of good eating. As he gets ready to depart again, his mother makes sure to pack enough food for a good while. Although Carmine tries to keep a balance between his places, he never seems to forget where he comes from and the memories he has of his past. His next move is to Trentino. The day he was departing from Hamburg, Carmine meets the chef of Arbëria who tells him “ogni luogo è un sapore. Chissà che palato ricco di gusti ti farai vivendo in tanti posti diversi. L’importante è che li aggiungi ai sapori della nostra terra, di quelli siamo fatti nel profondo, della sua scorza odoriamo, anche se viviamo altrove” (“every place is a flavor. Who knows what rich flavors you will find living in all these different places. What is important is that you add them to the tastes of our land. That is what we are made of, deep down; our skin smells of it, even if we are living somewhere else”; 102). The chef is telling the protagonist that every new flavor is a new addition to what they know best. One can appreciate the new tastings from different places but somehow what is familiar and comforting are the flavors and the tastings of one’s own land.

At this point, we find another stratification to the personal history of flavors in Carmine’s life. He marries a girl from Germany. She liked Italy and since they were both accommodated to work in Trentino, they lived in Besenello, in the northern Italian region of Alto Adige. They traveled between Calabria and Germany frequently. Carmine says that they always spent the summer vacations in Calabria and the Christmas festivities in

Germany with his wife's family. He confesses that it is only because of love that he is able to give up the thirteen good things for Christmas they have in Carfizzi.<sup>74</sup>

Carmine says that finding a perfect place to call it home is not an easy task. But he gets used to his home in Trentino after a while and he says that the little garden they put together with blooming begonias, roses, his favorite fig tree, a persimmon tree, a plum tree, a cherry tree and an apricot tree. He states: “ero orgoglioso del nostro giardino, il posto che più mi ricordava la Calabria” (“I was proud of our garden, the place that most reminded me of Calabria”; 117). Even in the new place, Carmine had to create a space that brought him somewhat closer to his roots.

Another important moment of reflection in this book is when Carmine's parents finally decided to visit him and see where he lived. For them, it was a bit disappointing. First, the mother would throw away in the garbage the just purchased mushrooms because she didn't trust them. Then, his father said “qui non hanno l'aria fina che improfuma di mare, non hanno le robbe buone che c'abbiamo noi da mangiare” (“here they don't have the fresh air perfumed of the sea, they don't have the good food we have to eat there”; 119). The parents did not find the North as comforting as their own land. By comparison, the best place that suited them was Calabria, which they knew best. Besides, the father was not approving of his son leaving Carfizzi. His dream was seeing him living there. However, the father approves the German girl for his son exactly after he tries her specialty “la polenta con la 'nduja di Spilinga” (“cornmeal mush with a typical Calabrian spicy salami from the area of Spilinga”). This dish is not a German specialty as one would expect. Her creation is a perfect synthesis of North and South regions of Italy.

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<sup>74</sup> See *Il Banchetto* p. 115.

After fully enjoying the dish, the father said with a loud voice: “questa è una donna con sale” (“this is a woman with salt – an expression which means: this woman has taste”; 120). The father’s approval came from the stomach. As long as the woman was a good cook, she would make a good wife.

In the next few chapters, Abate describes the house he constructed in Carfizzi which they use during the summer. I visited the house in the summer and I have vivid the view of the nature’s panorama, overlooking the veranda. It is that country side view that his father was so fond of his land. He describes the view as solid, rough and concrete but with a bit of work it transforms in flavors, perfumes and gaudy colors. All the fresh fruits and vegetables they get from this land, that go right on the table, are things that made his father was so proud of his land. The homemade oil and the Cirò wine were, among other things, the specialties of the area.

The last layer in this stratified personal history is the passage to the next generation. When Carmine’s first son, Michele, is born, he would take him back to Carfizzi for the usual summer vacation or special occasions. The grandparents would stuff him with food as it was custom. They would visit the same places as described on the first part of this novel, during the times of young Carmine. One of the gestures that surprised little Michele is his grandmother kissing the sand in Punta Alice. He asked what the reason for doing so was, and grandma explains that it was a long tradition. Her mother used to do it as well and it was because the first ancestors arrived by sea and set foot in that same place. Because of them, they get to call this place home and enjoy the goods it has to offer. As Carmine sees his son walking through the same places he used to visit as a young child and eat his grandmother’s food, he relives once again his nostalgic

old days and finds again those flavors and tastings he had missed for a while. Carmine ends the novel with this last sentence: “io mi ritrovai a pochi centimetri dagli occhi azzurri e sorridenti di mio figlio, gli diedi un bacio sulla fronte e lui, grato, mi avvicinò alle labbra la sua cuzzupa che addentai con gusto, ritrovando dopo tanto tempo il sapore perduto della cuntentizza” (“I found myself a couple of centimeters from my son’s cheerful and blue eyes. I gave him a kiss on the forehead and he gratefully placed near my lips his Calabrian Easter cake that I tasted with enthusiasm, finding again after a long time the lost flavor of happiness ”; 164). Typical tastes and typical sounds of his land mingle in this sentence: the last word is extremely flavorful as it is in dialect, “cuntentizza,” and perfectly expresses the mixed sensations coming from food, feeling, and place. Although Carmine tried to make his home in Trentino as comfortable as possible, the real happiness he finds is back home in Carfizzi where the memories return, the view is inviting and the flavors of the Calabrian food play with his taste buds, and with his heart at the same time.

## ARBËRESH CULTURE HOLDING ON UTOPIA

This chapter analyzes narratives written by Arbëresh authors of the last century, such as Pino Caccoza, Anna Stratigò, Adam Yamey and Sara Bell. These authors wove narrations starting from their personal memories and stories told by others. They reflect the lives of the Arbëresh in southern Italy, in towns that are constantly being confronted with the clash between the mythic past and everyday reality. Because they deal with memoirs, they constitute important sources to uncover elements of Arbëresh culture that have penetrated time and generations. In addition, I will include recent documentaries filmed in Calabria such as *Speciale Arbëreshet me vallet dhe kostument 500 vjecare* (*Special: The Arbëresh with their dances and 500 year costumes*) and *Shqiptare si Arbëreshët* (*Albanians as the Arbëresh*) that portray culture through dance and costumes. These documentaries portray the most recent Arbëresh cultural trends and document performances and rituals. The documentary *Speciale Arbëreshet me vallet dhe kostument 500 vjecare* includes interviews with young Italian-Arbëresh performers who represent recent changes in culture as opposed to the culture presented by the authors forty or fifty years ago. Lastly, I will share my experience in visiting the Arbëresh towns in Calabria.

### **Finding Arbëresh Culture in Written and Oral Narratives**

I selected the narratives of authors such as Anna Stratigò, Adam Yamey and Sara Bell because they all write stories based on their life experiences, memories and reflections of their past – and thus they are representative of the entire cultural group.

Sara Jane Bell is a young scholar who researched the Arbëresh town of Chieuti, and her thesis *My Heart Sings to Me: Song as the Memory of Language in the Arbëresh Community of Chieuti*, written for her MA Degree at the University of North Carolina, demonstrates that songs are used as memory of the Arbëresh language. Through singing and performance, the people of Chieuti act out their collective narratives of longing, belonging, nostalgia, history and sense of place. She studies the community involvement of the members of the folkloristic group and notices their desire to bring the culture and the songs forward to the young generation. Donato Meola and Giorgio Dell'Acquila informed Bell about their efforts to revitalize the songs they heard from their grandparents and parents. With the determinations of other people from the community,<sup>75</sup> they formed the Gruppo Arbëresh di Chieuti. They recorded Arbëresh songs that accepted the dual role of being both sentimental and vibrantly current. They choose songs that recalled the past but also gave them a new vibe. They also perform in cultural events in Chieuti and in other Arbëresh towns.

The efforts of the group are geared to work together to bring their culture forward and make it more appealing to the young generation and getting them involved in cultural events shows in their songs, which remain somewhat traditional. At the same time they also strive to “free them from a certain traditionalism” (59). They performed their very particular experience as a generation of musicians, who were challenged to negotiate the vast cultural and temporal fissure that had divided their community. Bell acknowledges the musicians “dual role of being both deeply nostalgic and vibrantly current, and when

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<sup>75</sup> Giovanni Rimenti, Antonio Fiadino, Nicola DeVirgilio, Nicola Bucci, Antonella Calo, Virginia Carducci, Giorgio Selvaggi, Giorgio Cuccia, Domenico Gallucci, Giovanni Licursi, Donato's brother Leonardo Meola, and Angela's brother Raffaele Dell'Aquila

they hit the road to perform the traditional music of their community they wove relationships between audience and performer that manifested as reflexive and highly political” (59). Their efforts extended beyond Chieuti, and they connected with the rest of the Arbëresh in Southern Italy with the purpose of the diffusion and preservation of the Arbëresh Culture. One of the songs included in their first cassettes is the well known song “O e bukura More” filled with nostalgia for the long lost home:

<p>O e bukura More  Si të le  U më ngë të pe!  Si të le  Si të le  Si të le  U më ngë të pe!  Atje kam u zotin tat  Atje kam u zojën meme  Atje kam edhe t'im vëlla</p>	<p>O beautiful Morea  Since I left you  No longer do I see you  Since I left you  Since I left you  Since I left you  No longer do I see you  There I have a father  There I have a mother  There I have a brother too.</p>
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Table 3 Song taken from Sara Bella p. 65.

Another researcher, Adam Yamey, describes his experience in visiting the Sicilian Arbëreshë in 2014 in his book *From Albania to Sicily*. Adam Yamey is a British author who has written a number of books on his personal experiences and travels to Albania and the Balkans. Since he had already had an interest in Albania, and knew the history of its people, when Yamey heard of the Arbëresh he became interested in going to visit the Arbëresh towns in Sicily. His book is of significance because he describes his travels through the Arbëresh towns of Sicily and he describes in detail the Albanian symbols he found along the way and the Arbëresh people he encounters.

Yamey describes his first encounter in the Arbëresh towns with the emblems and memorial plaques bearing the double-headed eagle. The double-headed eagle is a symbol that first appeared in the heraldry of medieval Albanian noble families and it is said to

have first been put on an Albanian flag by Skanderbeg.<sup>76</sup> The researcher found this symbol present in every corner of a byzantine church, museums and on road signs confirming the land and/or the place was constructed by the Arbëresh since the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The bilingual signs also were noticed by Yamey, differentiating these places from the rest of Italy he knew. He affirms that these signs along with the ubiquitous bilingual road signs emphasized the fact that in Piana degli Albanesi, Albanian, meaning its Arbëresh variant, is without doubt a living language.<sup>77</sup>

Yamey happened to walk passed a building with a sign *Besa*. The word in Albanian means word of honor. *Besa* actually represented the union of the communities-administrative office. The word choice to name this organization is important because *besa* in Albanian culture is a keyword that expresses a fundamental ethic value. In fact, there is an Albanian saying: *Shqiptaret vdesin dhe besen nuk e shkelin* (Albanians would rather die than break the word of honor) which illustrates the significance of this word. *Besa* organizes cultural events and also has put its efforts to establish new branches in reviving the interest in Arbëresh matters. Yamey mentions that the little town of Palazzo Adriano, for example, has lost the spoken Arbëresh language and *Besa* would send people to teach Albanian lessons. This organization covers all the towns in Sicily, and its people are dedicated to including everybody in revitalizing the Arbëresh culture and language.

Yamey mentions that from the beginning of his journey in the Arbëresh towns, he found a friendliness and warmth that was typical of these towns. The Arbëresh were very warm welcoming, and he was surprised to find that everyone in the street greeted them

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<sup>76</sup> Yamey Loc. 352.

<sup>77</sup> Yamey Loc. 722.



and asked how they were enjoying the trip.<sup>78</sup> Yamey noticed that these towns now are filled with African refugees. He affirms that “it seemed most appropriate that the Arbëresh descendants of Albanian refugees from the Balkans, who were given shelter in Sicily, should now be helping today’s refugees from Africa and elsewhere” (Yamey 796). Surprisingly, he noticed that there is no racism among the recent arrival of Africans and the Arbëresh: according to him, this must be due mostly to the fact that the Arbëresh are reminded of the times when their forefathers were on the run from the Ottoman Empire and found shelter in Sicily.

### **Pino Cacoza and his Contribution in Promoting the Arbëresh Culture**



Figure 13 Pino Cacoza dressed in Arbëresh attire.

One of the most important voices contributing to preserve Arbëresh culture is Pino Cacoza. He is a writer, poet and a singer-songwriter from San Demetrio Corone, an Arbëresh who writes poetry and sings songs in the Arbëresh language. He is the director of *Unione Arbëria* which is an organization that stimulates cultural unification of all the

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<sup>78</sup> Yamey Loc. 746.

Arbëresh through social events and festivals. Cacoza is well known to all the Arbëresh, and his name was referred to me by all the locals as the person to speak with in regards to the Arbëresh culture. The interview with him was long and passionate, and I will share some of the author's feedback. Cacoza identifies himself as Arbëresh, but he is also Italian. He says: "sono nato qui, sono Italiano a tutti gli effetti ... gli Arbëresh hanno contribuito per l'Italia" ("I was born here, I am an Italian for all intents ... the Arbëresh contributed to Italy").

In the effort of preserving Arbëresh culture, regular trips to Albania seem to be necessary. Cacoza went there for the first time in 1976 when he was a student and Albania was under Enver Hoxha's Communist regime. He mentions that although Albania's borders were closed, the relationship between Albania and the Arbëresh was good and somehow he felt that there was "un mito di appartenenza" ("a myth of belonging"). The language between the Albanians and the Arbëresh still remains the biggest linkage and fundamental to the connection. Cacoza describes this connection as "siblings" who were separated at birth. He says that being Arbëresh means to have *ndjenja* (feeling), to feel as an Arbëresh and to embody the language the antique traditions, the rituals, the costumes and the story of the motherland.

When Cacoza was asked about the changes in the Arbëresh culture and the efforts for its maintenance, he replied that cultures do evolve naturally, and they automatically transform. Globalization and the imposing of the dominant languages have a great effect on the Arbëresh. He admits that there is contamination of *calabresismi* and *italianismi*, but he refuses to say that the Arbëresh language will die. He says: "muoiono tante lingue, non l'Arbëresh ... si puo' modificarsi ma non morire" ("many languages die

but not the Arbëresh language ... it can be modified, but it cannot die”). He explains his position by stating that the Arbëresh cannot vanish, because Albanian is spoken in two nations: Albania and Kosovo. The language can be modified but it will not die. He acknowledges that the efforts of the community, the families, and the political projects from the Italian state for minorities are elements that together can bring the language and the culture forward.

Cacozza states that memories are important. Without them you are nothing, you die. He has many memories of legends, fables, wedding rituals that can be put into a book. In fact, lately, he is working on a novel based on his memories. For what he has already published, Cacozza has been recognized by winning the “Premio Mediterraneo d’Arte e Creatività” in 2009 and also the Albanian President recently honored him the title “Naim Frasheri për letërsi.”<sup>79</sup>

Cacozza’s collection of rhapsodies and poetry titled *Rrënjat e Arbërisë* (The roots of Arbëria) is filled with nostalgia, recalling the past and the roots of the Arbëresh’s existence. Italo Costante Fortino states in the *Presentation* of this collection that Pino Cacozza’s collection reminds us of the role of the *rapsodi* of antiquity. They were central characters of the cultural life of a population, and having inherited the traditional patrimonies, the values and visions of life, they unfolded the role of tutors and transmitters of the culture to the younger generations’.<sup>80</sup> Cacozza’s recital is a return to the origins of the loved and abandoned land. Recalling the past brought in the present, creates a new cycle of inviting the younger generation to listen and to be familiar with their past and history. The past gives new energy to the present.

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<sup>79</sup> The title Naim Frasheri for literature.

<sup>80</sup> See p. 5.

In Cacozza’s poetry, Scanderbeg is again recognized as the spiritual founder of Arbëria. “Vdekja e Scanderbeg”<sup>81</sup> (“The Death of Scanderbeg”) is a poem written in 2009. This poem recollects the beginning of the Arbëresh community. The death of Scanderbeg was devastating for all the Albanians because it meant collapse. The faith and the hope the people had built on Scanderbeg’s figure to save the land from the hands of the Ottoman Empire was shattered. Nevertheless, Scanderbeg was a father and God-like figure who saved them from the domination of the Turks for the Arbëresh. They praise his glory by weaving poetic lines about him as a legendary figure who will never be forgotten. He will always be remembered and his name will be known for generations to come.

#### The Death of Scanderbeg

<p>Trihimisu, Arbëri!          Eni Zonja e bularë          Eni te vapëhta e ushtërtorë          Eni e qani me hjidhi          Sot te varfëra qëndruat          Pa prindin që ju porsinej          Ju porsin’ e ndihnej          E më hjenë e vashavet          Më harenë e gjitonivet          As kini kush të ju ruanjë          Prindi e Zoti i Arbërit          Ai vdiq që somenatë          Skandërbeku s’është më...</p>	<p>Move, Arbëria!          Run ladies and gentleman          Get together people and soldiers          Come to cry with grief          Today you have remained poor          Without the father who directed          The one who advised, helped          No more honor of the women          The joy of the neighborhood          No one who can protect you          The Father and the God of Arbër          He died this morning          Skanderbeg is no longer here...</p>
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Table 4 originally published in: Pino Cacoza, 2009, *Rrënjat e Arbërisë*. The Arbëresh has been translated by Edna Lubonja.

One of the aspects of the mythical utopia, the link between past-present-future, is underlined in another important poem: “Ku jam u...Ka vij u...Ku vete?” (“Who am

<sup>81</sup> Taken from the collection of poems titled *Rrënjat e Arbërisë* p. 12.

I...where I come from...where I'm going?").<sup>82</sup> Cacozza's poem summarizes in short verses who are the Arbëresh. References of the East and across the Adriatic Sea turn the heads toward Albania, the land where they came from. It is the unforgotten land where they brought all their treasures, referenced in the poem as "gold," which means their language, culture, traditions and rituals. There are some unanswered questions when it comes to the identity of the narrator: Who am I? Where am I going? But the last verse confirms that what he is sure of is his past that he carries with him in his present.

Who am I...Where I come from...Where I'm Going?

<p>Kush jam u?          Jam Ajri I ngrohtë që ka dejti Jonë          Sillen mallin e vjeter          Jam loti i ngritur që ka nata          Nxiren shpirtin më të zi          Ka vinj u?          Thonë si vinj ka errësira më e thellë          E kam me mua një thes me arë          Thone se vinj ka drita e lindjes          E kam me mua frymen e gjuhes illire          Kush jam u, poka? Ka vinj? Ku vete?          Jam era e lulevet ndë verë          Çë dridhen lëkurën e dheut          Jam pjaku I krusur me një djal mbrënda          Çë tundet e këndon          U nëng e di ku vete... u nëng e di që          çonj...          Po di se gjëndem... te buka e te vera....</p>	<p>Who am I?          I am the warm breeze from the Ionian sea          That brings the antique nostalgia          I'm the cold tear that from night          Hunts the blackest spirit          Where do I come from?          They say I come from the deepest obscurity          I bring with me a bag of gold          They say I come from the Eastern light          And I have with me the breath of the Illyrian          language          So Who Am I? Where do I come from?          Where Am I going?          I am the smell of the flowers in the spring          That trembles the world's skin          I am that old, tired man with a child inside of          me          That moves around and sings          I don't know where I'm going... I don't know          what I will find...          What I know is that you will find me there...          in the bread and wine...</p>
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Table 5 originally published in: Pino Cacoza, 2009, *Rrënjat e Arbërisë*. The Arbëresh has been translated by Edna Lubonja.

<sup>82</sup> *Rrënjat e Arbërisë* p. 28.

In Cacozza's poem, living and breathing the language and the culture is an everyday activity for an Arbëresh. The archetype of the *rapsodi* becomes apparent in the character of the old man, even old and tired, does not rest in singing the songs and rhapsodies that recall the past and the history of who he is. No matter where life takes them, or what they will find on the way, what has become apparent at the end of this poem is that the Arbëresh will always go back to their roots, to the bread and wine.

Cacozza's piercing list of questions recall the eternal question of the immigrant identity. We find the same conundrum in the Italian-American poet Joseph Tusiani who migrated from Italy as an adult and bears the scars of this laceration in his soul. Poem titled "Song of Bicentennial" reveals his confusion and brings up questions that are often unanswered.

Two languages, two lands, perhaps two souls?  
I dare not ask these flowers I know well,  
each of them making its one calyx bright.  
Nor can I question that forbidding oak:  
    Though low and long, its roots  
Cease at the hindrance of the nearest brook  
    As if abhorring alienness of ground.  
Then, who will solve this riddle of my day?  
Two languages, two lands, perhaps two souls...  
Am I a man or two strange halves of one?  
    Somber, indifferent light,  
    setting before me with a sneer of glow,  
    because there is no answer to my plight.  
I find some solace only in this thought—  
    That maybe, just as this revolving earth  
must not proclaim your triumph all at once,  
I two must be, while waiting for my dawn,  
    the night of my own self.  
Or maybe, just as your unbridled flame  
Would, individed, scald this hemisphere  
    And turn it into ashes, I fulfill  
My human fate by giving you, O sun,  
a chance of mercy of my helpless life.

Table 6 originally published in: Joseph Tusiani, 1978, *Gente Mia and Other Poems*.

Both these authors thread in verse their struggle of finding themselves split in two different worlds, thoughts and states of mind. Tusiani finds himself in the middle of Atlantic Ocean as Cacoza finds himself in the middle finds of the Adriatic Sea. They both talk about the depth of the dark, the night that reflects the past. The past holds a remorse that transcends in the present and in the future. The fear of not knowing is evident in both poems as well. Not forgetting where you come from, is a clear command in these poems.

The theme of persistence is present in another poem by Pino Cacoza titled: “Jemi një culturë që ngë mënd vdes” (“We are a culture that cannot die.”)<sup>83</sup> This poem has a message for the Arbëresh, reminding them that the Arbëresh culture will live and it cannot die. Cacoza takes excerpts from everyday life, history and memories to remind his people who they are and where they come from. The efforts that have been spent in five hundred years to bring this culture forward need to be continued. By refreshing his fellow countrymen’s memories, Cacoza reinforces the hard work their ancestors have done to reconstruct the life in the new and demanding land. The repetitive refrain of this poem is also significant, because it begs for unity. Only together as a community, the memories, the history and the past will have a future.

#### We are a Culture that Cannot Die

Na jemi burri I lodhur pa lot e pa hare	We are the tired man with no tears and no happiness
Jemi balta te balta, jemi i treti dhe	We are mud over mud, we are third world
Na jemi trimi I mbitur që rri e vete praptë	We are the stiff youngster who is fixed and loses ground
Jemi nana që lireu deren haptë	We are the grandmother who leaves the door open
Na jemi gruja që pret, pjaku që dridhet	We are the wife that awaits, the old man who trembles

<sup>83</sup> *Rrënjat e Arbërise* p.32.

Jemi djali që shllon dhëmbet te qaramidhet	We are the boy that throws his teeth on the shingles <sup>84</sup>
Mirremi për dora	Let's hold hands
Se jemi vëllezer e motra	We are brothers and sisters
Jemi nje culture që ngë mënd vdes	We are a culture that cannot die
Na jemi aresha që prest verën sa të zgjohet	We are the bear who waits for the spring to wake up
Jemi nusja që ngë sheh heren të martohet	We are the bride who can't wait to get married
Na jemi djali të barku që ngë du për lehet	We are the boy in the womb who doesn't know why he's born
Jemi burri i humbur që çon forcën të dehet	We are the defeated man who finds the force to get drunk
Na jemi i treti dhe që nëng mend vdes	We are the third world that cannot die
Jemi Ajri, suval'e dejtit, jemi lumi arbëresh	We are the breeze, the wave of the sea, the Albanian river
Mirremi për dora	Let's hold hands
Se jemi Vëllezer e motra	We are brothers and sisters
Jemi nje culture që nëng vdes	We are a culture that cannot die
Na jemi ata që fjasen me zëmëren të dora	We are the ones who speak with the hand on our hearts
Jemi dielli ndë verë, ndë dimër jemi bora	We are the sun of the summer, in the winter we are the snow
Na jemi pesqind vjet storje e kale ndër duar	We are 500 years of history and calluses on our hands
Jemi shpia e bënë me djers e tue kënduar	We are the house made of sweats and singing
Na jemi buka të tryza, lulja të muri	We are the bread on the table, the flower on the wall
Jemi fara që lulëzon edhe të guri	We are the seed that blooms even on the rock
Mirremi për dora	Let's hold hands
Se jemi vëllezer e motra	We are brothers and sisters
Jemi një culture që ngë mend vdes	We are a culture that cannot die

Table 7 originally published in: Pino Cacoza, 2009, *Rrënjat e Arbërisë*. The Arbëresh has been translated by Edna Lubonja.

Another interesting poem is Cacoza's "The Albanian and the Wolf"<sup>85</sup>, geared toward describing another important aspect of Arbëresh experience: the struggle for their

<sup>84</sup> In the Arbëresh and Albanian culture when the children's baby teeth are falling out they say to throw from the top of the roof for good luck so the new teeth will come nice and straight.

<sup>85</sup> *Rrënjat e Arbërisë* p. 38.



acceptance and respect in the new land. This extended poem refers to the times when the Arbëresh and the Italians were not getting along. As it has been mentioned in the previous chapters, the Arbëresh were seen as bandits and they were despised to the point that the Italians had this saying, when you see an Albanian and a wolf, kill the Albanian and let the wolf live. The poem calls the Italians, referred as “my friend,” to open their eyes and to realize that at the end they are the same and they share the same rights. Not least, because both the Italians and the Arbëresh fought for the same wars and they together fought with Garibaldi and for the resistance against the Germans in World War II.

Cacozza recalls all the well-known men who died for liberty and for the well-being of this land. He asks the Italians for recognition and not pushing them aside. The poem touches on the struggles of the Arbëresh for survival and the different ways they seek to survive. The Arbëresh appear strong, courageous, fighting for their own rights, and maintaining what is their own and close to heart. Cacozza lists Arbëresh names and events that made history, and ends the poem by asking the Italians the question: who are they going to kill? This question begs the Italian part to rethink and reconsider the question of minorities, specifically the Arbëresh. The last line clarifies once again that as a community they are protected and will continue to promote and bring forward their treasures such as the language, culture and traditions. Cacozza adopts a strong provocative tone in this poem. The poem reads as if the author is directly speaking with the Italian, confronting him/her to realize who is the Albanian minority and their contributions to the Italian land.

## The Albanian and the Wolf

<p>                 Thuame, o shok, gjellen tende                  Se dal'e dale u te thom timen                  U rittim bashke me lule e lende                  Te keto rruga çë na nistin frymen                  Bashke shkuaam luftrat me te keqe                  Per shpine, per dheun e per shencen                  Bashke vume ngrah malet e rregjevet                  Te Garibaldit e te Rezistences                  Vellezerat Mauro vdiqtin per lirine                  Ashtu Milano, Dramis, De Rada, Bafi e                  Stratikoi                  E shume te tjera trimeria i bekoj                    Per tia...per tia... edhe per tia...oj Arbëri                  E beme bashke Italine                  E thone librat e shkolles, gurat e glorjes                    E na haruan, jashte na shlluan                  Me kepuca qumbi shkeltin historine                  Bashke qeme atje nde mal                  Gjinde pa emer, latrone buke                  Bashke i veme te gjitha kundet                  Me ligjat e verteta e ato çë munden                  E qeme bixantine, greke e romane                  Aq letire, arabe e normane                  Te vdekur uri u veme brigante                  Te vdekur uri u veme emigrante                  Tek Merika e begat e tek ajo e nemur                  Sollde e mut te ky dhe i shtrembur                  Sulltim paqe e dashuri kudo vame                  Per vendin tone, per keto kater mura                  I shkuaam te gjitha, nje mile e njeqind                  E mbi nesh ra cdo shkundullim                  Me Shen Merine tek zemra e me tynezot                  Shkomi bashke edhe ditën sot                  Fort therresin atje ku jane                  Dorsa, Krispi, Gramshi e Mortati                  Fjalën dhe udhën çë na thane                  E shomi gjithëher kun na i sualli fati                  Do ten a presin gjuhen! Do ten a                  xhikarnjen                  Do te na... globalixarnjen                  Jemi minoritet, jemi pjukur nde bote                  Njo Shpirti im! Benie rrobot             </p>	<p>                 Tell me, my friend, your life                  And little by little I'll tell you mine                  We grew up together with flowers and acorns                  In these streets that gave us our first breath                  Together we won the hardest battles                  For the house, for the land and for science                  Together we wore the shirts of the kings                  That of Garibaldi and the Resistance                  The Mauro brothers<sup>86</sup> died for liberty                  So did Milano, Dramis, De Rada, Baffi and                  Straticò                  And many more others are honored for their                  braveries                  For you... for you... also for you, o Arbëria                  We both constructed Italy                  The school books say it and so do the rocks of                  glory                  But they forgot about us, and they threw us out                  With lead shoes they crushed the history                  Together we were, there in the mountains                  People with no names, thieves of bread                  But together we had everything                  With the true laws and those that were possible                  We were byzantines, Greeks and Romans                  Many Latins, Arabs and Normans                  Dying of hunger we became bandits                  Dying of hunger we became immigrants                  In the rich and poor America                  Money and shit in this crooked world                  We brought piece and love everywhere                  For our land, for these four walls                  We went through all, a thousand and one hundred                  And every earthquake fell on us                  With the Virgin Mary and our God at heart                  We will pass together even this day                  With strength they shout where they are                  Dorsa, Krispi, Gramsci and Mortati<sup>87</sup>                  The word and the way they indicated to us                  Let's see where destiny will direct us                  They want to cut our tongue! They want to strip                  us                  They want... to globalize us                  We are minority, we are powder on land                  Here is my spirit! Make it a robot             </p>
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<sup>86</sup> Raffaele and Domenico Mauro From San Demetrio Corone

<sup>87</sup> Referring to the last names of Arbëresh personalities who were noted in the Italian Risorgimento such as Francesco Krispi, Antonio Gramsci, Vincenzo Dorsa and Costantino Mortati.

<p>Eni! Xa, eni! Njo stamaqi! U nëng iki, jo  Shkrehmni ketu, se jam arbëresh e jam  letir  Neng e kini fare nje cike nder,  popopopo...  Neng ju mer turpja... oj sa ishe me mire  Qasu tek u, kumba, rimmi afer e rrimi qet</p> <p>Se jemi...njo... faregje...roçkari  Shkrehni! Shkrehni! E per njeter pesqind  vjet  Ju rri te trute si driza nder sy  Ketu kundrela diellit që na dha jete</p> <p>Eshte I varrosur “u gjegju”, arbereshi, i  shkreti  I vrare ka kush? E thomi fjalen e vertet  I marr ka moti, i vdekur uri, i vdekur eti  E me falni ndese sot ju jap disturb  Si thone Letinj “quannu scontri nu gjegju  e nu lupu...”  Oj kumba, a kini vo ammazzari, që mban  te gjalle</p> <p>Se, njo, jemi te ruajtur si dy animel te  ralle...</p>	<p>Come on, come. Here is my chest, No worries I  don't escape  Shoot at me here, because I am Albanian and  Latin  You don't even have the smallest honor, oh my!</p> <p>Don't be ashamed... when it was much better  Come closer, friend, we are together and we are  quiet  Because we are... nobody...platitude  Shoot! Shoot! And for another 500 years</p> <p>We will be in your minds as grains in the eye  Here in front of the sea that gave us life</p> <p>Is buried the Albanian, the Arbëresh, the poor</p> <p>Who killed him? Let's say the truth  Wiped out with time, hunger and thirst  And sorry if I disturb you  Italians say: “when you encounter an Albanian  and a wolf...”  My friend, who do you want to kill, and who do  you keep alive</p> <p>Can't you see that we are protected like two rare  animals...</p>
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Table 8 originally published in: Pino Cacoza, 2009, *Rrënjat e Arbërisë*. The Arbëresh has been translated by Edna Lubonja.

There is sadness and irony in this poem. At times, the author confronts his compatriots as enemy that is trying to confront him, and other times, he calls them as friends trying to make them understand reality. He brings to the table the history of Italy as a nation where the Arbëresh are not excluded but their efforts and awards are overlooked. Cacoza invites his compatriots to recognize Arbëria and the Arbëresh for who they are, what they have contributed to this country, and to break the anger as the Arbëresh have all the rights to be where they are.

## Documentaries as a Source of Cultural Representation

A precious testimony of current Arbëresh culture is the recent documentary, *Speciale Arbëreshet me vallet dhe kostument 500 vjecare* (Special: The Arbëresh and their 500 years dances and costumes) filmed in April of 2014 by video journalist Naum Lasku, is set in the Arbëresh town of Cività in Calabria, or *Cifti* as the locals call it. In the Region of Calabria there are about fifty Arbëresh towns that identify themselves with the Arbëresh culture, although some of them have lost some of its elements, the language for example. This documentary centers around the events happening on April 22, in the town of Cività, a festive day when the Arbëresh from all the different towns gather to celebrate, walking around town and gathering at the main piazza singing and dancing the *vallja* and showcasing their traditional costumes. The majority of participants of this event are young, confirming that there is still interest from the new generation to know about their roots and to show where they come from, although many of them do not know too much about Albania today, the old Arbëria where their ancestors came from.

The journalist interviews the participants of this event, and one of the interviewees, responding in a mix of Italo-Arbëresh, affirms that the colorful costumes they are wearing were made about 200 years ago. She also states that for these types of events they practice the singing and dancing for almost a year. She confesses that the inheritance of the culture and the teaching of the rhapsodies, dances and performances are alive as a result of family and *miq* (family friends) who have passed them on to the next generations. Her confession confirms once again the closeness of the community is central in contributing towards its cultural preservation.

A group from Mongrassano, the province of Cosenza, a town of Arbëresh descent that has lost the Arbërisht, is also participant in this event. They are all young adults dressed in traditional costumes and they sing and dance just like the rest embracing the remnants of their culture. One of the boys from the group informs that the reason why they no longer speak Arbërisht is because around 1450 a Baron went through this town and “aveva paura dei sutterfugi di di... che insomma potesse andare contro il barone, e quindi ci ha eliminato completamente la nostra lingua” (he was afraid of deception that if this town spoke Arbërisht they were going to go against him, therefore he eliminated completely our language). He continues to say that the reason they are taking part in this event is because everything else has remained in their culture, the costumes, the singing, the dancing and the most important part he affirms “ci sentiamo appartenenti tutti dell’ Arbëria” (we all feel we belong to this culture from Arbëria). He speaks with an enthusiastic tone about this event because it gives them an opportunity to perform their culture all together with the rest of the Arbëresh groups from the other towns around them.

Another interviewee, a performer holding the harmonica on his hands and the Albanian flag around his shoulders expresses that even though he was born and raised in Italy he feels Albanian at heart. Such a cultural event invites the Italian audience who does not miss the chance of being at the show. They demonstrate admiration for the fact that the Arbëresh have shown firmness in the preservation of their culture. An Italian man from Oriolo, a town that is surrounded by four Arbëresh towns around it, says that he lives among the Arbëresh and is glad of it. It is important to note here that because of this proximity he has with the Arbëresh he is so well informed of their being and cultural

events. He asserts that although they understand each other through gestures (because they speak the Arbëresh dialect) he attends these events and states “ammiro questo popolo perché hanno saputo trasformare le terre, che erano le più desolate, in luoghi pieni di vita” (I admire these people because they knew how to transform these lands, which were deserted, in places full of life). In fact, he admires the fact that they have a sense of community and dynamism which he does not see in his own Italian culture. He states that the Arbëresh are active and they live and perform their culture every day and he really appreciates this attitude which he doesn't find in his own culture.

Two other Italian women were interviewed and they express their thoughts about this community, as both of them married into an Arbëresh family. The first woman states that Arbëresh make one feel comfortable and very welcoming. It is a town that has a lot to give and has a lot of pride. The journalist jokingly provokes the second woman if the Arbëresh men are better than the Italians and she laughingly nods, yes. Both women show how they were immersed in the Arbëresh life, and follow the family traditions.

This documentary shows that today the community has opened the doors for the Italians to come in to their community and also many of the Arbëresh moved outside of their cultural boundaries. But what they still save and hold onto is what their ancestors have given them the traditions, the costumes, the songs and the dances. They are proud of who they are and for what they represent. They gather as a community and perform their traditions to provide awareness within their community and for the younger generation but also for the rest of the larger society, as they showed in the *vallja* event.

In conclusion, as we saw in Abate's novels, this documentary shows that what is the fundamental element that keeps this culture alive is the sense of community and the

older generation, the family and friends that keep it together. The gatherings, the performances, the traditions, the rhapsodies, the costumes, the language, even spread words here give life to a culture that has surpassed time and places and it is still standing strong.

Another documentary filmed in Albania portrays the maintenance of the Arbëresh culture through voices of three of the highest clerics of the byzantine ritual. This documentary is directed by Ilva Tare, a journalist for *Ora News* and presenter of the show *Tonight*. She invited from Arbëria of Italy Papàs Antonio Bellusci, from the parish of Lungro, who is also the founder of the magazine *Illyria*; Donato Oliverio, the Bishop of the Eparchy of Lungro appointed since May of 2012; and the vicar of the Bishop, Pietro Lanza. The bishop says that this is the first time they are visiting Albania to “puthim dheun e atërve tane, dhe te shtrengojme doren te gjithe vellezerve me zemer dhe me lidhjen qe na mban” (kiss the land of our forefathers and to shake hands with all of our brothers we have at heart and for the connection we all have that cannot keep us apart). He seems emotional about seeing the land of the forefathers for the first time, the land that they know only through antiquity, legends, and rhapsodies.

The Bishop also tells of the first time he visited the Pope. The first thing the Pope asked him was how the Arbëresh have succeeded to keep their language, traditions, and rituals for six hundred years. Oliverio’s answer was that it is God’s will, the people’s disposition and their hearts that keep the traditions going. Lanza says that when they arrived in Albania their eyes were filled with happy tears and their hearts were full of joy that they got to touch the land of their forefathers. He also mentions that they are proud to have the common core of their culture with Albania and to have been able to save it from

one generation to the next for over five centuries. Perhaps this was a moment of reality for them to finally see with their own eyes the similarities the Albanians and the Arbëresh share in language, traditions and culture.

In the show, Pieta Lanza sings a song he has written, titled *Himni i vellazerimit* (the Hymn of Brotherhood):

Kur Arbëreshet gjendemi bashke	When the Arbëresh find each other
Kur dy Arbëresh japin doren	when two Arbëresh hold hands
Skanderbegu vjen nga qielli	Scanderbeg comes from heaven
E vjen e ri bashke me ne	and he comes and stays with us
E me e bukura kopilje	and the most beautiful girl
Vishet ari, vishet si nuse	dresses with gold, dresses as a bride
Dora, dora me trimin	and hand in hand with the fearless man
Vjen e luan per Skanderbegun	she comes to dance for Scanderbeg
Marmi doren o vëllezer	let's hold hands o Brothers
Se na jemi gjaku i shprisht	because we are the scattered blood

Table 9 originally sung at the show Tonight by Ilva tare titled "Shqiptare si Arbëreshet" in 2014. The Arbëresh is translated by Edna Lubonja.

This song delivers the message of unity and community. Scanderbeg, the Arbëresh's savior fought for unity and working together to save what is valuable. The Arbëresh follow his remarks to stay together as a community, by holding hands, singing and dancing together and preserving their culture and traditions. The repetition of holding hands reinforces the message of being united, no matter the distance. The concept of being Arbëresh is one for all the community.

Bellusci explains the deeper meaning of this song by saying that for the Albanians who live in the diaspora, the ones that constructed a life outside the confines of the Albanian state today, the feelings for the lost motherland are much stronger. He continues to say that, at times when the world today wants to divide us and make enemies, we sing as an invitation to hold hands together and be more united. The distances of the Arbëresh,



wherever they are, does not matter, because once they find each other and reunite, the scatted blood becomes one again.

The Arbëresh bishops are chosen and nominated by the Pope. The Arbëresh are Catholics who follow the Greco-byzantine rituals. This is the only difference from the rest of the Italian Catholics. During my summer research I had the honor of meeting the Bishop in Lungro and he was very clear to explain to me that thanks to the Byzantine ritual, the traditions have been saved and this ritual has contributed to the preservation of the language. He admits that some priests do not do their best in using the Arbëresh language during liturgy but he assures that in Lungro the Mass is sung in Greek and Arbëresh.

The Bishop says that today there are 30,000 Arbëresh and 30 Arbëresh villages around Calabria. He is optimistic and says that the children do come to church and they sing the liturgy in Arbëresh and they are introduced to the language at home as well. Bellusci adds that the conscience of being of Arbëresh descent leads also to learn to find out more about ones background, culture, language and ritual. In the end, it is the religious community and the family that stimulate the younger generation to participate, to find interest in the community and be a part of it.

## THE ARBËRESH OF CALABRIA AND THEIR “CONFESSIONS”

I base this more strictly ethnographic part of my research on Naomi Quinn’s belief that testimonies and conversation are the best methods of finding culture. In her book *Finding Culture through Talk*, she maintains that, “cultural analysis is to tease out, for discourse, the cultural meanings that underlie in it” (4). Therefore, I decided to expand my research by visiting the Arbëresh towns in Calabria and interviewing the locals. The purpose of this trip was to observe in close proximity how the Arbëresh live their lives today and to define Arbëresh culture through communicating and interviewing the locals and observing their efforts in keeping their Arbëresh cultural utopia alive.

The questions posed to the interviewees consisted of the following: 1) whether they consider themselves Italians, Arbëresh or Italo-Arbëresh; 2) who can be considered Arbëresh and what qualities do they need to have; 3) how it feels to live in Italy as a minority; 4) whether they ever visited Albania; 5) what connection they find with Albania the country and the Albanian people; 6) how they feel about the future of the Arbëresh culture and where it is heading to; 7) what are some of the efforts that need to be done in order to save the Arbëresh culture; 8) what objects they own at home that represent the Arbëresh culture; 9) what memories of the past, songs, rhapsodies they know; and lastly 10) if they know who is Carmine Abate and what do they think of him as an Italo-Arbëresh author. In this section of the dissertation, I distill their most interesting answers to these questions, to make a cohesive presentation of Arbëresh culture.

The interviewees were mostly from the towns of San Demetrio Corone and Lungro but I also contacted other people from the close by Arbëresh towns of San Cosmo, Carfizzi, and Macchia Albanese. In total, there were 40 interviewees and their ages ranged from eighteen to ninety. Most of the interviewees who accepted to be interviewed were professors, poets, cultural activists, artists and people who had some education. I found interesting that some of the local elderly people did not want to participate in the interview because they thought there were not capable of answering the questions. Therefore they would direct me to speak with a well-known person in town.

The first town I visited was San Demetrio Corone, in the province of Cosenza, a small Arbëresh town surrounded by four other Arbëresh towns: San Giorgio Albanese, Vaccarizzo, San Cosmo and Macchia. The trip to reach this town was tricky for a foreigner and finally, as I thought I was arrived, I discovered there still was a big hike as the town stands on a mountain. The difficulty of reaching these sites is already an important element in locating Arbëresh culture: it is secluded and protected as a hidden jewel, an ace in the hole. Plus, the location conformed to the strategic location the first Albanian warriors looked for when they first landed in Italy.

The first detail that left an impression is that although these towns are located in Calabria, the people do not speak the Calabrian dialect, and they surely do not want to be identified as *calabresi*. Bruno, one of the interviewees who became a friend and was kind enough to show me around town, said that if they really try they can speak the Calabrian dialect but it is somewhat choppy and the *calabresi* always make fun of them speaking it. Therefore, they have given it up as a lost cause but they do not to forget the confrontations the Arbëresh had with the *calabresi* throughout the years. Whatever the

reason is, there is a linguistic gap between the town and the region, and the inhabitants simply identify as Italo-Arbëresh. They speak standard Italian and Arbëresh.

San Demetrio is a small town of 35 hundred inhabitants. There is one main boulevard in town where the four cafes can be found. During the day, these cafes and the seats in the piazza are mostly filled with men who are not afraid to throw gazes at girls passing by, especially an unknown face. By night the boulevard, the piazza and the bars are filled with families, children and young people who like to enjoy a nice long stroll along the road and then sit down on the benches and coffee tables. It is an everyday routine and in such a short period of time a foreigner can become easily familiar with the locals.

For small towns such as San Demetrio, the laid-back lifestyle is very common. Everybody knows everybody and words get around very fast. The locals are friendly and very welcoming. As soon as I told them I was a student from the United States, born in Southern Albania and specifically in the city of Korça, they started singing a well-known serenade from my hometown: “O moj Korçare sa e bukur je...” (O Korça girl how beautiful you are...). To some extent, it was shocking and surprising at the same time to find out the majority of them knew this song. Although centuries have passed and barriers have impeded the reunification of the Albanian and the Arbëresh, the songs and the culture have been floating across the Adriatic Sea and preserved the linkage between the two cultural identities. Every time I heard the song from an Arbëresh, it confirmed what the saying “gjaku jone i shprishur” (our dispersed blood) means. Physically we are detached but mentally and culturally there is little distance.

## The Voices of the Arbëresh

### Federico Braile



Figure 14 These pictures were taken at Braile's studio in San Demetrio Corone, Calabria.

Federico Braile is an 84 year old sculptor and painter I met in his studio. He is passionate about his work and he showed me some of his recent paintings, as seen on the pictures above. Among others, were a the portrait of the Arbëresh Bishop, a painting of the lady dressed in the traditional Arbëresh costume and a painting of the Albanian flag with a drawing of his sculpture of Scanderbeg's head. Then, he started to tell me of his memories of his parents and grandparents. According to him, there were just about 60 families who were the founders of San Demetrio and they can be identified by their last names. Today the town has transformed slightly and people from other adjacent towns such as Acri, a non-Arbëresh town, have moved closer to San Demetrio. In the last twenty years or so, also some Albanian families from Albania have made San Demetrio their home, moving here after the fall of communism. As a result of the coming of these "outsiders" who now live in town, the majority of the interviewees confirmed that this is

the reason they speak standard Italian around town and they speak Arbëresh among very close group of friends and at home. I was surprised by the fact that Arbëresh was not used as much as expected in an Arbëresh town, but the locals confessed that it is a form of respect to the people who are not Arbëresh and do not understand. Many others responded that the younger generation speaks more naturally in Italian, given that they teach Italian in schools. The children do hear the Arbëresh in most homes, but Italian has much more word choices for the people to express themselves whereas Arbëresh is somewhat limited in words simply because it has not evolved.

### **Carmela Oliva**



Figure 15 Carmela Oliva and her Arbëresh costumes (some she treasures from her ancestors and others she handmade herself).

What has progressed and covers a big part of the Arbëresh culture are the traditional costumes. These colorful folkloristic costumes are worn today in special events and performances but they come from a long history and they bear deep meanings stitched into their seams. The locals directed me to, zonja Carmela Oliva who is the expert of the history of traditional costumes and she also makes them by hand.

She is a grandmother who continues to speak Arbëresh at home even with her grandchildren. She continues to follow the traditions as her ancestors have shown her throughout the years. She mentioned that her grandmother and her mother owned the traditional costumes and she has saved the pieces that have remained. Her mother had saved the costume of her great grandmother, which is now Carmela's and she has preserved it as a treasure. From the first picture above, we can see the pieces she has saved: two skirts (one pink and one blue); the embroidered white undergarment, the blue jacket and the gold head piece. On the second picture we can see the Arbëresh costume Carmela replicated for her granddaughter. She said that 300 or so years ago, women asked to be buried wearing their costumes and that is why many families do not have costumes. Carmela said this was an old tradition but with the years it changed. Nowadays, the elder women leave their costumes to their daughters or nieces so the tradition continues.

Each dress has a color that matches a specific event. If the skirt was blue or green it was the wedding attire for the bride. A *cibuno*, a small jacket, and a veil to cover the head are part of the costume. Usually, red tulle is used for wedding. If the color of the skirt is fuchsia, it meant the woman was going to church. When women were mourning someone in the family, they would put a black apron over their costumes. When the husband died, usually they would wear their wedding attire with the black apron over it.

Back in the day, women would wear their traditional costumes every day. Carmela says that this is no longer the case. Today, they are only used in special events such as weddings or special performances such as Christmas, Easter, the celebration of the Saint Day of San Demetrio, festivals etc. Carmela said that it has become a trend for

the young women of San Demetrio to wear the traditional costume on their wedding day. She has made many costumes for different Arbëresh groups. She invited me try one of her nieces' costumes and showed me how the costume is put on correctly, piece by piece.



Figure 16 This picture was taken during summer 2016 at Carmela Oliva's house. I couldn't resist but try one of the Arbëresh costumes she made.

The ritual of dressing is also important because it requires other women's help to put it together. It builds connections among women as they are getting dressed.

### **Vicky Makri**



Figure 17 Two Arbëresh women helping each other to wear their Arbëresh costumes.



Vicky Makri, the girl on the left side of the picture above dressed in Arbëresh traditional costume, is a young woman from San Demetrio who is very passionate about her Arbëresh culture. She recently got married wearing the Arbëresh costume. She said that being Arbëresh is not only your origin, “lo devi sentire, è un obbligo nel dover portare avanti la cultura ... di farla vivere” (“you have to really feel it in your heart, and it is an obligation to bring forward the culture and make it alive”). One can see the passion in her eyes and through the intensity of her speech about the culture she represents. Vicky practices her culture almost daily by participating in every cultural event, wearing her costume, and singing. She said that to be able to maintain the culture it has to be a daily thing, not take it for granted. She realizes that people move away for different reasons, they get married, the parents do not teach the children to practice their Arbëresh language because they speak Italian with open vowels. She also thinks about the younger generation who need some guidance to really embrace the Arbëresh culture and become as interested as she is. In fact, Vicky has been invited to teach traditional Arbëresh dance in one of the high schools for the preparation of the festival of the year. As she was teaching, she realized that the songs are old and the same ones are so overused in every event that children are tired of the same routine. She says that is not any renewing. Therefore, she proposed songs that are more appealing to the younger generation and she was successful in catching their attention. Now she teaches dance and music to a group of girls she named *luljet e rea* (the new flowers).

Vicky identifies herself as an Italo-Arbëresh, an Italian born who has something more to offer, the Arbëresh in her. She did say that Italians sometimes “ci prendono in giro, ma non me ne frega” (make fun of us by the way we speak, but I really don’t care).

She also mentioned that Arbëria, which includes all the Arbëresh towns in Italy, is believed to be close-minded, leaving a negative connotation for these communities. Vicky denied these comments and proclaimed herself proud of embracing both cultures. According to her, the Arbëresh is spoken “quotidianamente, sempre a casa, non tanto fuori per rispetto agli altri” (daily, always at home, not spoken too much outdoors for respect towards other people) who might not know Arbëresh.

Vicky has traveled to Albania a couple of times and she thinks that every Arbëresh at some point should visit Albania to see the land where their ancestors came from. She felt comfortable in Albania and she confessed that “in Albania ci baciavano, ci abbracciavano ... si sente il sangue ... ti appartiene” (in Albania they kissed and hugged us ... you can feel the blood ... the sense of belonging”). She felt welcome. She has participated in numerous festivals in Albania and she is always available to help every time she has been invited.

Vicky grew up in a family where both of her parents worked hard in promoting the Arbëresh culture. The father was involved in a cultural group called *Zjarri* (Fire). Her father also opened a museum in which he collects different things that represent the Arbëresh culture. The mother also spoke Arbërisht at home and she used to write Arbëresh songs. She grew up with the grandmother who was always dressed in the traditional costume. When she passed away, Vicky said that her grandmother “voleva essere seppellita con il vestito folcloristico per trovare il marito morto vestita così come si sono sposati” (“wanted to be buried with her traditional costume so her dead husband would see her wearing the same dress as when they were married”). She did however leave some pieces as inheritance such as the *cibuno* (jacket) and the *coja* (skirt).



Figure 18 Vicky and I during summer 2016 in Lungro.

**Prof. Adrianno Mazziotti**



Figure 19 Prof. Adrianno Mazziotti and Prof. Lily Paloli from San Demetrio Corone, Calabria.

Adriano Mazziotti, an English professor of high school, is another resident of San Demetrio who accepted to speak with me about his culture. We can see a picture of him and Lily Paloli, another professor who lives in San Demetrio. Prof. Mazziotti embraces both cultures: Arbëresh and Italian. He says that to be an Arbëresh one has to “credere e usare la lingua, le tradizioni ... conoscerle e difenderle” (“believe and make use of the

language, to know the traditions and to defend them”). Therefore an Italo-Arbëresh, as he defines himself, is an Italian born person who also is attached to the traditions of his Arbëresh culture and believes in the byzantine ritual. According to Mazziotti, Arbëria is a microcosm which includes all the Arbëresh in Italy who have resisted for more than five centuries maintaining for the most part, the language, the traditions and the religion. The majority of the interviewees responded the same way. Instead, Albania for Mazziotti is “un paese legato al ricordo di forti e dolorose emigrazioni ... radice commune della lingua” (a country linked to the memory of strong and agonizing emigration with the common core of the language). Mazziotti has visited Albania one time, in 1979, during communism and he says that the only thing the Arbëresh and Albanians share is the language. He believes that the separation in the 1500s split the Albanians in two groups. The Arbëresh evolved in Italy where the Albanians in a different way in Albania. In his house, he holds on to a statue of Scanderbeg, the Albanian flag, *tespie* (prayer beads), and an old *çakmak* (lighter) he bought in Albania as a souvenir. These are some objects that symbolize his culture and background.

According to Mazziotti, there are different cultural events to promote the culture and to gather the community, such as *le valje* (the dances), the election of Miss Arbëresh, *La festa della canzone Arbëresh* (Festival of the Arbëresh song) etc. In a 2006 article published on the arbitalia site, Mazziotti writes that popular games return to San Demetrio as a tradition of what once used to be. He explains that as a result of the efforts of the municipal administrator, many people gathered in Piazza Monumento to participate in playing and learning about these simple games that once were played by the boys, young and adults, with the purpose of having fun but also to get the people together to

share whatever they could offer as a price of winning the game. During those days, the food was not as abundant as today. He states that bringing back these games is “è stata anche un tuffo nel passato, tra ricordi e nostalgie, che aiuta le nuove generazioni a capire la memoria storica locale e i più grandi a non dimenticare” (“also a dive in the past, through memories and nostalgias, which helps the new generations to understand the historic local memory and helps the elders not to forget”). Some of these games are *Karroçuli* (the spinning top), *Jok me ven* (an egg games), *Kuturuni* (the race with the cooking pot), and *Tërkuzen* (the rope pulling game) etc.

Mazziotti also appreciates the work by Carmine Abate as someone who “usa il suo essere diverso ... usa la minoranza linguistica” (“uses his differences ... uses linguistic minority”) – referring to the Arbëresh culture and language in his novels. He also says that “grazie a lui la cultura Italo-Arbëresh si sta catapultando” (“thanks to him the Arbëresh culture has been catapulted”) further than the Arbëresh communities. But he is not convinced that the future of this culture is very promising. He states “non è certo felice” (it is certainly not cheerful). The mass media and the dominant language are two elements that have affected the use of the Arbëresh language. High school offers the Albanian language but not Arbërisht. Mazziotti says that “i canali per mantenere la lingua non ci sono purtroppo” (unfortunately, the channels to maintain the language are not available). By now many families are mixed Arbëresh-Italian and as a result the language that dominates is Italian. The children understand Arbërisht, but they do not practice or speak it.

## Angela Castellano



Figure 20 Having coffee with Angela Castellano (to my right) and her friends after Sunday's church.

Some people were more optimistic than others, when the question about the future of the Arbëresh culture was posed to them. One morning, after mass was over, I encountered a group of three elderly ladies who sat down for coffee at the bar facing the church. I approached them to ask some questions and thus met Angela Castellano, a retired professor of Latin. In the picture, she is sitting on my left hand side. Angela Castellano is a Turinese woman who was married an Arbëresh and lived in San Demetrio for 52 years. She embraced the Arbëresh culture as much as the locals. By now she was one of them, she said: “si sente molto naturale vivere a San Demetrio” (“it feels natural to live in San Demetrio”). She spoke Arbëresh perfectly and she said that Arbërisht “è la vita di famiglia,” (“is part of the everyday family life”) here in San Demetrio. Throughout the years she spent in San Demetrio, Angela learned from her in-laws and friends how to cook typical meals; she learned Arbëresh fables and storytelling for children; she read Girolamo de Rada’s poems; she learned the popular songs by Don Angelo Belluscio; and

she also has read Carmine Abate's novels. Abate, she affirms, "è molto aperto, intelligente e molto attaccato alla cultura" ("is very open, intelligent, and very attached to the culture"). She celebrates all the festivities in town, such as Easter, San Demetrio Day (the patron of town), the remembrance of the dead, etc.

Angela is optimistic about the future of the Arbëresh culture but she says it is the responsibility of everyone in the community to insist in the preservation of the culture and the byzantine ritual. She has demonstrated she has put all of her efforts to become part of this community, conforming to all the rules. She has taught her children the same manners and she was proud to say they too do speak Arbëresh and they also follow the traditions. Some of the ways she proposed to help maintain this culture are: speaking to the children at home, organize gatherings, cultural exchanges etc.

### **Prof. Lily Gradilone Paloli**



Figure 21 Lily and her husband Aleksander Paloli at an Arbëresh event.

Also a teacher in San Demetrio, Lily Gradilone Paloli is attached to her origin and her culture and she clearly shows how she embraces them by participating in every



cultural event and also teaching her children to follow the same family traditions. She is married to Albanian musician, Aleksander Paloli (see picture below). She defines herself as an Arbëresh. An Arbëresh for her means to have “il cuore legato alle radici,” (“the heart tied to the roots”). On one hand, she says Arbëria is the place of her birth, including all the Arbëresh towns in Southern Italy. On the other hand, Albania for her represents the roots of her heart, which cannot be denied.

Lily has visited Albania numerous times, the first time in 1993, right after the death of the dictator Enver Hoxha. She goes there often because of her husband’s musical events and also her daughter’s performances in the Arbëresh vallje. She said that Arbëresh was the language both of her children spoke first. She also thinks in Arbëresh, speaks in Arbëresh and also knows how to write it. As most of the people in San Demetrio, Lilly hopes that the future of this culture will survive.

### **Pessimistic Voices: Tarantino, Chimento and Campagna**



Figure 22 Bruno Tarantino from San Demetrio Corone, Calabria.



Bruno Tarantino, a physical education professor, also hopes that the Arbëresh culture will survive and it will pass to the next generations to come. He also responds along the same lines as Lily, that time has evolved and so has the culture. The culture, according to Bruno, is not being maintained as it should. He states: “la cultura non si mantiene come si deve, i figli non parlano la lingua” (the culture is not being maintained as it should, the children do not speak Arbëresh). Without making a sweeping statement about everybody, Bruno says that the new generation shows no desire to maintain the roots. He himself has never visited Albania and he said that except the roots and the language, there is nothing else the Albanians and the Arbëresh have in common.

Emilio Chimento, another San Demetrio local to whom I was introduced right from the beginning, became my guide and a friend. His thoughts about the future of the Arbëresh culture are pessimistic as well. He believes that technology does not help in the maintenance of the culture, the myth of internet. From his past, he recalls “i racconti dalla nonna ... era bello ... oggi non più” (“the stories my grandmother used to tell ... it was beautiful ... not any more today”). He remembers the good times he spent with his family and he sounded especially nostalgic about the good old times he spent with his grandmother. He regrets that this is no longer the case, as the generations pass. Many traditions have been lost with time, but what Emilio says still remain are: the festivities of Easter, Christmas, all of them including the byzantine ritual and also dancing and singing in Arbëresh. Moreover, he mentions the day they do a pilgrimage as a ritual for Sant Cosmo’s day: whomever wants to participate, leaves San Demetrio by foot and goes all the way to San Cosmo, a distance of 15 kilometers away. He also mentions other cultural events like presentations by Arbëresh authors such as Carmine Abate. Emilio says that he

appreciates his books for “l’uso del linguaggio del popolo ... fa grande pubblicità con l’uso dell’Arbëresh nel libro” (“the use of the language of his people ... he offers great publicity with the use of Arbërisht in the book”).

Francesco Campagna, another local, also shares the same bleak opinions. He says that the future of his culture is hard to predict: “non si legge facilmente, culturalmente abbiamo aggredito,” but culturally he says, (“we have taken control”). He believes everyone has to dedicate time to maintain what is valuable. He is somewhat pessimistic because he sees that the older generation has taken with them things that are hard to get back. He does not specify what in particular, but it surely includes cultural objects, part of the language and some cultural events that are no longer practiced. One of the events that brought Albania closer to the Arbëresh, according to Francesco, is three decades ago. He remembers the concert of Vace Zela, an Albanian singer who gained fame during the communist era. He asserts that her concert in Italy, thirtyfive years ago, was a great success.

Francesco says that his everyday speaking routine is a mix of Italian and Arbëresh, where the Calabrese dialect is not spoken but sometimes it is being used just for fun or when joking. When I asked him what Arbëria and Albania means to him, his answer was that they are one “area culturale di due poli” (one “cultural area of two poles”). He acknowledges the common cultural background but when he was asked the next question - what the Arbëresh have in common with the Albanians - Francesco says that it is difficult to say as he has not really lived with them. He has not visited Albania but he has an interest in going.

## Hevzi Nuhiu



Figure 23 Sculptor and painter Hevzi Nuhiu.

Hevzi Nuhiu is a well-known sculptor and painter in the Arbëresh towns and all over Albania and Kosovo. He was born in Kosovo. In 1984 he escaped the war in Kosovo and arrived at San Demetrio as an exile. He made San Demetrio his home and he is happy with the life he has constructed with his Arbëresh wife, his son and his nieces.



Figure 24 Nuhiu's sculpture of Mother Teresa.

His artwork is present at the entrance of San Demetrio and around every corner of the town, leaving his signature. We can see his stone sculpture of Mother Teresa of Calcutta in the above picture. Mother Teresa was born in Skopje (today the capital of the Republic of Macedonia), then part of Kosovo Vilayet of the Ottoman Empire. She is an inspirational figure for all Albanians and they praise her for her charitable work all over the world.



Figure 25 Nuhiu's wooden sculpture photographed in the City Hall of San Demetrio.

Another sculpture made in wood that caught my eye was standing at the City Hall of San Demetrio. This work of art also held Nuhiu's name. He feels welcomed and comfortable around the members of the community and by now he is an Italo-Arbëresh as the rest. He speaks Arbëresh at home. He describes the Arbëresh as having a different mode of thinking, in comparison with Italians or the *Calabresi*. He believes that to be Arbëresh, you have to “sentirsi Arbëresh, lavorare per dedicare tempo per ciò che valora” (“feel as an Arbëresh, work to dedicate time for what you believe is of value”). Nuhiu describes the fact that the Arbëresh have brought the culture forward this far, as a miracle and as a treasure. He says that Arbëria today is a small Albania. After the borders of Albania and Kosovo opened, Nuhiu often travels freely to his birthplace to see his family

and in Albania for business. He has close relations with all three places. He says that the Arbëresh and the Albanians are “due gemelli che vivono in due paesi diversi” (“two resembling separated twins who live in two different countries”). The language, the customs and the culture unites them as one.

As we were discussing the future of the Arbëresh culture, Nuhiu was not very enthusiastic. Although Arbëresh is spoken at home, he believes that the language and the culture “si stanno perdendo poco a poco” (“are deteriorating little by little”). He mentioned some negative aspects he sees as damaging the progression of the language and culture. First, he mentions the document of 1989 that included migrants, minorities and their insertion as the rest of Italy, as just a written paper, but in reality it is not being applied. Second, the Arbëresh language still remains an oral tradition, not a written one and it is not being spoken or taught in schools. Third, Nuhiu describes the Arbëresh as “rammolliti” (“soft”) and also added in Albanian that they no longer have a *shpirt revolucionar* (revolutionary spirit). Lastly, he says that the “menti migliori” (“best minds”) are slowly passing away, inevitable loss that’s irreplaceable.

Nevertheless, Nuhiu continues to contribute his fair share to the place and the culture that has become his home. He and his wife opened the door of their house as a warm welcome by offering typical Arbëresh plates such as *i fagioli* (beans), *byrek* (pita pie), *pita* (pita bread) etc, ratifying once again how “l’ospitalità è sacra” (hospitality is sacred). Not only the town, but his house looks like a museum, filled with his artwork. Some pieces I found to represent the culture were: the double headed eagle he worked on the frame of the wall and the sculptures of Mother Teresa displayed throughout his house. Nuhiu names the local saint days of Sant’Adriano in August 26, and the city’s patron

saint: San Demetrio Megalomartire on October 26 as the most known cultural events. Easter is also another favorite cultural event of San Demetrio Corone where the whole town participates in the rituals and the *vallje*. The ways these events are celebrated in this town differentiate from the rest of Italy, because they have an Arbëresh essence. They are unique and they represent the Arbëresh culture through the dances and the traditional costumes.

### Deciko Genaro



Figure 26 Deciko Genaro, the presenter of Festival della canzone Arbëresh.

Another person who is involved in the cultural life of San Demetrio and in the Arbëresh towns around it is Deciko Genaro. He is the presenter of *Festival della canzone Arbëresh* since it first started, 35 years ago. On the picture above, we can see him holding the mike as he is presenting this event that has become such a cultural tradition. He is also a local correspondent, journalist and publicist of the magazine *La Provincia* and

*Katundi Yne*. He keeps participating in this event because he believes it is the social and cultural contexts that keep the culture alive. He says that his son spoke Arbëresh until the age of 10 and after that he started to speak more and more Italian. Perhaps also for this reason, Deciko sees the future a bit sad and gloomy. He says that everyone in the community needs to help in some way or other to keep the interest in the preservation of culture, especially to the younger generation. The offering of classes in Arbëresh and the socio-cultural events he suggests are ways to get people involved. Some objects Deciko owns at home that represent the Arbëresh culture are a wooden sculptures of De Rada and Scanderbeg; a painting of the Arbëresh town from one of the greatest Albanian painter, Ibrahim Kodra; photos of the Arbëresh festival; and the traditional Arbëresh costume of his mother. Deciko also mentioned that he is a friend of Carmine Abate. He brought him to San Demetrio in the 1980s and introduced him as an Arbëresh author.

During my stay in San Demetrio, I met and spoke with other people of different age groups. The younger generation acknowledges their origins as Italo-Arbëresh but not many of them speak Arbëresh daily, even at home. Many girls<sup>88</sup> I interviewed said that when the grandparents are at home, they speak in Arbëresh but they tend to respond in Italian. They sure do understand everything, but Italian comes more naturally when it comes to communicating. They do have their grandmother's Arbëresh costumes, the lace, the *xhibuni* (jacket), which nowadays is being passed on to the next generation as a treasure of the culture. Although at times the youngsters appeared to be more modernized and not really following the traditions of their ancestors, they all named among other events, Easter and the day of the dead as two favorite cultural events where the whole

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<sup>88</sup> Among others: Adele 16 years old; Cristina Paloli 20 years old; Pino Cacoza's daughter 18 years old; Gilda Fuscaldo 29 years old

family is involved in each other's company, eating, drinking and celebrating together at home but also as a community.

### **Salvatore Laminata**



Figure 27 Salvatore Laminata, San Demetrio's mayor. Picture was taken during summer 2016.

I also met with the mayor of San Demetrio, Salvatore Laminata. He shared with me his experience growing up in an Arbëresh town. He said that he felt the difference from an Italian child because he also embraces the Arbëreshness in him. Laminata says that back then, the Arbëresh language was spoken much more than today. He says that there is a lack of will in the younger generation. The immigration and the dispersion of the people also affect the maintenance of the language and culture. The lack of funds for activities to boost the Arbëresh culture is also another reason Laminata mentions as a negative element for the future of this culture.

Apart from all the negative sensations, Laminata says that the language is still vivid and spoken in most homes of San Demetrio. The use of the Arbëresh language during the rituals and in the church is somewhat lost. This statement was also mentioned



to me by Donato Oliverio, the Bishop of the Eparchy of Lungro, as some priests are not making an extra effort to keep the Arbëresh language in church liturgy. But Laminata says he favors the publishing industry that leads to local authors to publish in Arbëresh. The Festival della canzone Arbëresh is a great event that gathers all the Arbëresh from all the towns in Calabria and elsewhere. He also mentioned the organization Unione Arbëria as a union that puts many efforts towards the preservation of the language and culture.

### **Papas Andrea Quartarolo**



Figure 28 Pictures taken during summer 2016 inside the San Demetrio Megalomartire Church.

Before leaving San Demetrio, I met with archpriest, Papas Andrea Quartarolo. As he was showing me around the church, I noticed the symbol of the double headed eagle on the floor, right in front of the altar. This symbol indicates the church's Arbëresh background. On the right of the entrance of the church, there was the first church of San Demetrio which was very small compared to the size it has now grown. Father Andrea explained that the population back then was small, now they have expanded. He explained to me that ritual means identity for the Arbëresh. He also mentioned that the Arbëresh had to sacrifice and overcome difficult situations in order to keep their

Byzantine traditions.<sup>89</sup> The Catholic clergy repeatedly attempted to convert the Arbëresh. They insisted the Arbëresh change their ritual by imposing the Italian language in the liturgy and by modifying their traditions. In fact, many Arbëresh communities practice the Catholic religion today. Even in the communities that have managed to keep the Byzantine ritual, the liturgy is performed in Italian.

Father Andrea said that to maintain the ritual there needs to be the strong desire, at times one has to be a tough nut to crack. He admits that there is a lack of interest as the older generation is passing. But one has to have faith, the father says. So he explained to me some of the rituals that are followed in days such as Easter, the day of the dead and wedding.

The rituals for Easter<sup>90</sup> start a week before the actual day. The holy week starts with Palm Sunday, with the ceremony of the “Rito dello Sposo,” (Rite of the Groom) characteristic of the Greek Orthodox ritual. This ceremony consists of readings of passages from the Gospel and refers to a parable of the ancient text, that of “prudent virgins and foolish virgins.” The prudent virgins will illuminate the path of their future spouse at the time of their meeting, the foolish virgins, not treating the vicissitudes of life; will not be able to illuminate the path. This means that you must wait for the period of Lent: “Christ died on the cross to resurrect for men.”

Good Friday is a ceremony where all the people in town unite in the church for the *deposizione dalla croce* (The deposition from the cross). Everyone follows the procession by singing the typical Arbëresh songs and walking around town with the coffin

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<sup>89</sup> Rite of Constantinople, is the liturgical rite currently used by the Eastern Orthodox Church and Byzantine Catholic Churches.

<sup>90</sup> The Easter ritual is also described in detail by Adriano D’Amico in Arbutalia [http://www.arbutalia.it/tradizioni/religione/pasqua/damico\\_tradizioni\\_pasquali.htm](http://www.arbutalia.it/tradizioni/religione/pasqua/damico_tradizioni_pasquali.htm)

of the Christ which is being held on the shoulders of a couple SanDemetrini. At the end of this procession, the people come back in to the church and they bring flowers to embalm the lifeless body of Christ. Saturday morning everyone is still in mourning and they walk silently to the Church of Sant'Adriano, at the "Fontana del Collegio" to *rubare l'acqua* (steal the water; they fill bottles to take home the blessed water). Father Andrea explains that water is "simbolo della vita" ("symbol of life"). This procession supports the story that the tomb is open and the life is reclaimed. For Easter everyone makes cookies. Usually, Sunday is a happy day where the town gets together and dressed in the traditional costumes they sing and dance to celebrate. After the Christ is resurrected, the greeting is *Kristos Anesti*<sup>91</sup> (From Greek: Christ is risen).



Figure 29 Rituals for the day of the deceased in San Demetrio. Pictures taken from the Associazione Culturale Giovanile blog.

The Saturday of the deceased, everyone goes to visit the tombs and bring food for them. Father says that "la vita nostra è come una candela," (our life is like a candle) so in this day people celebrate the life of their loved ones who are no longer here. As seen on the pictures taken from the blog of *Associazione Culturale Giovanile*<sup>92</sup>, the ritual for this

<sup>91</sup> Greek is used in Albanian ritual because of the Byzantine Greek Orthodox rite.

<sup>92</sup> <https://associazioneculturalementipensanti.wordpress.com/2016/01/29/san-demetrio-corone-domani-30-gennaio-2016-si-rinnova-la-festa-dei-morti/>

day is to make *la panagjia* (bread of the all-Holly), *grano bollito* (boiled wheat) and wine. For the day of the dead people visit the tombs and bring food to them as a tradition they follow for years. Later everyone sits at a big dinner and usually one seat is left empty. Father Andrea explains that the purpose of leaving one seat empty is to have it filled by the spirit of the deceased.

Some of the wedding rituals the father mentioned are the day of *Bonjin Shtratin* (making the bed) which is usually on Thursday. He also said that as part of the “dote” (dowry), the bride would receive the Arbëresh traditional costume. The day of the wedding “*il dolce della sposa*” (the dessert of the bride) is made which is prepared in a round form and it has a whole in the middle, which is filled with a glass of wine. Father Andrea explains that the form of this dessert and the wine in the middle is a symbol of fertility. I was fascinated by the father’s explanations of each ritual. Some of these rituals are exactly the same as the Albanian orthodox and some are slightly different. Father Andrea concluded that these rituals are still followed today and they are not only religious but they unite and bring the people of the community together.

### **In Carfizzi with Carmine Abate**

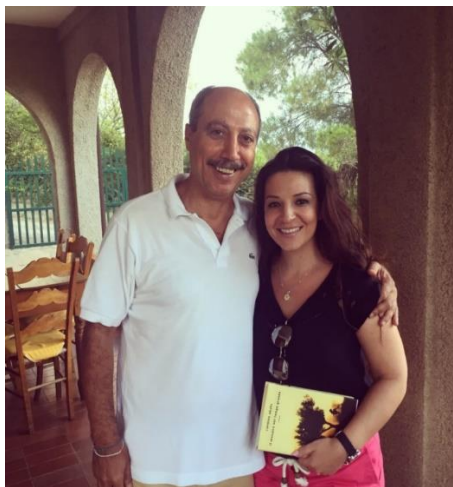


Figure 30 At Carmine Abate's house in Carfizzi during summer 2016.

After San Demetrio, I decided to make a stop in Carfizzi, the town of Carmine Abate. He happened to be there too, for his usual stay during the summer. We met very briefly at the veranda of his house, as seen on the picture. He wanted to show me the *Parco Letterario* (Literary Park) dedicated to his name. The name is quite misleading as it is not a “park” but an enclosed space where all of Carmine Abate’s novels are displayed and there is also a room where literary events take place.

The following pictures are taken inside the Literary Park which display all of Carmine Abate’s work. The visitor can go through all of Abate’s books and articles that have been written about him or about his novels. It can be seen that this place was constructed with the purpose of collecting all of Abate’s work, not only because he is an author from Carfizzi, but someone who writes about Carfizzi and reflects on his hometown in every page of his books. On the external wall of the so-called parco letterario, we can see a mural representing on of Abate’s recent books. From here on we can understand that the “park” is filled with Abate’s writing.





One side of the inside wall was covered by a poster displaying his accomplishments, including the Premio Campiello he received in 2012.



Figure 32 Poster celebrating Abate's victory at Premio Campiello, in Venice (2012).

As we were waiting for the mayor to bring the key, I took the opportunity to interview with the mayor's wife, Vittoria Pompo. She identified herself as Italo-Arbëresh. She says that the qualities of being Arbëresh are hospitality and the use of Arbëresh language. She feels that the Arbëresh and the Albanian have an antique bond and she explains it as a detached umbilical cord.

Vittoria says that the Arbëresh language comes spontaneously to her and to every other person in town when they speak with each other. It is the language of every day. They do have a language school that offers Arbëresh courses for elementary and middle school children. She admits that the culture has changed with time because of Italianization and immigration. She says that whoever remains in town tries to keep all

the traditions alive as their ancestors have left them. She wants the people to come back to town and not forget about their homeland.

Vittoria has the original traditional Arbëresh costume and the jewelry of her great grandmother. Her favorite event in town is *la festa del ritorno* (the celebration of comeback), an event that happens during the summer when everyone who lives away or studies away comes back to town. This is an ongoing event filled with a number of events such as theatrical plays, dancing and singing etc. She is a good friend of Carmine Abate and she says that what you read in his books is what we do here. Hence, Carmine Abate's Hora represents the life of Carfizzi. She says that they both worked in constructing the Parco Letterario.



## In Lungro with Anna Stratigò



Figure 33 Picture was taken during summer 2016 in Lungro with Anna Stratigò on my left hand side and Bishop Donato Oliverio.

The following Arbëresh town I visited was Lungro. Ungra, as the Arbëresh call it, is a town of 2,700 inhabitants. This town is not easily accessible, or found by chance on the way to another destination. It is almost a secret town in the middle of Calabria that one has to know in advance. I had heard so much about this small town, as it is one the most prominent centers of the Arbëresh people. This town is known to be the religious capital of the byzantine rite as the seat of the Eparchy of Lungro resides there. I had also seen in numerous interviews Anna Stratigò and wanted to meet her in person. She recently published her book *Casa Nostra*. In fact, this picture is taken inside the Eparchy of Lungro with the Bishop, Donato Oliverio and Anna Stratigò on the far right.



Figure 34 The sign at the entrance of Lungro.

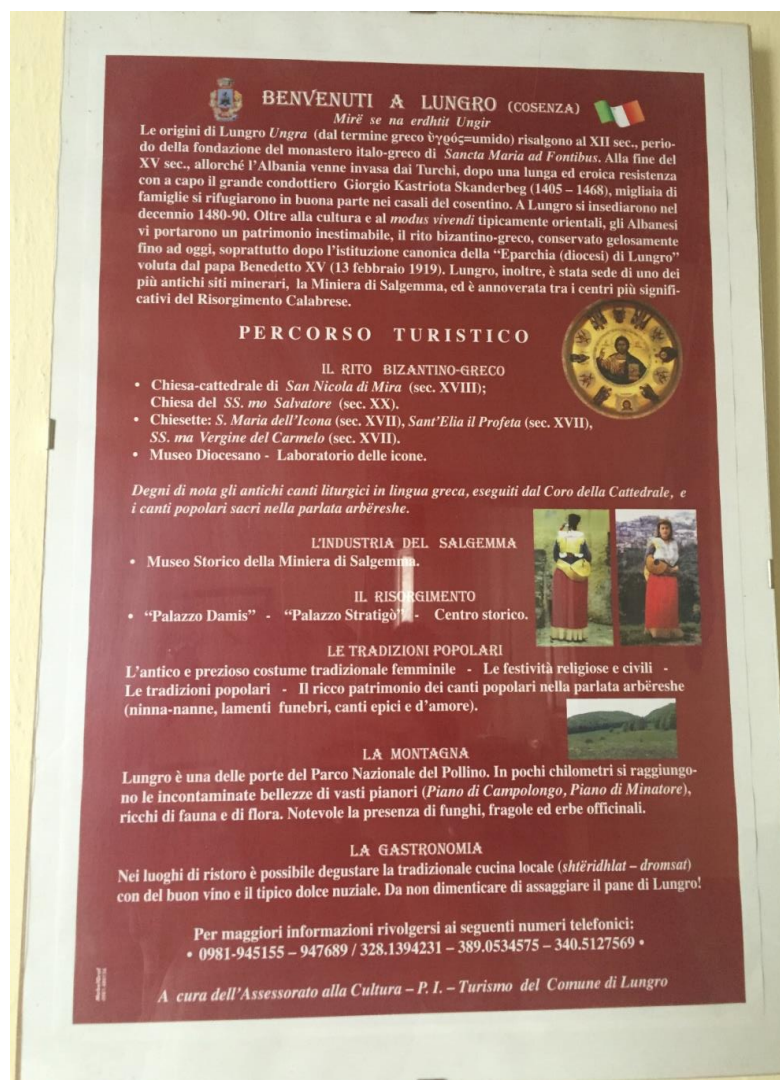


Figure 35 The welcoming and informative sign at the entrance of Lungro.

On the right hand side of the entrance of the town, I noticed two huge welcoming signs of Lungro explaining the history of this town and the Arbëresh origin (as seen on the pictures above). These signs inform the visitors from the beginning about the treasures they are about to discover in this town. The metaphor *Sënduq*, a treasure chest, used on the first picture, refers to the magnificent cultural beauties that can be found in Lungro in a welcoming sign. These beauties include the picturesque landscape, the museums of the Risorgimento, the Salt museum, the food, the traditions, including the Byzantine ritual.



Figure 36 Scanderbeg's statue standing in the middle of the main piazza in Lungro.

Further down, the road opened into a piazza and there was the Statue of Scanderbeg, once again, a symbol of identity for the Arbëresh. I noticed that people in Lungro use the Arbëresh outdoors, while in San Demetrio they do not. This town is one of the most prominent centers for the Arbëresh people particularly because the seat of the Eparchy is located there. Another valid reason is the absence of ‘outsiders’ which has allowed the preservation and use of the language and the traditions.

I was trying to locate Anna Stratigò’s house, which she has turned into a museum/bed and breakfast. The house was built by her ancestors in 1553 and it still stands today, thanks to the maintenance the family has devoted to this place for centuries. The house stands on a steep hill and I was unable to drive close by the house so I decided to park the car in the piazza and walk towards the house, while Anna was waiving at me from the balcony and giving me directions in Arbëresh, on how to get there.



Figure 37 Anna showing me the Arbëresh costume of Lungro she has displayed in her house.

Anna has renovated the house and made it comfortable, while keeping the old and the memories of her ancestors. The first thing one notices is the house emblem that has stood on top of entrance of the house for over 500 years. Once in the house, the impression one gets is as if entering a museum. She showed me the traditional Arbëresh costume of Lungro. The pictures on the walls, the old Arbëresh costumes hanging on the drawer, the books and the magazines around the house, show that this house is protecting its own history. Anna is a collector of the old, the memories of her past and she knows how to preserve them with so much care and love. She is often recognized as the soul and voice of Lungro because she gives all of her gifts of singing and writing for the promotion of her culture and traditions.





Figure 38 I took these pictures at Anna's house during summer 2016. Scanderbeg's sculpture, the Arbëresh magazines, the dictionaries, the traditional attires, and the family pictures show her family background and the culture she inherits.

Anna has turned the basement of her house into an *Officina della Musica* (A Music Shop), and she teaches the younger generation how to sing in Arbëresh and how to play musical instruments. She collaborates with another musician from Korça, Albania,

maestro Spiro Pano. She also organizes theatrical plays with the other locals for special events that are performed in the center of town. In fact, when I arrived at the *casa museo*, Anna and her group of actors were practicing a play. The play organized by Anna represents an Arbëresh wife who was married to an Italian. The wife, her mother and the children were speaking in Arbëresh and were enjoying a nice afternoon drinking mate,<sup>93</sup> while the husband was always complaining about the wife's habits and all he wanted to do was relax and watch some Italian TV. The play was meaningful because it portrayed the reality of many families who deal with these issues on a daily basis. The children who have parents of both Arbëresh and Italian descent are immersed with both cultures simultaneously. Anna says that they try to organize different types of cultural events, such as the play, to involve everyone in the community, to promote their culture and traditions and to encourage interest in the younger generation.

Anna is also a great cook. She learned from her grandmother, her mother and her aunts how to prepare some Arbëresh dishes she made from scratch when I was visiting. She prepared *shtriljet*, a type of long pasta she made by hand and then she cooked them with beans. The next day she prepared *dromsat*, crumbs of Arbëresh pasta. Anna prepared them from scratch by putting flour on the table and “baptizing”<sup>94</sup> it with a branch of oregano. This is how the crumbs of dromsa form and then she cooked them in a light tomato sauce. We can see in the picture how they are prepared step by step.

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<sup>93</sup> Mate is a typical Argentinian type of tea drink, but Anna explains that probably from the earlier migrations to South America the Arbëresh who returned back to Lungro, brought this tradition back. Today it is very common in Lungro (only in Lungro, out of all the Arbëresh towns) Anna says this tradition has been alive in Lungro for at least 100 years.

<sup>94</sup> Drizzles of water.



Figure 39 The preparation of dromsa.

### **In Lungro's Salt Mine Museum**



Figure 40 Visit to the Museum during summer 2016.

Important traces of Arbëresh life can be also found in an unusual place such as the Salt Mine Museum. I learned that salt mining started in Roman times.<sup>95</sup> The salt brought great wealth and the salt was sold all over Calabria and even across Europe. Many locals

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<sup>95</sup>

[http://www.calabriaonline.com/specialecol/buono\\_di\\_calabria/miniere\\_di\\_calabria/miniera\\_di\\_salgemma.php](http://www.calabriaonline.com/specialecol/buono_di_calabria/miniere_di_calabria/miniera_di_salgemma.php)



worked in the mine and even outsiders came to Lungro to work as well. Geologist Tamarelli who visited the mine in March 7, 1880 writes:

Il campo coltivato del deposito di salemma di Lungro era di circa 100 metri di larghezza per 300 metri di lunghezza con sezione irregolarmente ellittica, quasi una grande lente, con stratificata colle argille; che gli scavi infine si sprofondano 220 metri, senza che vi sia indizio di diminuzione del minerale. Si afferma d'altronde esser quel sale senza confronto il migliore che sia somministrato dalle saline del regno, per la purezza, pel sapore e per la sua bianchezza quando è rivolto in polvere...

The cultivated field of the salt deposit of Lungro was about 100 meters wide and 300 meters long with irregular elliptical section, almost as a great lens, mixed with clays; the excavations eventually plunge 220 meters, without it giving a clue of the drop of the mineral. It is known, moreover, that this salt is without comparison the best administered by from the salt mines of the Kingdom, for the purity, for flavor and for its whiteness when turned to dust (Alfredo Frega, Speciale Col- Miniere di Calabria).

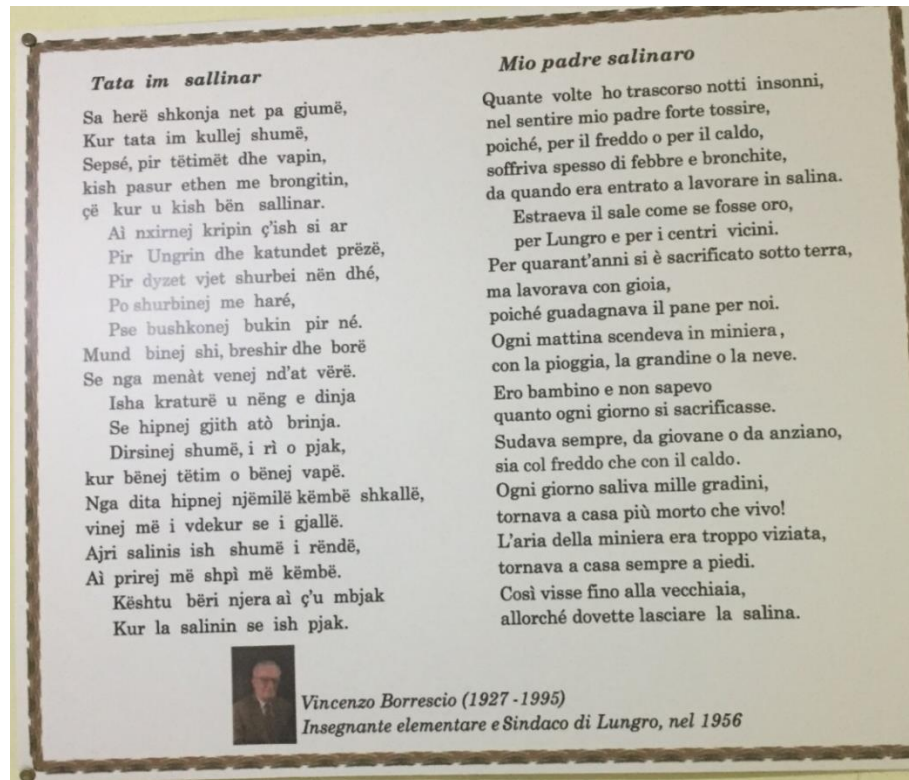
The everyday routine included a shift of walking up and down the 2,000 steps. Saint Leonardo was adopted as the Patron Saint of the salt mine, and is portrayed in a sculpture inside the museum.



Figure 41 Poster of Saint Leonardo at the museum in Lungro, summer 2016.

The mine was abandoned in 1976 and it was commemorated as a museum in 2010. The museum was filled with memories of a lifetime of hard work and the Lungresi knew how to preserve all the memories put together in a small but valuable museum for their community

As I was walking through the museum, I noticed on the walls many poems and popular verses in the antique Arbëresh language. One of them was a poem written by Vincenzo Borrescio, dedicated to his father who was one of the workers in the salt mine.



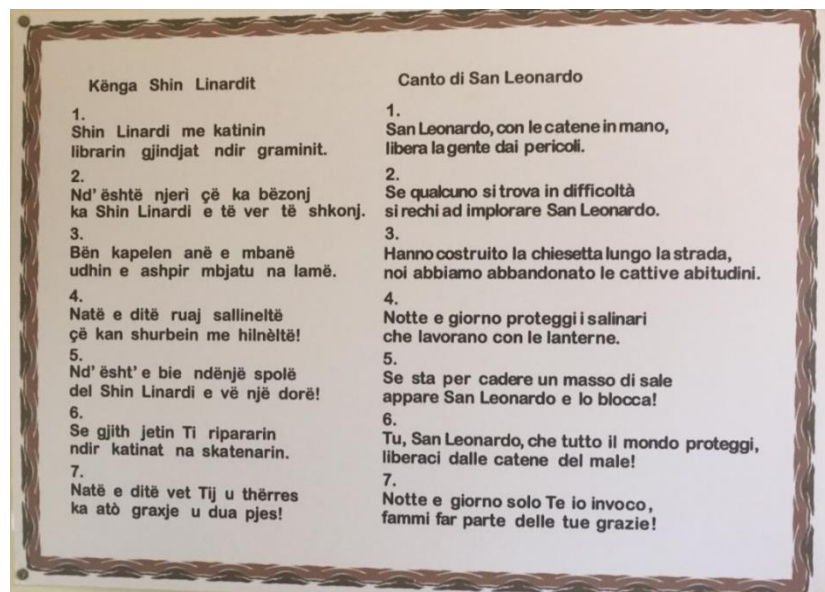
The poem recites:

How many times I passed sleepless nights,  
 Listening to my father's strong cough,  
 Either from the cold or from the heat,  
 He often suffers from fever and bronchitis,  
 Since he started working at the salt mine.  
 He extracted the salt as if it were gold,  
 For Lungro and for the closest towns.  
 He sacrificed himself underground for forty years,  
 But he was happy working,  
 Since he was earning to feed us.  
 Every morning he would go down the mine,

Whether it was raining, hailing or snowing.  
 I was a child and I didn't know,  
 How much he was sacrificing every day.  
 He was always sweating, young or older,  
 Whether it was cold or hot.  
 Every day, he climbed 1,000 steps  
 He returned home more dead than alive!  
 The air of the mine was too spoiled  
 He returned home always by foot  
 This was his life until he was order  
 When he had to leave the salt mine.

Table 10 originally displayed on the wall of the Sald Mine Museum. Written by Vincenzo Borrescio. Accessed summer 2016. The Arbëresh has been translated by Edna Lubonja.

Another poem/song I came across was the Song of Saint Leonard the salt mine workers sang at work praying to Saint Leonard to keep them safe as they are underground. The song was in Arëresh and in Italian. Here is the song:



1

Saint Leonard, with the chains in hand,

Frees the people from danger.

2

If someone is in a difficult situation

They run and pray to Saint Leonard.

3

They have constructed the little church along the road

We have abandoned the bad habits.

4

Day and night protect the salt mine workers

Who work with lanterns.

5

If there is a rock of salt about to fall

Saint Leonard appears and blocks it!

6

You, Saint Leonard, who protects everything in the world

Liberate us from the bad chains!

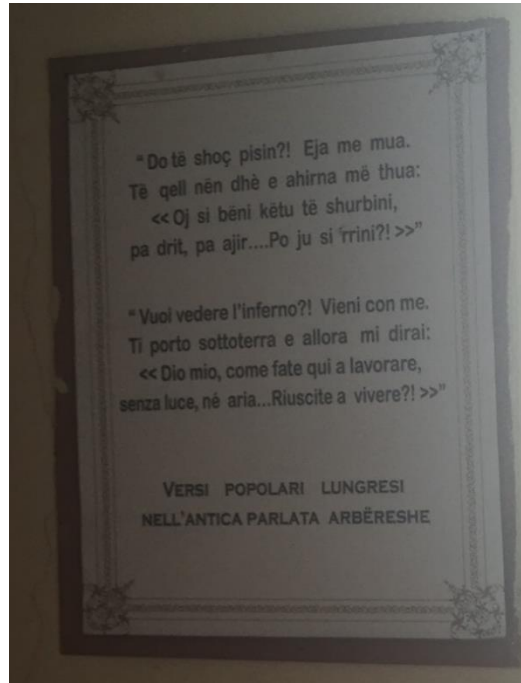
7

Night and day I only pray to you,

Make me a part of your gracefulness!

Table 11 originally displayed on the wall of the Salt Mine Museum next to the picture of Saint Leonard.  
Accessed summer 2016. The Arbëresh has been translated by Edna Lubonja.

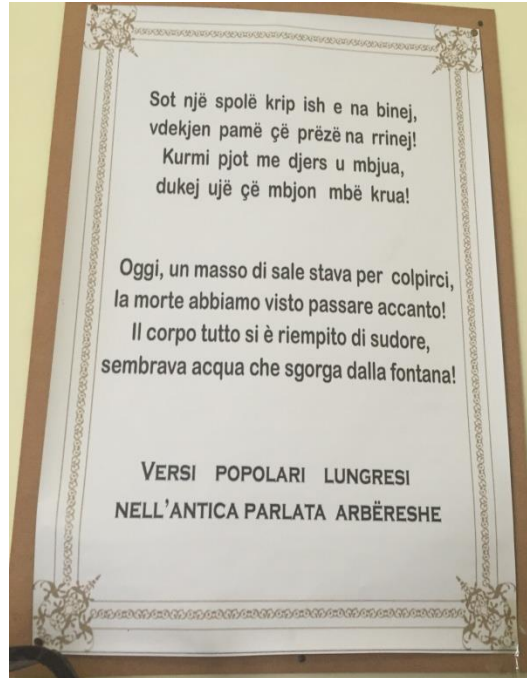
In the next room, I found more popular verses posted on the wall, expressing the hard work and the poor conditions of working in the salt mine. The first compares the mine to Hell.



“Do you want to see Hell? Come with me.  
I bring you underground and you tell me:  
“My God, how do you work here without  
Light, nor air...will you succeed in living?”

Table 12 originally displayed on the wall of the Salt Mine Museum. Accessed summer 2016. It has been translated in English by Edna Lubonja.

The following poem recalls an accident during work..



Today, a rock of salt was about to hit us,  
We saw death pass by our side!  
The body was fully covered with sweat,  
It seemed like water that poured from the foundation!

Table 13 originally displayed on the wall of the Salt Mine Museum. Accessed summer 2016. The Arbëresh has been translated by Edna Lubonja.

They are short compositions that seem ideal for oral traditions or to be repeated as proverbs. At the exit (see picture below), there was a big poster titled “Katundi Ynë” (Our Community), portraying the community of Lungro, its landmarks and the people dressed in Arbëresh costumes. This poster commemorates all the people that worked at the salt mine for a better future for their descendants and shows how their hard work has made the town and the community what it is today.



Figure 42 Picture collage of Lungro and its inhabitants: "Katundi Ynë: Our Town".

In conclusion, the people I met in these Arbëresh towns show that the sense of community still exists. They try to maintain the traditions and the culture as vivid as possible, despite the evolution of time. Many of them show concern of the future and progression of the Arbëresh culture as the younger generation is not as interested and they condemn the school for not giving them an opportunity to learn how to write the Arbëresh that they already speak every day at home. However, there is still a light of hope. They believe that with the community's effort to promote the Arbëresh culture, and everyone at home teaching their children to speak Arbëresh and follow the family traditions, the future can become more promising. As my research in these towns was coming to an end, my last thoughts were lingering impressions of the passion and the dedication of people had to save the culture and language of their ancestors.



## ARBËRESH CULTURE AS POSSIBLE HETEROTOPIA

As we have seen in the previous section, some people showed concern on the longevity of the Arbëresh culture and language. They fear its disappearance on the next generation as they see indifference and disconnection as generations move forward and are more immersed in the Italian lifestyle. This concern is also portrayed in Carmine Abate's collection *Le stagioni di Hora*. He presents the Arbëresh community in a special moment of its history, in a moment when it is veering towards the end of utopia. In other words, the characters battle on the struggle of the interior withdrawal and the geographical and cultural temptation of the outside world.

Abate demonstrates that by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Arbëresh struggle to keep the community together and as closed as before. Other than hope to keep the traditions, the inevitable changes imposed by the larger Italian society have affected the Arbëresh utopia and it is somewhat alarming. Donald Pitzer affirms that in most of America's communal utopias he takes into consideration (the Shakers, George Rapps Harmony Society, the Amana Colonies, Oneida Perfectionists, etc.), "the developmental process poses a double jeopardy threat to communal longevity" (Pitzer 13). He refers to the process required to keep the communal lifestyle in comparison with the outside forces of the larger community. As a result, the actions that require adjustments away from the communal stage result in the breakup of the community and also the movements that become "locked into their communal discipline often stagnate, killing their movements and their communes" (Pitzer 13).

Specifically, in the case of the Arbëresh, changes have been instigated by the larger Italian community, and the struggle of living in the South has obligated many Arbëresh to find other places for a better living. Italian TV and the implementation of the Italian language in schools have contributed negatively in the preservation of the Arbëresh language for many Arbëresh communities. As it was mentioned previously, the Arbëresh language represents identity for the Arbëresh people. In their mother tongue, they can express thoughts and ideas in unique ways. As Mark Janse affirms, “every language is the guardian of its speakers’ history and culture...The conservation of oral traditions in endangered languages will help us understand more about human values, culture, world view, verbal art, oral literature, and much more” (142). Indeed, the Arbëresh language is considered an endangered language because of the factors mentioned above, but it is not extinct. According to Janse, as long as there is even one last speaker, the language is considered in danger but not in extinction. The Arbëresh have tried to keep the language element of their culture and identity as vivid as possible, overcoming barriers, through the oral tradition. Therefore, we can say that the Arbëresh are balancing on the verge of dystopia, but they are holding to the last thread of the Arbëresh utopia they saved for centuries.

I would suggest another term that could help describe the Arbëresh’s current state: Michel Foucault’s *heterotopia*. Foucault used this term to describe places and spaces that function in non-hegemonic conditions. This term describes spaces that have more layers of meaning and are defined in relationship to other places. Foucault explains this concept through a mirror. “In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am

not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent. The mirror exerts a counteraction on the position that I occupy” (4). Heterotopia is a sort of “simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live” (4). Therefore heterotopia is a state of confusion as in itself beholds the meaning of “different” and “otherness,” but opens doors to multiple spaces and places for the people to find themselves. The people find themselves in a state of mind that leads them to multiple directions. Foucault enunciates different possible types of heterotopia such as crisis heterotopia, heterotopias of deviation, heterotopias of time and heterotopias of ritual or purification. Heterotopia can be a real place that juxtaposes several spaces.

Foucault also states that it is impossible to live in a bubble, unaffected by the outside surroundings:

“the space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space. In other words, we do not live in a kind of void, inside of which we could place individuals and things. We do not live inside a void that could be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another” (3).

Applying this idea to our case, the Arbëresh could not keep the closed community just among themselves for much longer. Eventually, they had to be immersed and blended with the Italian community. As a result, we see the changes in the Arbëresh community

that for some Arbëresh seem as a threat, while for others these changes are taken more naturally as an inevitable part of life. Therefore, the two different worlds coexist side by side. For some one world becomes more familiar than the other and for others the axis tilts on the opposite side. It is a more flexible idea of utopia, one that has become permeable to the external world, not as rigid as before.

### **Migration Weakens the Arbëresh Utopia**

Relocation is a condition that allows people to be different and explore what is not familiar to them. As we have seen, the history of the Arbëresh starts with a migration. Their beginning as a community started by the movement from their homeland to the new Italian land which they made their new home, nonetheless, preserving their old traditions. Their living conditions became unbearable, as the South of Italy suffered from underdevelopment in comparison with the Italian North. While the South was largely agricultural, the North offered more job opportunities for a better living. Thus the Arbëresh were led to migrate again to Northern Italy, Western Europe or even America. This second wave of migrations was not as immense as the first one. The men had to find new ways to provide for the family. As a result, the families were separated for long periods of time. The elders, women and children stayed at home, living their everyday lives thanks to the financial help of the men who worked abroad.

In the last 25-30 years, the Arbëresh communities have also experienced migration movements toward them. They have become a migration destination. Many people have arrived in the Arbëresh community from the surrounding villages and have made it their home. Albanians from Albania who flooded Italy during the exodus of the early 90s, after the fall of communism, found the Arbëresh community as a sister place to

have a better life. During my visit to the Arbëresh towns, I noticed the presence of many Albanian outsiders who, while keeping their foreign stigma, had been accepted. They integrated in the community by embracing the language, the rituals and the customs just as the Arbëresh. Not only do they respect the town they made their home, but they live their lives in the community by being a part of it and by following the same traditions.

Migration has become a necessary movement for better economic purposes, not by choice but more of a necessity. A poem written by Tommaso Campera titled “Hora ima vëdes” (“My town is dying”) on March 27, 2006 in Maschito, a town in the province of Potenza, Basilicata portrays the deserted feeling of the town as the inhabitants leave. The original text is written in the archaic Albanian dialect of Maschito. The text of this poem delivers a sad feeling, as the birth town is transformed into a mother, who feels that the children she gave life and raised are abandoning her because of emigration. The inhabitants are called “children” throughout the poem, a metaphor to explain the close relation the inhabitants should have with their hometown. This relationship is broken as a result of emigration. The people/children do not speak the language and some do not even recognize their hometown. Thus, the poem ends with the “mother” cursing her “children” for abandoning her, instead of giving them her blessing.

<p>Hora ima vëdes, Si nje meme ce a'harruar Nga t'bilat, llargu merguare. Hora ima vëdes, Si nje meme ce- vetam e pa lote Kla t'bilate t'merguare nga mot. Hora ima vëdes, Si kjo mema- a 'fort- mendon: Im bir, gjuhan a'kujton? Vëdes, kjo a'bukura horë E plaka-turp I'madhë- klan  I'biri ce gjuha jona na shan. Vëdes, debirat kjo horë</p>	<p>My town is dying As a forgotten mother From her children far left behind.  My town is dying As a mother that without tears Cries for the children who left far away.  My town is dying As a mother with great courage thinks: “Does my son remember his language?” My beautiful town is dying And the old lady cries saddened  The son that despises his language. Dies, this town is getting lost</p>
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<p>Si l'beri ce- a'madhe andiri  Me jeman neng ce me kufi.  Vëdes a'bukura a'vjetra hore,</p> <p>E sin je meme shehe e thot:  "I'bera u? Neng me ndhot".  Hora ima ... vëdes,  Vedes meman ce pjeli bila t'huaja  Ce thon: "kjo gjuhe...nga! Shuaja!"  Vëdes ... u'hujtin bila ma meri!</p> <p>Thorze shtratin, murmurima pa diliguare  Jo me bekuare: "po nga jema t'mallkuare!"</p>	<p>As the son that – great shame  Does not look at his mother anymore  The antique, beautiful town is dying</p> <p>And as a mother, sees and says:  "They are born from me? It doesn't seem that way".  My town ... is dying,  The mother who gave birth to foreign children is dying  Children who say: "This language ... out! Forget it!"  It is dying ... they have become foreigners ... miserable  children!</p> <p>Next to the bed unintelligible mumbles  No more blessed: "But from the mother cursed!"</p>
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Table 14 originally displayed on jemi.it. Accessed April 21, 2017. The Arbëresh has been translated by Edna Lubonja.

The migration theme is also present in Carmine Abate's novels as a central theme. As we know, the author also migrated to Germany and lived there for some time, and, through the characters of the *Mericiani*, he has the opportunity to reveal his own experience as an immigrant. Migration is represented as an inevitable alternative for the Southern Italians, including the Arbëresh, as jobs became unavailable in this area. As Abate affirms, the men did not voluntarily leave their own *Hora*, the locale represented as the place of the heart, and the ultimate place where the Arbëresh people find their inner identity and peace. They were forced to go to Northern Italy, Western Europe or even America to work for their family to have a better life.

Migration is a double-edged sword: on one hand, it brings economic relief to the hometown but on the other hand, it separates families and severs identities. The children grow with an absent father figure. The men come back confused because they do not belong to any place. They feel foreigners at home and abroad. When they come back to their hometown, the community sees them with a different perception because they come back with a different mindset, a more modern attitude. Modernity is portrayed as inevitable but an enemy for the Arbëresh community because it brings change and affects

their preservation of the antique culture and traditions they have saved for generations. According to Armando Gnisci, who quotes Salman Rushdie, a real immigrant undergoes through a triple turmoil: first, he loses his own place; second, he needs to deal in a foreign language and third, he is surrounded by individuals who possess different social behaviors than his own and can sometimes be offensive.<sup>96</sup> The twist and turns of migration, the struggle, the adventure, the interpretation of loss and gain in the process, are part of this experience.

Carmine Abate dealt with migration from a young age. While he grew up, his father worked in Germany. Abate would always hear his dad say “il prossimo anno torno per sempre al paese... “germanese” in Italia e “Itaker” in Germania, cioe` stranieri in patria e all'estero” (“next year I will return back to town for good...they call me German in Italy and *Itaker* in Germany, that is, foreigner at home and abroad”; Abate 369). Such behaviors are very common when it comes to immigration. They unleash a series of socio-psychic consequences such as maladjustment, stress, alienation, collapsing of conscience, difficulty of identity formation for the second generation, conflicts between generations, questioning of your own world of values and certainty.

In the book *Il mosaico del tempo grande*, Abate touches on the theme of migration and covers the whole span of Arbëresh movements: some voluntarily and some restricted. There is the arrival of the first member of the Damis family who settles and starts to build Hora. Dhimitri Damis emphasizes the need for a close community, for conserving the memory of where they came from and by speaking the same language and keeping the same traditions. However, he also affirms that the unbearable living

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<sup>96</sup> See Armando Gnisci pp. 15-26.

situations obliged men to leave to America or elsewhere. He states: “i padri non raccontano mai niente: sono distrutti dal lavoro o vanno in guerra o emigrano all'estero, indaffarati e inquieti, assenti sempre o quasi” (“the fathers don't express themselves any more: they are destroyed by work or they go to war or they emigrate abroad; they are always busy, restless and almost always absent”; *Il mosaico del tempo grande* 46).

Also Carmine Abate's recent novels *Vivere per addizione* (2010), *Il muro dei muri* (2006), *La felicità dell'attesa* (2016), once again confront the theme of migration. In these recently published novels, Abate has incorporated many more elements from the “outside” into the Arbëresh community. It has been noticed that the author has taken a slight turn towards the integration of the Arbëresh community with the rest of the world. He seems to open up the community towards acceptance of the others. He complicates the Arbëresh community and its movements, reflecting the authentic changes the Arbëresh face as time progresses. The characters in these novels seem to adjust to the new environments much easier, as previously seen. They seem to adopt to new adventures crossing their way.

This process of adaptation and recognition of differences is crucial in reinstating self-identity in the Arbëresh subject. In the book *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Georg Hegel argued that one *self*<sup>97</sup> reflects on its own self but also in another self. This reflection between the self and the other has to occur for the self to be self-identified. Hegel stated: “a self-consciousness has before it a self-consciousness. Only so and only then is it self-consciousness in actual fact; for here first of all it comes to have the unity of itself in its otherness” (2723). The confrontation of the two self-consciousness is the

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<sup>97</sup> A mind or a person.



process of recognition where the boundaries and the limits of each self are determined. According to Hegel, this process has double significance: “first it has lost its own self, since it finds itself as another being; secondly, it has thereby sublated that other, for it does not regard the other as essentially real, but sees its own self in the other” (2748). This ongoing process between the self and the other happens constantly until one differentiates from the other and reinstates his/her own identity. In the case of the Arbëresh, we can see that they battle with themselves as they are confronted with the others who have a different cultural background. At times they feel foreign and distant and at other times they seem to mold with them. Even Abate’s characters can be seen as examples of selves, to use Hegel’s terms, who experience the ongoing struggle of self-identification as they are confronted with other who question their identity.

### **The Absent Father Figure**

Another element that pushes Arbëresh culture on the brink of dystopia, is a direct effect of migration: the breakdown of the family unit. In the novels, absent father figures such as Francesco (The Mericano) and Giovanni, can cause a dystopian situation because it is not conforming to the Arbëresh ideal. In the novel *Il ballo tondo*, Francesco Avati, Costantino’s father, is a perplexed characted who lives his life between Hora and Germany. He is known by the people of Hora as the *Mericano*, not really referring to an American. The Arbëresh associate *Merica* with “lavoro e benessere” (“work and well-being”; 82). Many flew away for work to make a living. This nickname also denotes him as a foreigner who brings new and modern ideas to town. He is a foreigner in Germany, and somewhat of a foreigner in the eyes of his own community but still deeply rooted in his family origins. When it comes to his obligations as an Arbëresh father, he needs to

make sure his daughters keep a good name of themselves and for the family and has to arrange their marriage to a good man. At times, he seems more modern for having seen the world outside the confinement of Hora: “lui che aveva conosciuto la vita, disse, sapeva che una donna segue la propria natura, anche se la legghi con le catene” (“he, who had known the life, knew that a woman follows her own choices, even if you tie her in chains”; *Il ballo tondo* 107). From the beginning to the end of the novel, the *Mericano* is seen in transit, back and forth, from and to Hora. At times, he is determined to stay and never leave Hora, and at other times, “lasciava il paese alle spalle con il sollievo di non dover più temere gli sguardi indagatori della gente, ma anche con tutte le preoccupazioni che lo avevano accompagnato giorno e notte in quei lunghi mesi” (“He could leave the town behind his shoulders with the relief of not having to dread about the enquiring looks of the people and all the troubles that had accompanied him day and night in all those long months he stayed there”; *Il ballo tondo* 159). Immigration has turned him into an unstable character who cannot find a place to call home and find his inner peace.

Although Hora pulls him back to his origins, the *Mericano* still finds it difficult to fit back in. Nino Lissandro’s words confirm the destiny of the immigrant by stating “questo è il destino del Mericano: tornare, partire, demolire, costruire, tornare, demolire, partire... non sa nemmeno lui quello che vuole” (“this is the destiny of the *Mericano*: coming back, leaving, demolishing, constructing, coming back, demolishing, leaving... he doesn’t even know what he wants”; *Il ballo tondo* 182). It is the ambiguity of the immigrant who is always in a transitory state of mind. The *Mericano* finds himself in a liminal space but the familiarity of Hora and its utopia calls him always to return back home.

In the novel *La moto di Scanderbeg*, Scanderbeg, the father, is also an absent figure in his son's life. He is a "protagonista nascosto" ("a hidden protagonist"; 134) as described by Rosana Morace, who comes to life only through the voice of the mother. The stories the mother tells and the symbolic gifts from the outside world the son has of his father, such as the soccer ball and the motorcycle, make him remember-able and present in Hora. This is how Giovanni relates to his absent father:

Scanderbeg, mio padre, non era morto. Voglio dire: non era morto del tutto. Ogni sera, per anni, appoggiavo la testa sulle ginocchia di mia madre e lei lo faceva resuscitare, lo plasmava con l'alito della voce ... Vedevo mio padre aggirarsi nella stanza. Era sempre vestito come il giorno della scommessa mortale, con pantaloni marroni di fustagno e la camicia di lino dalle maniche corte. Un giovane di trentacinque anni, coi capelli forti e ricci ... la voce di mia madre lo faceva muovere con bravura sul palcoscenico della stanza e lui ripeteva le stesse azioni, le stesse parole, gli stessi errori, come un attore consumato che non sbaglia neanche una Battuta. A volte, mi passava davanti e mi accarezzava il viso con le sue mani callose.

Scanderbeg, my dad, was not dead. I meant to say, he was not completely dead. Every night, for years, I would put my head on my mother's knees and she would revive him, she would mould him with the breath of her voice... I could see my father walking around the room. He was always dressed with brown fustian pants and a short sleeve linen shirt. A young man, 35 years old, with thick and curly hair... my mother's voice

was making him move skillfully in the stage of the room as he kept repeating the same actions, the same words, the same mistakes as a warn out actor who doesn't miss one single line. Sometimes, he passed in front of me and would caress my face with his callous hands (*La moto di Scanderbeg* 102-103).

In this passage, we see Abate's technique of sewing together presence and absence. While the father is away, the reports of the past, narrated in the present tense bring him and his time in an immanent present.

Another narrative technique that brings the past and the present together and reconciles with the absent fathers is using the tone of a fairy tale. The father figure lives in Giovanni's imagination and leads him to fantasize about him. Abate has the children of absent fathers invent fairy tales to help them cope with their reality. Giovanni fantasizes about his father as if he were there, although he is far away. He sees him as a hero who brings him gifts that are different from those of his friends. This mix of reality and dream reminds us of a kind of magical realism, which Vladimir Propp defines as typical of fairy tales. Their plots are born out of life, but "reflect reality only weakly" (*Fairy Tale Transformations* 787). Propp says that tales do rise from real life but the artistic realism and the presence of elements from real life are two different concepts that do not always overlap. The same scenario is portrayed in Giovanni's case as he fantasizes about his absent father as if he was there.

We find the theme of a child struggling with an absent father in another novel by Carmine Abate, *La festa del ritorno*, published in 2004. The protagonist is Marco, an eight years old boy, who lives with his mother and sister and awaits the arrival of his

father, who works in France. Because the father is always absent, he is seen as a hero who comes back to Hora and brings gifts to Marco. These gifts are special for Marco. He notices they are different than the ones his friends have and he saves them by not letting any of them touch his toys. Because the father is often imagined, when he comes back, it is hard to believe that he is there physically. Here is how Abate describes Marco's reaction upon the scene of the father's arrival: "il giorno dopo mi svegliai molto presto, entrai scalzo nella stanza dei miei genitori e mi avvicinai al lettone per accertarmi che mio padre fosse vero, in carne e ossa; per sicurezza lo toccai con un dito sulla schiena e poi andai a dormire felice" ("The next day I woke up very early, I entered barefoot at my parent's room and I went close to their bed, to verify that my dad was there, real in flesh and blood; to make sure I touched his back with my finger and then I went to sleep happily"; *La festa del ritorno* 25). Since the father is almost never there, it is hard for Marco to believe when he is really there. He wants to make sure he is not dreaming any longer.

Identity questions are left unanswered in these unbalanced situations as the characters face constant confrontation with the traditional world and modernity. The life of sacrifice that is being presented here where the fathers are far away from their family, trying to make a living to provide for the family, affects the identity formation of their children. The father realizes his alienation when he comes back to Hora. He tells his children: "e la vita passa e noi non ci godiamo né i figli né la moglie né questa bella terra germogliata e po' pellizzona" ("and life passes by and we don't enjoy neither our the children, nor our wives or even this previous and beautiful germinating land"; *La festa del ritorno* 37).

Marco's father lives in France, which is presented as cold, and distant, merely a work place. On the other hand, Hora is the place of the heart, a warm place where the family and everything is very closely related. When the father speaks from the heart, he confesses to Marco the reality he needs to know. He explains the difficulties of working in France, especially when he first got there. He emphasizes the importance of not giving up, given the hard times he endured, because he did not want to come back empty handed to Hora.<sup>98</sup> These characters are constantly confronted with the struggle of migration and being in transit in time and space. They seem to accept it as an inevitable part of life, nevertheless, they persist in saving and preserving what is valuable to them: their language and traditions, the substance of their utopic vision.

#### **Ambiguity of the Immigrant (A Transitory State of Mind)**

Migration transforms the characters into ambiguous beings. We can see that Abate has taken a different turn in his latest books. He no longer leads the characters backwards to their past and their Hora, but works towards acceptance of the new and integration of the inside and outside worlds, thus leads them towards the verge of dystopia. *Il muro dei muri* (The wall of walls) is a collection of short stories that focuses on stories of rebellion, generational conflicts, but also on the theme of immigration, while opening doors to new perspectives and possibilities. Through these stories, Abate portrays a different stage of the Arbëresh community, the late years of the 90s. As time passes by, the generations change because of the affects the larger society imposes on this community. The Arbëresh community is now more open towards outsiders and

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<sup>98</sup> See *La festa*, Chapter 5.

foreigners, also thanks to the eroding force of migration that brings change, a change they refused to accept for a long time.

The first short story, titled “L’idolo lontano lontano” (“The idol far far away”) gives an angered description of migration and blames the fault on the Italian State. The story starts with the narrator remembering the times his father was home and they functioned as a united family. But shortly after, this picture perfect family was broken due to the father leaving to find a better job to support the family. The son revolts:

Mio padre sta in Germania per colpa dello Stato. E dei partiti. Io parto per colpa loro. Bisogna lottare per costruire una società dove tutti gli uomini sono uguali e perciò nessuno emigra. E tutti i bambini hanno un padre di carne e ossa, che ritorna a casa ogni sera dal bar, e non un padre di carta e matita, che ritorna una volta all’anno e poi riparte.

My father is in Germany as a result of the State’s fault and the political parties. I am leaving because of them too. We have to fight to construct a society where all the men are equal and therefore, no one immigrates. And all the children have a father in flesh and blood, who returns home from the bar every night and not a father in paper and pencil who comes home once a year and has to leave again. (*Il muro dei muri* 16)

The immigrants see migration as a struggle, a separation from their families but also as an inevitable way to make a living. They regret leaving their children dreaming about their father instead of having them close by as a role model. The father describes immigration as “una malattia inguaribile e una volta presa non ta la togli più di dosso” (“an incurable disease that once you have it, you can’t get rid of”; 18).

In the second story of the collection *Il muro dei muri*, “La biondina occhispenti” (“The opaque blonde”), the narrator tells the experiences in Hamburg as he encounters struggling characters from his hometown who work there but also others who try to take reality with composure. Zu Pietro, for examples, begs for compassion when he says “questa terra appartiene un po’ anche a noi: vi abbiamo versato il nostro sudore e a volte il nostro sangue” (“this place belongs somewhat to us as well: we have poured our sweat and at time our blood here”; 32). Because he feels like a foreigner in each place (at home and abroad), uncle Pietro asks for belonging and acceptance in Hamburg for his accomplishments. Sometimes, while in Hamburg, his past and the memories of his birthplace would bring him back in time and question his existence. A number of uncertainties trouble his conscience as he says:

forse l’unica soluzione è veramente ritornare là, dove siamo nati. Forse bisogna farlo subito, altrimenti si ritorna nella bara. E allora non serve ... serve solo ad avere il tuo mondo con te, al funerale, quando a te non serve più ... forse voi giovani ... voi che avete tutta la vita davanti ... voi giovani dovrete ritornare per cambiare le cose ... forse all’inizio sarebbe dura anche lì ... ma forse quando uno parte non può più tornare indietro...

Maybe the only solution is really returning back to where we were born. Maybe it is necessary to do it right away; otherwise we have one foot in the grave. And by then it won’t matter ... maybe you kids ... you who have your whole life in front of you ... you kids have to go back to change things ... maybe the beginning will be hard even there ... but maybe once you leave there is no turning back ... (*Il muro dei muri* 34)



The passage is filled with “maybes,” a number of possibilities but no real solutions. The situation of the immigrant is confronted and analyzed from the different directions that pull him apart. The uncle is a wreck who does not know what he really believes in anymore, and what is the right thing to do. Stay away from home? Go back? Is it the responsibility of the youngsters to bring change? All these open-ended questions with no answer add to the struggle of the immigrants. They find themselves in a liminal space.

In addition, men who already constructed a family in Germany and elsewhere had little chances of thinking too much about going back to Hora. In Chapter 3, “Gabbie” (“Jails”), a new character comes into the picture. Saverio is the older brother of Zu Pietro’s mother, who lives abroad for a while. He says:

ma chi vuole tornare indietro? Io voglio andare ancora avanti, costruirmi una vita qui. Al paese ci torno solo per le ferie. La mia vita è qui, dove è nato mio figlio.

But who wants to go back? I want to move on forward, to construct a life here. I go back in town only for vacation. My life is here, where my son was born. (*Il muro dei muri* 34)

Saverio’s perception of the past and what he left behind is different than Zu Pietros. He has constructed a life in the new place, which has substituted Hora as a secondary place, only to visit for vacation. Saverio has not given up completely his birthplace, but given his circumstances, having a son who was born in the place where he works, he is determined to construct his life there. The family remains the nucleus on how the decisions are determined. Instead, Zu Pietro remains a puzzled character with one foot in Hora and the other in Germany. He is puzzled and does not find his home. Saverio, on the

other hand, has found Germany to be the permanent place to live and to raise his son in a modern way and to move forward.

Another novel that describes the downward parable of the Arbëresh community is Carmine Abate's *La felicità dell'attesa* (The Happiness of Waiting), published in 2016. This novel develops the story of Carmine Leto, an Arbëresh, and his wife Shirley, an American. Carmine is an Arbëresh boy who left as all of his contemporaries for America to find a job and make a living. One time, he comes back to Hora with a girl who is described by the people of Hora as a “giovane donna dalla pelle vellutata, scura scura, una montagna di capelli ricciolini, occhi come olive nere al sole, un po' più alta di lui, che pure non era un cacanello, come la maggior parte degli uomini di Hora” (“young lady: dark, dark velvet skin, a mountain of curly hair, olive shape black eyes, and she was a bit taller than him; and he wasn't that short like the majority of the men in Hora”; 12). She has distinguished features which defined her as a foreigner, and outsider.

Shirley's first impression of Hora is very negative. She tells Carmine: “Dove mi hai portato? In quale buco del mondo? Mi avevi detto che era un paese bellissimo, invece non ci sono né strade decenti, né luce né acqua in casa. E la gente è povera, più che nei peggiori sobborghi di New York” (“where have you brought me? In a hole in the world? You told me it was a beautiful place, instead here there aren't even decent streets, and the people are even poorer than in the worst suburbs of New York”; *La felicità* 15). On the other hand, Carmine's explanation and vision of his hometown are completely the opposite. He answers:

Ti sbagli, Shirley. Qui abbiamo da mangiare roba genuine, qui nessuno muore di fame. E se non hai occhi liberi per vedere quanto è bello questo

paese nostro, incoronato da un bosco sempreverde di ilici, il vento di mare che rinfresca l'aria pura che respire, le nostre chiese antiche, be' non ci posso fare niene. Dei posti dove vive, una persona vede ciò che vuole vedere, to lo dice uno che ne ha cambiati tanti; e tu hai bisogno di tempo per capire e convincerti che non ti ho ingannata, che qui avremo una vita felice, se non ci arrendiamo alle prime difficoltà, si, grazie ai soldi guadagnati là da voi.

You are wrong Shirley, here we have natural food to eat, and here nobody dies of hunger. And if you do not have eyes to see how beautiful is our town, crowned with a green forest, the wind from the sea that refreshes our fresh air you inhale, our antique churches...well, I can't do anything. People see what they want to see in a place they live. This is coming from a person who has seen many. You need time to understand and convince yourself that I did not lie to you. Here we have a happy life, if we pass the difficulty of, yes, thanks to the money we make over there by you, in America. (*La felicità* 15-17)

In this passage, we can see the two descriptions of Hora side by side. Carmine, which had been away from Hora for a while, enjoys the return to his hometown, the nature and the good food, like a breath of fresh air. Shirley feels uncomfortable at first and not really seeing what she had expected according to Carmine's descriptions. However, in a couple of years Shirley becomes one of them "la Mericana non disse più che voleva ritornare a New York ... in pochi anni la Mericana imparò l'arbëresh perfettamente" ("the American doesn't say anymore that she wants to return to NY .. in a

couple of years the American learned Arbëresh perfectly”; *La felicità* 22). She embraces the culture and the community. She finally recognizes the beauty that her husband saw right from the start. Their children grow up in a family with an Arbëresh father and an American mother. They are trilingual, speaking Arbëresh, English and Italian in school. If Arbëresh purity is sacrificed, the result is enriching.

Abate himself finds himself in a liminal space at times. He seems to have crossed the struggles and make the best out of such difficult situation. He sees the positive light in the life of an immigrant. He is consented by the positive outcomes that each place, although foreign and distant at first, can also become familiar with time and enriching.

For the newspaper *Corriere della Sera* he states:

Da allora cominciai a percepire a raccontare l’emigrazione non solo come strappo, ferita, percorso doloroso, ma soprattutto come ricchezza. Perché vivere tra due o tre mondi, crescere in più culture, parlare diverse lingue, acquisire nuovi sguardi, conoscere persone di altri luoghi, non può essere che una ricchezza. Più difficile ma irrinunciabile è il passo successivo: vivere per addizione, con un piede al Nord, uno al Sud e la testa in mezzo, prendendo il meglio di qui e là e di ogni luogo, senza soffocare nessuna delle nostre anime...

Since then I started to perceive to narrate about migration not only as fracture, wound, or a sad path but above all as treasure. Living between two or three worlds, growing up in more than one culture, speaking different languages, acquiring new gazes, knowing people of different places can’t be other than wealth. The most difficult but undeniable is the

following: living with one foot in the North and the other in the South and the head in the middle, taking the best from here and there and in every place, without suffocating the soul...

We can conclude that in recent years, the Arbëresh have become more open-minded towards the Italians and others. Many married into Italian, German, American families, expanded their community and somehow endangered the purity of the Arbëresh ways. Carmine Abate promotes this stage as positive and in the latest novels, proposes a different approach towards multiculturalism and multilingualism. He affirms that being able to know different people, different cultures and different languages is prosperity. The different approach of his latest novels unveils that identity is not created only through origin and tradition but also through a mixture and the multiplicity of experiences which make a man a unique individual, but still, in any case, a part of the community.

## CONCLUSION AND FINAL THOUGHTS

Let us recap now the itinerary of this dissertation. Through Carmine Abate's novels, the documentaries and the personal interviews conducted in the Arbëresh towns of Calabria, I have concluded that in the span of over five centuries the Arbëresh have succeeded in keeping the community together, but, the Arbëresh utopia has been modified. Its strength has been weakened with time and the loss of the older generation, but it has not been lost. The Arbëresh utopia has transitioned from generation to generation. The Arbëresh have shown their dedication to preserve their culture and traditions, defending them in a foreign environment for centuries. In this sense, the Arbëresh is a remarkable case because as we know the utopian communities do not usually have a long life span.

As we have seen, for the first generation that arrived in the Italian land, it was not an easy journey. They had to rebuild their life in the new environment. But they have shown to be a building block for the generations to come. Their passion and determination to preserve their culture, language and traditions penetrated centuries, and more than five centuries later, it is still alive. It can be said that the passion has weakened throughout the years. It is not as strong, especially when we look at the younger generations who are more and more integrated with the modern lifestyle.

Nevertheless, the tradition goes on. The community persists because of the utopia, which exists nowhere but in their minds. Designated people and institutions who are passionate and willing to put their efforts in the continuation of their Arbëresh roots, are contributing in the cultural preservation. Different means are used to promote their

Culture: cultural events which include book reviews, dance, music and theatrical festivals, and religious holidays. The church and the eparchies are institutions that keep the community together not only through religion but also promote the use of language and traditions. Other organizations have been created in the Arbëresh communities to raise interest in the cultural preservation and include the younger generation to participate and keep the promise, as they call the *besa*, to the older generation to save and bring forward their culture.

Carmine Abate, the Italo-Arbëresh author has contributed greatly to his Arbëresh community by dedicating his books to the South, Calabria and specifically his hometown Carfizzi, and to describing the unique, culturally rich lifestyle in which he grew up. By setting up his novels in Hora, Abate describes common stories from his childhood all the way to adulthood that shape the Arbëresh life in Calabria. He portrays the Arbëresh utopia as the stronghold that keeps the community together but also shows its flaws in his latest novels. He is not only applauded for his contribution in Carfizzi but throughout the entire Arbëresh community and beyond. All the interviewees in the Arbëresh towns around Calabria said that they are proud of Carmine Abate representing the Arbëresh community outside its borders, especially because he includes some Arbëresh words and expression within the Italian writing.

Abate expands his writing beyond Carfizzi and includes other themes in his latest books such as migration. Migration is an occurrence which started the Arbëresh community and continues to happen. People migrate to different places for various reasons. For the Arbëresh community, initially it was fleeing their motherland not to fall under the Ottoman Empire and preserving their culture, language and traditions. Later on,

migration was necessary for better living conditions, therefore men in the family left to work in Northern Italy, Europe and even America to work for their family's well-being. Abate lived under the same conditions and he was faced with an absent father figure because of migration. Later on, he migrated as his father did, for work and school. Initially, he describes the result of migration as an event that separated families, changed personalities of men who were differentiated from the rest of the community when they returned only for the money they would bring back for a better living. However, in his later novels, he treats migration as part of life that enriches the person by being in different places. Each place and each experience has something to offer that makes us more open and more knowledgeable, it makes us "live by addition," using an expression he uses often, "vivere per addizione".

Abate seems to naturally accept the changes with time and modernity as an inevitable part of life but he always seems to return back to the lingering past. Time and again he seems to find those memories that made such an impression to him as a young child and portray them in his novels. The last book he dedicated only to food and the memories he has of his grandmother and mother preparing different dishes and desserts for special occasions such as Easter, Christmas, and weddings etc. As life goes on and he encounters new experiences, the past somehow is always present.

Abate shows that today we live in different times. As we lose the older generations we also lose some valuable things from the past. But the memories remain and through memories we can rebuild some of the past and show to our children. This was the motto for many Arbëresh in San Demetrio and Lungro I had the pleasure of meeting. All of them admitted that times have changed and the memories they have



growing up with their grandparents were different. Many cultural activities have been lost or not practiced any longer. The feedback I received in reference to the past and the way it used to be fifty years ago was bittersweet. They remembered with nostalgia the times where Arbëresh was spoken every day and everywhere; the family gatherings and special occasions were more festive and the table seemed to be always fuller. The children looked up to their grandparents for identity formation.

The Arbëresh recognize that some changes come as a result of some inevitable factors such as the lapse of time. However, they also admit that there are other factors that can be prevented from affecting negatively in the loss of language, culture and traditions, if they are handled by the right people or affiliations. Many interviewees pointed the finger to the deficiency of the people in power, starting at the Italian Government and down the line, which influences negatively in the cultural preservation of the minority communities. The Arbëresh confessed that the laws look good only on paper, but they are not being put to practice as they should.

Many of them were irritated by the fact that they could not write the first language they ever spoke, Arbëresh. The schools do not offer Arbëresh. Today, they only offer Albanian but the Arbëresh want to learn the dialect they know how to speak. As a result, they said that the local government is not pushing its limits far and beyond to make it happen. Another concern the Arbëresh raised is the question of the younger generation. The loss of interest, the dislocation for school and work purposes, and the mingling with people outside of the Arbëresh community poses a threat to the continuation of the culture. They need guidance from the elders and the community has to create ways to incorporate them in the cultural life by getting them to show interest.

The interviewees, many of them teachers and people involved in cultural activities in the community, were somewhat pessimistic towards the question of the younger generation. They admitted that something needs to be done but they didn't have any prominent solution. However, some did show that working closely with younger children and seeing what they need to have that switch in becoming interested in learning about the Arbëresh culture is an update on the old songs and rhapsodies. A modernized music, more upbeat than the lamenting songs would be more appealing to the children. In fact, the results have shown that this technique has worked and a group of children have signed up for learning the dances and the songs that reflect the history and the culture of the Arbëresh. Some people are more motivated than others and they do take the time and effort to teach their descendants.

In 2001, the remote town of San Demetrio opened its doors to international students who come to visit and explore the Arbëresh culture and the Italian culture of the South. This program has been offered to the foreigners for a number of years and it has been successful. The end of May and all the way towards the end of August, the town is filled with new faces. These American students from University of Rhode Island come to town to study and live in this area, as a result of the courageous idea of Professor Michelangelo La Luna. La Luna was born in San Demetrio Corone and is now a professor of the Italian Language and Literature at the University of Rhode Island. He is also the president of the Centro Internazionale di Studi Deradiani. He created this program for the American students to come and experience the culture of the south. The program is filled with "lezioni, laboratori e seminari incentrati su aspetti diversi della letteratura, storia e della civiltà italiana" (lessons, labs, and seminars based on different

aspects of literature, history and the Italian civilization; Adriano Mazziotti, “Tornano gli studenti”). Other than the lessons, the students are exposed to excursions and tours in Calabria, Basilicata and Puglia.

These American students have the challenge to interact daily with the locals and according to Mazziotti, they “stringono amicizie con i coetani del luogo, frequentano volentieri i locali pubblici bazzicati dai giovani e, soprattutto, portano ogni anno a S. Demetrio Corone una ventata di esuberanza, vivacità” (form friendships with the contemporary locals, they hang out the local bars filled with youngsters and, above all, they bring every year to San Demetrio Corone a gust of exuberance and vivacity). At the same time, the locals receive them with open arms, in the typical way of Mediterranean people. The students get to enjoy the local food, the friendliness of the locals and they show “vivo interesse alla peculiarità culturali del microcosmo locale e riconoscono anche il pregio di una esistenza fatta di rapporti umani, valori e sentimenti ancora vivi e scandita da tempo meno frenetici dei loro” (a real interest for the cultural peculiarities of the local microcosm and they recognize also the importance of a life made of human relationships, values and feelings still alive and marked by time less chaotic than theirs). In a way, they get to see a different lifestyle.

Mazziotti quotes from one of the students from Maryland who says “San Demetrio Corone è uno degli ultimi resti di un mondo rapidamente scomparso, un posto dove uno può trovare la serenità. Mi sento privilegiata di trascorrere questo tempo in Calabria” (San Demetrio Corone is one of the last remains in the world that are slowly disappearing, a place where one can find serenity. I feel privileged to spend this time in Calabria). This testimony confirms the welcoming reception the foreigners receive from

the beginning as they visit the Arbëresh town. They get quickly immersed in the southern lifestyle and they learn to appreciate everything it has to offer. The feeling of comfort is established by the locals and the organizers of the program that make the stay worthwhile. This internationalization of Hora is just one more factor that leads me to think that the utopia is not dead, it is just changing. I believe that as long as there is hope and inspirational people such as the ones I met who are passionate for what they represent and they have the courage to motivate others, the Arbëresh towns will continue to save and promote their culture and values. The Arbëresh utopia is not over yet.

The Albanian scholarship has worked hand in hand with the Arbëresh and have touched mostly the linguistic part of the research. We cannot forget the fact that throughout the years, many Albanian scholars graduated from St. Adriano College in San Demetrio and were students of Girolamo De Rada. In the recent years, the research and interest has captured the cultural side and its persistence that is still evident in the Arbëresh communities.

I would like to conclude with a poem by Ofelia Giudicissi Curci, a poet and archeologist from Pallagorio, available on [mondoarabesco.it](http://mondoarabesco.it) titled “Sinfonia di un popolo morente” (“Symphony of a dying population”). This poem synthesizes the utopian process the Arbëresh population has lived and that my dissertation has attempted to illustrate. It praises tradition, it allows for change and calls for future preservation. It starts on a sad note, by stating that the Arbëresh language is slowly deteriorating as the people are not using or practicing the Arbërisht any longer. The author blames emigration for the loss of language and not being able to use even the words that she knows in Arbëresh. As a result, even some traditions and customs are lost. But by the end, the

poem has turned towards hope and opened up to a slight ray of light. *Cursi* reinforces the fact that if there is desire, the heart of the Arbëresh and the antique myths of the past will remain and will survive for generations to come.

<p>Dire <i>dashiuria</i>          Che significa amore          E dire <i>mëmë</i>          Che sta per madre          Che senso ha ora che          Nessuno indende più la mia lingua?          Come ultimi orgogliosi Cheyennes          gli arbresci resistono          A Falconara – nido d’aquila-          e quelli della piana          di Castrovillari credono          di vivere ancora gridando          all’eco cerimonie e riti          mentre gli avanzi          di una civiltà antica          del catanzarese sbiascica          le ultime frasi in tracio          la mia lingua è la stessa          che parlò Omero e le ansie          di Achille sono le stesse          che lacrimo io se Teti          vuol dire “mare”          e Ioni “nostro” e se          lontano Cristo fu coperto          dal mio “sindoni”.          poichè le parole rimbalzano          a noi stessi e nessuno ha mostrato          rispetto per esse, esse si sono spente          così che un popolo morente          può solo dire come Ettore          in punto di morte “des...”          che sta per la parola muoio.          le canzoni, le ballate, i vezzi          il sarcasmo audace, il coraggio          e le care usanze, i merletti          nel bellissimo bianco inamidato          si sono persi nel cammino          dell’emigrazione.          Non so più dire nella mia lingua          la parola “soffro” e dirla così          non mi è nemmeno di appagamento;          Posso però fare intendere          alla mia gente          come altri hanno fatto con me,</p>	<p>To say <i>dashiuria</i>          That signifies love          And to say <i>mëmë</i>          That means mother          What sense does it have now that          No one understands my language anymore?          As the last proud Cheyenne          the Arbëresh resist          at Falconara – the eagle’s nest-          and those of the plain          in Castrovillari believe          of living still shouting          at the echo of ceremonies and rituals          while the progress          of an antique civilization          in the lands of Catanzaro is mumbling          the last phrases in Thracian          my language is the same          as the one that Homer spoke and the anxiety          of Achilles are the same          that I weep if <i>Teti</i>          means “sea”          and <i>Ioni</i> “our” and if          far away Christ was covered          by my “Holy Shroud”          since words bounce          on ourselves and no one has demonstrated          respect for them, they have died out          so that a dying population          can only say as Hector          at the moment of death “des...”          that means I’m dying.          the songs, the dances, the charms          the daring sarcasm, the courage          and the dear customs, the laces          on the beautiful white starch          have been lost along the way          of emigration.          I don’t know any more how to say in my language          the word “suffer” and to say it this way          it is not even to my satisfaction          But I can still make my people          understand          as others have done with me</p>
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che se vogliamo, qualcosa forse resterà di noi, del nostro cuore dell'antico mito di un tempo.	that if we want, maybe something will remain of us, of our heart and of the antique myth of long ago. <sup>99</sup>
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Table 15 A poem by Ofelia Giudicissi Curci titled *Sinfonia di un popolo morente* displayed in [mondoarberesco.it](http://mondoarberesco.it). The Arbëresh has been translated by Edna Lubonja.

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<sup>99</sup> See link: <http://www.mondoarberesco.it/giudicissi/sinfoniapopolomorente.htm>

## APPENDIX

### Interviews

This appendix contains information of all the participant interviews. The interview process was conducted in public space, face-to-face, question-answer format. The researcher used the same questionnaire for all the interviewees. The interviews lasted from fifteen to thirty minutes. The researcher visited the town of San Demetrio Corone, Calabria between 21-26 July 2016, where most of the interviews took place. The researcher was initially greeted by professor Michelangelo La Luna, a local San Demetrio who works in the United States at the University of Rhode Island. La Luna was helpful in distinguishing the right people to interview. The first encounter was La Luna's friend, Emilio Chimento who became a chaperone and a good friend. During this time, the researcher took day trips to the close by villages of Macchia, San Cosmo and Carfizzi to meet with other Arbëresh locals. The researcher visited the last town, Lungro, on July 26-27, 2016.

The questionnaire used for this research is as follows:

1. How old are you? \_\_\_ 18-21 22-40 41+
2. How do you identify yourself? Arberesh, Italo-Arberesh, Italian?
3. Who can be considered an Arberesh? What qualities do they need to have?
4. What distinguishes an Arberesh from an Italian or a Calabrese?
5. What does Arberia mean for you? And Albania?

6. Have you traveled to Albania? What do you think you have in common with the Albanians? Do you speak Arberesh? What Arberesh words do you like to use instead of Italian?
7. How do you feel living in Italy? Do you feel being a part of this country or not?
8. How do you maintain the Arberesh culture? Who is responsible for its maintenance?
9. Do you think the Arberesh culture has changed throughout the years? If so how?
10. What do you think about the future of this culture?
11. What Albanian object do you own at home?
12. Any memories of the past?
13. Do you know any poetry or songs?
14. What Albanian food do you cook?
15. What is your favorite event/party?
16. Any family names/pictures/ personal traditions?
17. Have you read Carmine Abate?
18. What do you know of him? What do you think?

The interview with Hevzi Nuhiu was held July 22, 2016 at Bar Centrale, Via Dante Alighieri, at San Demetrio Corone. A second casual meeting was scheduled July 24 when Nuhiu and his Arbëresh wife invited me for dinner to try the local food.

The interview with Prof. Lily Paloli was held at the main piazza on July 22 when she returned from the afternoon stroll routine.

That night the researcher was invited to a private painting exhibition event, where she met Prof. Bruno Tarantino.



The interview with Angela Castellano and her friends was held July 23, 2016 at Bar Centrale for a short coffee break, right after church.

The interview with Pino Cacoza was held on July 23, 2016. He was introduced to the researcher by Prof. La Luna as he was sitting at Bar Stilla with singer-songwriter Ernesto Iannuzzi for a coffee. The researcher encountered Cacoza many times after the first interview for further conversations and lastly, Cacoza offered some books of poetry and cd's he had recently published. On this day, the researcher also interviewed Gilda Vuscaldo, bar Stilla's waiter, and the student Adele.

The interview with Carmela Oliva was held on July 24 at her house. Emilio Chimento, a local who knew everyone in town, helped the researcher during her stay in San Demetrio to interview the right people and acquire more information. Chimento drove me to Oliva's house, and she was extremely welcoming to open her doors and speak with me about her passion for making Arbëresh costumes. Once the interview was completed, Carmela showed me the Arbëresh costumes she preserved and the ones she had handmade herself.

That same afternoon, Emilio and Bruno had arranged a meeting with Vicky Makri at her house. Bruno took me to her house and we had a long conversation with Vicky and her husband who is a musician. She was very welcoming and provided extensive information about her involvement in local cultural activities.

The interview with Federico Braile was held on July 25 in the afternoon, in his studio. The interview was interrupted many times as he would show me his paintings and sculptures he had recently made. He was introduced to the researcher by Pino Cacoza.

The interview with the author Carmine Abate was held on July 25, at the veranda of his home in Carfizzi. The researcher had to drive two hours from San Demetrio accompanied by Emilio Chimento, to meet with the author for a short interview and see the town of Carfizzi and its surroundings. During this visit, the researcher interviewed Vittoria Pompo, the Carfizzi mayor's wife, as they were waiting for the key to enter the Parco Letterario.

On July 26, the day before leaving San Demetrio, the researcher had an early meeting with the priest, Andrea Quartarolo, right before the liturgy, in the San Demetrio Megalomartire Cathedral. After the interview, the priest took the researcher on a tour of the church, explaining its foundation.

On this same day, the researcher interviewed on the main piazza Deciko Genaro, Francesco Campagna and Prof. Adriano Mazziotti. They were all out in the piazza as the showcase of a painting event was taking place.

The last interview that afternoon, was the meeting with the mayor Salvatore Laminata at the city hall. This meeting was made by Emilio, who had informed the mayor of my arrival.

Half of July 26 and all day July 27 was spent in the town of Lungro. The researcher met with Anna Stratigò at her house/B&B. On July 27, accompanied by Stratigò, the researcher met with Donato Oliverio, the Bishop of the Eparchy of Lungro. The meeting was held in the hall of the Eparchy of Lungro.

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