150 anni della nostra storia:
la pastorale agli emigrati nelle Americhe
a cura di Vincenzo Rosato

SOMMARIO

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Lifting the Veil: Migrant Murder, a «madre italiana», and the Politics of Transnational Colonisation*

The impact of Italy’s imperialist agenda on Italian migrants from the 1870s until World War I has received increasing scholarly attention from diverse perspectives. One understudied historical source of relevance, however, is that of the foreign language press which holds a rich repository of cultural, social and political attitudes, providing insight into the complexities of community life and the responses to homeland politics from a range of radical to conservative approaches. Although host societies differed across the diaspora in terms of their responses to the millions of Italians who emigrated, Italian migrant editors and journalists attempted to forge a collective image of Italians, representative of the «social reality» they wished to create. As Rudolph Vecoli states, these newspapers acted as «a site of intense

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ideological struggle for the minds and souls of the immigrants» even if such migrants «filtered media messages through the sieve of their own experience»\(^3\). In an examination of their broadsheets it is not surprising to find that most newspapers convey little about the experience of women. Despite the emergence of women’s suffrage newspapers in white settler societies, the public sphere was dominated by businessmen and the business of community-building, evident in both the ethnic and mainstream press. There are a few exceptions all the same, one of which can be found in the case of female crime.

A number of issues played out between 1904 and 1907 over one homicide case in the largest Italian community newspaper in the United States, New York’s Il Progresso Italo-Americano. On the stormy evening of 10 March 1904 in Lodi, a small Italian town in the county of Bergen, New Jersey, two Southern Italian women, Anna Valentini and Rosa Salza, became engaged in a heated verbal dispute that quickly descended into a struggle over a kitchen knife and ended with Salza «dead, slain by the hand of Anna Valentini», as The Evening World of New York couched it\(^4\). Valentini had, in fact, stabbed Salza about 17 times before turning herself in to the local police in neighbouring Hackensack. The shocking incident was taken up by the American press, which covered the trial, the verdict of murder in the first degree by a 12-man jury, the sentencing of Valentini «[...] to die on the gallows at Hackensack»\(^5\), and the saga of her legal team’s many appeals. But New York’s Italian community became equally compelled.

As rare as inflictions of fatal violence by Italian women were in the United States during the pre-war era, they tended to be reported more in the mainstream press to reinforce the historic gendered and cultural victimisation of the perpetrators – usually Southern Italian women – with a focus on their inability to control their emotions\(^6\). According to Jennifer Guglielmo, Italian migrant women were seen as

\(^3\) Ibidem, pp. 19, 28.

\(^4\) The Evening World, 18 April 1904, p. 6. Anna Valentini’s surname was translated as “Valentina” in the English-speaking legal proceedings and press.

\(^5\) The Evening World, 9 June 1904, p. 11.

«docile, dominated, and in need of rehabilitation» in general. When they stepped outside of this frame through acts of lethal violence, explanations quickly shifted to their irrational nature. This approach had the weight of pseudo-scientific theorisation that had gained momentum out of the context of late nineteenth century racism, linked to the rise in nationalism and imperialism. However, it was an approach that also overlooked precipitating factors, such as domestic violence, while aiming to reassure the reading public that there was no connection between any woman’s crime and the notorious criminal organisations of the day.

Qualifying officially as white, Italians were often cast to the periphery within settler societies as well as in public discourse for breaching social standards – in employment, living conditions, physical appearance, marital relations, any demonstration of cultural heritage, or deviant behaviour. Their engagement in jobs that were traditionally dominated by black people – thus crossing racial expectations – was interpreted as threatening the hegemony of the white civilized world. Any danger to the dominant racial homogeneity challenged the ideal of democracy and national identity by «polluting the body politic», in David Goldberg’s words. In addition, social Darwinism had given rise to works like William Zebina Ripley’s The Races of Europe in 1899, which announced new distinguishing racial classifications between Alpine and Mediterranean peoples, and which implicated Southern Italian criminality. In Italy these currents were crystallised by the «positivist school» of criminal anthropology, largely led by Cesare Lombroso from the early 1880s, which contested the classical approach to criminology. In the United States, some anarchist Italians critiqued assumptions about the South’s inferiority, which generally

7 Guglielmo, Living the Revolution, pp. 80-81.
8 Ibidem, pp. 85, 98.
isolated Southern Italians in the contemporary discourse of race, as «the race of the rich and the race of the poor»\textsuperscript{12}. But this articulation of class antagonism was rare and many (both Americans and Italians) subscribed to the view that the racial origins of Southern Italians were questionable and could be detrimental to upholding the "dignity" and privileges of a white social collectivity – the only kind of society, it was assumed, that could ensure the success of democracy. An association with black society, therefore, including potential republican or populist political sympathies as Matthew Frye Jacobson points out, caused so much anxiety that it could result in extreme cases in retribution through lynchings, from the famous 1891 New Orleans case onwards\textsuperscript{13}.

Against this background Italian migrant women slipped across definitions of white and non-white like Italian men, but gender and class added further limitations. These women were largely considered «apolitical» – suppressed by patrilineal traditions – «unorganizable» workers, and rendered domestically passive by historical, patriarchal and cultural traditions – a view, nevertheless, recently contested by Jennifer Guglielmo\textsuperscript{14}. In the United States, as she explains, «news reports consistently constructed an image of Italian women as oppressed by Italian men, who were both lazy and violent [...] unwilling to work, abusive, and negligent in their role as providers»\textsuperscript{15}. Officially, husbands and fathers remained legally responsible for Italian women in Italy until 1919\textsuperscript{16}, yet citizenship rights were not attained until 1946. While the legal framework in the United States differed substantially from that in Italy, there were significant cultural similarities.

Very few Italian migrant women enjoyed autonomy, independence and freedom. Instead, their lives were tied to the family and the home, supplementing incomes through irregular unskilled work. For the vast majority emigrating to the United States, employment opportunities outside the home were both restricted and gendered with Italian women mostly taking up jobs in clothing and textile factories or domestic service before marriage\textsuperscript{17}. Yet, even after marriage and out of «una


\textsuperscript{13} Jacobson, \textit{Whiteness of a Different Color}, pp. 56-63, especially p. 57; see also Salerno, «I Delitti della Razza Bianca», pp. 123, fn. 33.

\textsuperscript{14} Guglielmo, \textit{Living the Revolution}, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibidem, p. 96.


\textsuperscript{17} Guglielmo, \textit{Living the Revolution}, ch. 2; Maddalena Tirabassi, «Bourgeois Men, Peasant Women: Rethinking Domestic Work and Morality in Italy», in Donna
necessità imprescindibile», these women formed part of an invisible workforce, enslaved in the «sweat-shops» within their «tenement-houses» to produce goods for the growing consumer society, in order to meet their family needs\textsuperscript{18}. In the process, as Andreina De Clementi explains, Italian working mothers tended to adopt three strategies: «[...] il taglio dei consumi, l’incremento della sfera dell’autoproduzione – il vestiario ad esempio poteva essere rammendato o confezionato in casa con l’aiuto della macchina da cucire – e la caccia alle entrate supplementari», such as taking in boarders\textsuperscript{19}. On top of this was a culture of domestic violence\textsuperscript{20}. In this light, the sentencing to death of a Southern Italian-American woman in 1904 offers considerable scope for interpreting the pressures facing Italian migrant women and the context that drove an interest in them from the perspective of the local Italian migrant press.

Shortly after Valentini’s conviction, the director and chief editor of Il Progresso, Carlo Barsotti, launched a campaign «per salvare Anna Valentini» with the employment of the newspaper’s lawyers James Trimble and Nathan Kussy of Newark, New Jersey\textsuperscript{21}. Indeed, Barsotti reminded his readership one year later: «L’avvocato James M. Trimble è quello che il “Progresso” impegnò e al cui onorario tante centinaia di italiani contribuirono, per salvare la Valentini. Devesi ai suoi sforzi se fu accordato un nuovo processo»\textsuperscript{22}. If Barsotti’s role was central, this was also to be a community affair. The issues that emerge from Il Progresso’s broadsheets point to the place of Italian women in transnational power relations, which are linked to three factors: threats against the acceptance of Italian migrant equality and respectability; Barsotti’s political ambitions through the cohesion of an Italian-American community; and what Mark Choate refers to as Italy’s «Program of Emigrant Colonialism»\textsuperscript{23}. Valentini’s predicament served the purpose of galvanising the Italian government’s attention for Italian-Americans, which had the potential of providing benefits for commer-


\textsuperscript{19} Ibidem, pp. 431-432.

\textsuperscript{20} See Guglielmo, Living the Revolution, pp. 24-26.

\textsuperscript{21} See The Evening World, 13 June 1904, p. 4; Il Progresso Italo-Americano, 19 aprile 1905, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{22} Il Progresso Italo-Americano, 15 marzo 1905, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{23} Choate, Emigrant Nation, Introduction.
cial, cultural and political ties not only with Italy, but also within the United States.

National and Imperial Conceptions of the Southern Italian migrant woman

Scholarly interest in the place and role of ethnic women vis-à-vis the nation gained historiographical momentum from the late 1980s. Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis’ pioneering work, *Woman–Nation–State*, emphasised the centrality of women to ethnic/national boundary-marking and to the «ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as the transmitters of its culture», amongst other features. In this work, various authors explore gendered, racial and class roles through the nexus between the nation and motherhood ideologies. While Anthias and Yuval-Davis argue that «there is no unitary category of women which can be unproblematically conceived as the focus of ethnic, national or state policies and discourses», where both Italy and the early ethnic conservative thrust for community-building were concerned, unity was the unquestioned focus. More recently, histories of imperialism have offered increasing scope for appreciating the global reach of the politics of gender, class and race, intertwined in complex «intimate, reciprocal and contradictory relations», as Anne McClintock puts it. Not irrelevant is the example of the British Empire in which one gendered cultural system imposed assumptions and roles on others wherein attitudes to female sexuality helped to assert the colonisers’ racial and class superiority over both colonised Indigenous women and working migrant and local-born women. Kathleen Wilson states that female «bodies served as symbols of national virtue and martial potency», while Philippa Levine points out that «control of white colonial sexuality was just as critical as the managing of indigenous mores».

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26 McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 5.
With respect to Italy, *la questione meridionale* became part of the discourse of Orientalism from the 1870s, exacerbated by the government’s impatience to colonise, colliding with eugenistic beliefs, and coinciding with the mass emigrations, especially from the South. In the work of Jane Schneider, both the «displacement» of a northern political position and the «complicity» of a southern intellectual elitism essentialised the geography of the peninsula along both economic and socially gendered lines. Notably, moving beyond a narrative of victimhood, Schneider’s work highlights how approaches to the history of «relations of colonial intrusion and domination» over the South might explore the ways through which southerners created their own history. How categories of gender, class and race converged and became contested, especially in regards to Southern Italian migrant women, can be gleaned from Italian political and anthropological developments around the turn of the twentieth century.

In the context of the historical antagonism between Italy’s North and South, Southern Italians were positioned problematically during Italy’s post-Risorgimento nation-building and imperialist phases. By 1873 Francesco Crispi had recognised the failure of the government’s “civilising” program in the South even though he also intended to curb any development of racial prejudice against Southerners. Brigandage, amongst other problems, was not restricted to the South, in his opinion, where he refused to consider the idea of criminality as being racially systemic with any seriousness; more pressing was economic and moral unity. Nevertheless, criminal anthropological investigations held opposing views, with a special emphasis on Southern Italian women. Such studies determined that «[...] the pathology of the “savage woman” was located in her anatomy» and recommendations were adopted in legal proceedings as far away as the United States.

The late nineteenth century work of Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero, culminating in *La donna delinquente*, presented cutting-edge clinical “proof” of the «criminale-nata» from studies involving almost 44% of Southern Italian women, the largest fieldwork component. As

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29 Schneider, ed., *Italy’s “Southern Question”*, especially pp. 3, 10, 19.
31 Ibidem, p. 15.
33 Ibidem, pp. 346-347.
35 Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero, *La donna delinquente: la prostituta e la donna normale*, Parte III e IV, L. Roux e C., Torino e Roma 1893. Notably,
is well-known, cranial and other physiological measurements were meant to "prove" that some women were born with a criminal predisposition. Of those examined, a large number of their skulls qualified as "cranii virili," thus "si avvicinano di più ai maschi"36. This proposition was supported by other traits like the tendency for hair and eyes to be "più scuri", the likelihood that the "canizie e calvizie precoce vi farebbero [...] difetto come nei rei-nati", and more wrinkles37. Lack of "normal" maternal instincts – considered "un vaccino morale contro il delitto e il male" – was also a strong sign of potential delinquency38. In short, as they wrote: «Tale è in complesso la fisonomie morale della criminale-nata, che mostra cioè una tendenza fortissima a confondersi col tipo maschile»39. Women whose biology betrayed any kind of masculine traits, therefore, had the potential to cross gendered roles and result in 'uncivilised' if not depraved behaviour. There were differences of opinion within this positivistic circle, as Mary Gibson shows, but these views emerged at the same time as Italian women were campaigning for enfranchisement40. Although Lombroso argued that the "congenitally delinquent" woman was not responsible for her actions – because of her insanity – his recommendation was that society was best protected from her type through incarceration, exile or execution41.

A progressive and traditional man, Crispi condemned the death penalty and advocated a paternalistic view of women's roles42. But his real attention was on transforming Italy into a great military and economic European power with designs on colonising Africa43. At the same time he was also concerned about Italy's population exodus through emigration, which was disrupting the task of creating political unity. Over the 1880s Crispi flirted with ways to encourage patriotism and to link the state's economy into migrant trade networks44. By 1894, he was arguing that Eritrea would offer an ideal colony for Italian migrants45. The devastating debacle in Adwa, however, shelved the idea until his successors, Antonio Starabba di Rudini and then

the study included analysis of 234 inmates of the Female House of Correction of Southern Italian origin, 52 Italian prisoners from Piedmontese origins, 150 prostitutes and 100 criminals from Moscow (Parte III, pp. 351-352).

38 Ibidem, Parte IV, p. 499.
40 Gibson «The "Female Offender"»; see also Guglielmo, Living the Revolution.
41 Gibson «The "Female Offender"», pp. 157, 161.
42 Duggan, Francesco Crispi, pp. 235, 275.
43 Ibidem, pp. 415, 455-459.
Giovanni Giolitti, reignited parts of his dual objectives – colonialism and emigration. As Choate explains, under the Emigration law of 1901 and the establishment of the Commissariato Generale dell’Emigrazione: «Emigrants would be united through culture, religion, and economics, not as fugitives, but as heroes; not in a diaspora or “scattering,” but in a consciously created, global community of Italians, under the umbrella of the Italian state». After the establishment of the Istituto Coloniale Italiano of Rome in 1906, a congress for Italians abroad was organised in Italy for 1908, followed by a second one for 1911, with the intention of cultivating such ties. This information was reported in the Italian foreign language press as part of the news from Italy. The campaign to save Valentini from the death sentence must be read from these developments.

Reviewing how *Il Progresso* covered the Valentini homicide case brings together a number of points about Italian migrant women and the discourse on the South into Italy’s contemporary national and transnational politics. Valentini’s case invokes questions not only about the reason why one woman murdered another, but also about the interest of a northern Italian bourgeois man in rescuing a Southern Italian peasant woman. On the one hand, focusing on Valentini’s drama reflects Barsotti’s ambitions to legitimise his position in Italian-American society. Her case had first captured the attention of middle-class women in Hackensack and the citizens of the state of New Jersey, who were campaigning against capital punishment and for women’s rights, organising a large petition for the Governor. As the issue had already caught the public eye, Barsotti could mediate the Italian public response. On the other hand, Barsotti’s commitment to Valentini’s cause suggests the dual anxieties about the rights and status of Italians in the United States, and about Italy’s geopolitical reputation. By taking up both issues, Barsotti gained to benefit commercially and politically.

**Unveiling Anna Valentini**

After murdering Salza, the details of Valentini’s troubled life unfolded in countless sensationalist and melodramatic accounts in the mainstream press, and in one significant report published in *Il Progresso*.

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The latter is problematised by it being a translation of her affidavit from Italian dialect into English for the initial court proceedings; it was then retranslated back into Italian and possibly also edited for an Italian-American audience\(^49\). No less significant is the fact that Valentini had not killed her defacto, Michele Colucci. He had a history of domestic violence, was involved in the frowned-upon field of labour recruitment, and had formed a relationship with Salza, all of which earned him little public sympathy. Instead, Valentini’s victim was the young mother, who was described, all the same, in *Il Progresso* as «l’adultera [...] cattiva femmina»\(^50\). The report in question was the only known public first-hand account and it offers a rare glimpse into Valentini’s personal history, reconstructing a history of abuse and the events leading to her crime.

Valentini left her natal village of Ferrandina in Potenza, Basilicata, at the age of about 35 after the death of her parents. The Italian government had neglected expenditure on education in Basilicata, where brigandage was rife. Here, children grew up «unlettered» and married women could only expect a life of «exhausting toil, with deplorable consequences», making emigration an important option\(^51\). From the 1860s, a handful of Italian women campaigned for women to have access to education and suffrage rights. But ideas like these were so far removed from the political and cultural realities that, even when legislation was passed in 1877 for primary schooling, there were still restrictions against female education as well as fears about allowing girls the possibility of reading too much\(^52\). Able to sign her name, Valentini received very minimal primary schooling through the Church\(^53\), arriving in New York typically single, illiterate and unable to speak English fluently.

\(^{49}\) There are two points here: first, Valentini’s testament was written by an English-speaking male legal defence team in a language that was not her own (so through an interpreter, probably Michael Bonnacore, from her local dialect); and, second, the English affidavit was later translated back into Italian by a translator who was probably both male and working for *Il Progresso*, and carrying the bias of the campaign this newspaper was launching in her defence.


\(^{53}\) Father Salvatore Celesta, newly located in Hoboken, had attended school with Valentini in Ferrandina and visited her in her prison cell in 1904. See *The Evening World*, 11 June 1904, p. 5.
Once in New York Valentini met Colucci, a widower with a small son, also of Ferrandina. He was a builder, operating as a padrone, although not on a large scale, and he promised her ten dollars a month for her services as a domestic in his home – the kind of labour that De Clementi suggests was rife in New York city. Hence, Valentini was part of the chain migration process from her village, supported by the fact that two of her nephews were living in New Jersey city in 1904. She was never paid for her domestic services, but she and Colucci formed a defacto relationship that entailed severe physical abuse as her court testament reveals: «Io ero contenta di lavorare per lui e di assisterlo nei suoi affari e perché l’amavo io mi ero adattata a sopportarlo anche quando mi trattava male e, arrabbiato, mi percuoteva. Una volta mi percosse così violentemente che con un calcio MI RUPPE UNA COSTOLA. Io sopportai questo ed altro perché l’amavo».

For over nine years, in addition to her work as a domestic, Valentini worked in outside employment, which included manual labour for Colucci on his construction sites: «[...] io lo aiutavo come manovale. Io spingevo i mattoni e lì portavo su per le scale a lui [...]». He bought a small plot of land and secured a loan from a building-society to build a house, supplemented by her own savings, which were substantial from a number of reports. She had signed the documents for the loan as his wife and personally worked alongside Colucci and another man as a manual labourer to construct the couple’s two-storied “hutlike home”. Her American dream looked promising until May 1903, when Colucci forced her to sign a document. When she later reprimanded him for his frequent drunken behaviour he divulged that she had signed over full ownership of the home and property to him at which point he and his son violently turfed her out of the house. Not so easily humiliated, Valentini moved into the upstairs room, rented to another couple, at the same time as instigating legal proceedings against him. But, as one newspaper explained, without being legally married, «he had done nothing wrong for which the law could punish him». Consequently, the upstairs couple was evicted, Valentini forced to find accommodation a few houses away, and the room rented out to the much younger woman, Salza, who had left her husband, bringing her two babies with her. Only in January 1904, when

54 Refer to fn. 19.
55 See The Evening World, 13 June 1904, p. 5.
56 Il Progresso Italo-Americano, 7 maggio 1905, p. 1. [Capitalised words in the original].
57 An amount of $850 was mentioned. See, for example, The Evening World, 8 March 1905, p. 8.
58 The Washington Times, 3 September 1905, p. 53.
Valentini returned to the house, did it become clear to her that she had lost both home and status: «[...] andai alla casa di Michele per vederlo. Entrai in cucina e non ce lo trovai. Allora entrai nella stanza appresso, e guardando NELLA CAMERA DA LETTO trovai Michele e la Salza in una posizione compromettente» 59. The next time this occurred, Valentini had become despondent: «[...] mi sentii infelississima. Io mi logoravo l’anima per questa iniquità».

On the stormy evening in question, Valentini passed by her former home after work and heard Salza insulting her with language «dei titoli più vergognosi». Inciting Valentini into a confrontation, Salza then resisted opening the front door, but Valentini barged in and the pair started arguing. Valentini recounted in her affidavit how Salza, who was holding one of her babies, placed the infant down and started screaming «come una iena» with the words «ORA VEDRAI QUEL CHE SO FARE» 60. By this point Valentini had noticed that Salza had a knife and they fought over it: «Finalemente io riuscii a strapparglielo di mano e allora LE DETTI UN COLPO: ah! Non so se io gliene detti uno o cento dei colpi: avevo un velo davanti agli occhi, e non so quel che successe: io ero fuori di me. La prima cosa che mi ricordo è che mi trovavo nella strada [...]». In this account decisive physical aggression quickly flips to a semi-conscious, dreamlike state.

The metaphoric use of «un velo» conveys the separation of two realities, protecting Valentini from acknowledging her conscious role in a heinous act of aggression. The word specifically conjures something hidden, as in «un velo di mistero», something possibly sacred like the bridal veil or the veil to attend Mass, or something sinister that obscures what is happening. Employing the term to deflect a visual engagement with the act of stabbing Salza to death served as a shield or an avoidance tactic against taking responsibility. With little more elaboration than the expression of feeling «fuori» from herself, employing «un velo» might also suggests a continuity between realities 60. This sense invites an appreciation of how uncontrollable rage was something Valentini had felt before and, from her affidavit, less over the loss of Colucci to another woman than over the injustice of being tricked out of her hard-earned home.

59 Il Progresso Italo-Americano, 7 maggio 1905, p. 1. [Capitalised words in the original.]
While the American press interpreted the murder of Salza as «a drama of love, abandonment, jealousy and vengeance», Il Progresso focussed on the indignation of the treatment of an Italian woman in the American legal system. Contrasting the coverage in the mainstream press over an American woman facing a similar situation, Il Progresso reminded its readership of how Italians were perceived: «Per Anna Elisa Patterson tutti i giornali hanno pagine di difesa. Per Anna Valentini, italiana, “dago”, c’è solo la forca, la forca su cui vorrebbero strozzare tutto ciò che le somiglia: e il nostro giornale grida voce nel deserto». Barsotti’s campaign to save Valentini was convenient for other reasons. Paradoxically, just as Valentini articulated the sense of «un velo davanti agli occhi» to distance herself from her actions, Barsotti had started employing the metaphor of the «madre italiana» to obscure his readership from his personal ambitions.

The Italian-American Campaign

Born in Pisa to an «upper-class family» in 1850, Barsotti migrated to New York in 1870, setting himself up as a padrone, banker and businessman, and launching Il Progresso nine years later. Although his broadsheets reveal that he was conservative, nationalistic and «antilabor», he tried hard to create a sense of community cohesion amongst the city’s diverse Italians. He did this in a number of ways, not least through his promotion of the annual Christopher Columbus Day parade from 1892 and financing the construction of a monument to him as well as to others like Dante Alighieri, Giovanni da Verrazano, Giuseppe Mazzini, Giuseppe Garibaldi and Giuseppe Verdi. In short, Barsotti punctuated the city with symbolic markers of Italy’s cultural and national unity as foundational to the United States. As one newspaper remarked in 1909, when Columbus Day was made an official national celebration and noting Barsotti as leading the committee of numerous Italian societies: «The establishment of the anniversary of the discovery of America as a holiday is another evidence of a new force in American life, for it is largely due to the efforts of the Italians that it has

been brought about.65 Despite the enthusiasm of Italians marching in the parade as well as Barsotti’s reasonably high newspaper sales (about 80,000) and his program to defend all Italians, he struggled to galvanise the interests of Italian workers who represented the majority.66 Il Progresso’s message «to acquiesce in the status quo, to aspire to bourgeois values, and to love la Patria» also found competition from leftist newspapers67.

Two issues characterise Barsotti’s identification as an Italian community leader in New York: the bad press that Italian migrants often received in wider American society, linked to perceptions of criminal activity and racial pedigree; and the increasing interest from the Italian government in protecting migrants and in cultivating economic ties throughout the diaspora. Because Valentini had crossed gender expectations through the brutality of her crime, she was racially stigmatised as a dangerous Southern Italian female. However, the citizens of New Jersey saw her plight as an opportunity to challenge the draconian form of punishment she was facing. It had been 37 years since the last hanging of a woman in the state of New Jersey.68 As such, Valentini became an overnight sensation in the country’s print media. Meanwhile, Italy had started «to affirm sovereignty over nationals abroad more concretely» through the articulation of international policy for their protection69. These circumstances represented a means through which Barsotti could flaunt his profile to Italian migrants and Americans, and to Italy. Various reports in Il Progresso signalled the unfolding drama with captions like «Non deve morire!», «Non morrà!», «Agitiamoci per salvare Anna Valentini», «NON LA LINCIATE!», «L’Opera del “Progresso Italo-Americano”», and «Chi salvò Anna Valentini»70. Valentini’s case allowed Barsotti political leverage in exercising his own colonising powers.

After her arrest in April 1904 Valentini underwent a medical examination, but one that had not included an Italian physician. Sentenced to hang on 19 May 1904, she lost her first appeal to the Board of Pardons, which rescheduled her execution for 18 June 1904. Barsotti moved quickly in response, sending telegrams to the Italian Consul-

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65 New York Tribune, 10 October 1909, p. 5.
66 Baily, «The Adjustment of Italian Immigrants», p. 295; Green, American Immigrant Leaders, op. cit., p. 129.
69 Douki, «The Liberal Italian State and Mass Migration», p. 100.
General Gustavo Tosti in New York, the Italian Ambassador Edmondo Mayor des Planches in Washington, and the Governor of the State of New Jersey Franklin Murphy, but also to Her Majesty Queen of Italy Elena di Savoia, Pope Pius X, and Cardinal Satolli and Cardinal Gibbons in Baltimore71. More importantly he wrote to Il Progresso’s lawyers, Trimble and Kussey, to take on her defence. As her new legal team, they questioned the original medical examination on the basis of improper treatment of an Italian national in the American judiciary. They applied for a writ of habeas corpus in order to prove emotional insanity and swiftly arranged for another medical.

Kussey arrived at the Hackensack gaol with Dr P.M. Megaro, Dr A. D’Amico and Dr C.G. Bernardinelli «to make an examination of the woman’s mental condition»72. To the dismay of the Sheriff, who only allowed one of the three doctors to accompany Kussey into Valentini’s cell, they had not reappeared after two hours. After checking on the visitors, the Sheriff reported: «I found Dr. Megaro taking measurements and examining the woman as a physician. Neither the prosecutor nor I has [sic] the authority to permit such an examination without an order of some court. I stopped this proceeding». And, as Kussey announced to the press after the visit: «Dr. Megaro took notes as an alienist on Mrs Valentina’s mental condition, and I have the testimony in point of view. Neither Dr. Megaro nor myself has had the time to draw conclusions from the medical and legal facts that we have. We think, however, that with these facts and the great petition from citizens of New Jersey that is being prepared, we shall be able to present a substantial line of reasoning to the Court». Even though the methods used were targeted to save her life, this intervention demonstrated how pervasive contemporary Italian criminal theories on Southern Italian women were, albeit without involving Barsotti directly. When these efforts did not persuade New Jersey’s Governor to overturn the sentence, the writ acted as a second stay on the execution date as of 6 July 190473.

Once publicly engaged in the case from early 1905 Barsotti played both patriarch and rescuer of the “victimised” Valentini. He printed regular telegrams from Trimble and Kussey, reportage from his editorial team74, and letters and direct appeals that he personally composed. His aim was to rehabilitate her image, reprimand Italian-

71 Cited ibidem.
72 The Evening World, 13 June 1904, p. 5.
73 The Evening World, 15 June 1904, p. 8.
74 From analysis of autobiographical accounts, Vecoli notes that Barsotti relied on other Italians to write articles for «Il Progresso», but the Valentini campaign demonstrates his direct penmanship as well. See Vecoli, «The Italian immigrant press», pp. 21-22.
Americans for not demonstrating unity to the cause, and invoke personal connections with the Italian state. These themes developed through Il Progresso’s daily print-run over the last two of Valentini’s four appeal stages: from early 1905 until Trimble and Kussy lost her third appeal on 4 May 1905; and from 9 May 1905, when they won another stay on her death sentence and from which time the Italian government funded her appeal to the Supreme Court until her execution was commuted to a life imprisonment on 17 May 1906.  

**Colonising an “Italian Mother”**

On the news from Trimble and Kussy that Valentini had lost her third appeal in March 1905, Barsotti did not hesitate to endorse the contemporary nationalistic rhetoric to remind his readership of the connection between Valentini’s personal ordeal and Italy’s assertion of being a civilised and humane nation: «I moltiplici sforzi fatti; l’energica iniziativa del “Progresso” che agitò ed agita, per la salvezza della Valentini, la bandiera della civiltà e dell’umanità, possono essere frustrati; e, secondo il telegramma, lo sono. [...] I nostri sforzi, dopo le più ampie informazioni dell’avvocato Trimble, si riprenderanno con l’antica energia, con energia maggiore, per impedire che l’America macchi se stessa e il nostro nome, trascinandola forca una donna, nata in Italia.» This early equation of Il Progresso’s role with the defence of Italy’s international status went further by invoking a bigger political battle. The legal framework of the mighty United States insulted the right of Italy to protect Italian migrants. Indeed, once his newspaper had joined the debate, Barsotti cited the 14th Amendment of the American Constitution for a person to be given a fair trial, declaring: «Anna Valentini non è nata in Abissinia, nè in Cina; è nata, fortunatamente, [sic] in Italia; e tra l’Italia e gli Stati Uniti esiste una convenzione che va rispettata. Tutti gli italiani debbono godere dei diritti giuridiziarii dei cittadini americani. Questi diritti, nel caso della Valentini, sono stati lesi.» From his perspective, Italians merited unquestionable recognition for their racial superiority over others, especially given extant diplomatic agreements between Italy and the United States. This rhetoric became increasingly reliant on a local collective community effort. In fact, Barsotti targeted the vast number of Italian-American societies, appealing to individual and group patriotism «per impedire che una madre italiana penda da una forca».

Without the commitment of all Italian-Americans, one Italian woman would be executed and Italy’s international prestige damaged, as one report summed up: «Nella carcere di Hackensack, una povera donna aspetta la sentenza da voi, o italiani; da voi, o società italiane. Se avete coraggio, negate a lei il vostro aiuto, il soccorso vostro. Ma se siete così crudeli da negarlo, strappate dalle inutili bandiere la parola: “Italiano” e abbassate il “Tre Colori”, simbolo della Patria adorata»78. This was all about feeling and protesting «italianamente» to uphold «ogni impresa eroica, civile, progressista, umanitaria». Ultimately, Barsotti was calling on all Italian-American societies to join together in order to apply pressure on the Governor of the State of New Jersey. Only a unified voice, requesting «la comunicazione di pena», could hope to influence his pending decision. Within a few days this particular article was reprinted under the heading of «Le Società per Anna Valentini», accompanied by a few letters of support that had trickled in from the Italian Benevolent Society of Columbus Legion, the Società Accadiese di mutuo soccorso e protezione, and the United Marble and Enamel Mosaic Worker’s Laborers Association79. The reward for a letter of support was its publication in Il Progresso. By appealing to the essential symbol of value in every Italian migrant’s life – the mother – and defining her as the symbol of the Italian nation, Barsotti’s newspaper attempted to trump both apathy and internationalist sympathies. In addition, by applying the not-so-subtle method of shaming any association for not backing his campaign, he underscored how the hostile foreign environment in which Valentini had become enmeshed was also attacking the honour of both Italians and Italy.

The reluctance of the Governor to spare Valentini’s life was due to her voluntary confession and having produced the murder weapon on the night of the stabbing. One reporter from The Evening World summarised the issue: «The slayer was fairly tried and convicted of murder. The law of New Jersey imposes the death penalty for this crime. [...] Capital punishment may be barbarous, wrong or unnecessary. This is a matter for the people to decide in their laws. [...] this was done on legal, not sentimental grounds»80. However, Il Progresso placed the act of murder in a wider social context so that Valentini could be depicted as a martyr: «...per noi non è rea, perché ha fatto semplicemente quello che ogni donna, nella sue condizioni, avrebbe fatto. [...] La povera martire colpi, è vero, una, due, cento volte la vittima, la straziò, le tolse dalle sue vene fin l’ultima goccia di sangue; tutto vero, tutto provato. [...] non si

78 Il Progresso Italo-Americano, 19 aprile 1905, p. 2.
80 The Evening World, 10 May 1905, p. 12.
dica che la Valentini non aveva il diritto di difendere quello che era suo, o che, almeno, s'era avvezzata a considerar come tale»81. In fact, she deserved as much «dignità» as any woman for her capacity to procreate: «Vremmo che tutte le donne avessero tanto alto sentimento della dignità del loro sesso, da rovesciarsi, da ribellarsi, contro la turpitudine, inumanamente legale, infamemente ripugnante, dell'impiccagione di una donna, nel cui ventre si compi l'ineffabile atto della procreazione di un essere umano»82. Defined by her biology and the duty women had in reproducing children for the nation, to violate her life equated to violating Italy. Valentini was as sacrosanct as any Italian mother.

However problematic motherhood roles are in supporting national integrity, by juxtaposing Valentini with the ideal Italian mother, Barsotti lifted her personal dilemma above the class and racial distinctions between Southerners and Northerners, and beyond the discourse on criminality. Assimilating Valentini to a unified concept of Italian womanhood might enlist support from those who had felt that her appeal was virtually hopeless. Barsotti’s real intentions for heading a collective society of Italian-Americans were yet to be revealed, but from March 1905 onwards he proceeded to publish a deluge of telegrams and letters, received from the general public and sent by him largely to men in positions of influence. After losing the appeal on 4 May 1905, Trimble and Kussy pursued another avenue of habeas corpus on Valentini’s behalf, which led to another stay on her execution date83. This catapulted her case from a localised affair onto the international diplomatic stage.

«Violation of Treaty, says Italian Consul», read one headline as the Acting Consul-General Tosti explained the breach to the 1871 Treaty between Italy and the United States that protect the rights of Italians to a fair trial. The suggestion was that Italians were subjected to «primitive justice» since Italy had abolished the death penalty84. Recalling Italy’s Enlightenment contributions, Il Progresso determined that the stakes now included fighting «con al violenza dell’opinione pubblica» for «l’attuazione del voto di Cesare Beccaria: l’abolizione della pena di morte per tutti ma specialmente per le donne»85. By 10 May 1905, Tosti had secured the support of the Italian government and a remarkable $100,000 to spend on the case86. The announcement of Italy’s intervention marked the moment when Barsotti had secured transnational ac-

81 Il Progresso Italo-Americano, 10 marzo 1905, p. 1.
83 The Evening World, 9 May 1905, p. 2
84 Cited ibidem.
86 The Times Dispatch, 10 May 1905, p. 1.
knowledge of his newspaper's importance. Some American members of the press were, of course, astonished: "Several highly esteemed Italians in public and private life have interested themselves in preventing the execution of the death sentence imposed upon their countrywoman, Anna Valentina, by the law and Court of New Jersey. [...] it is claimed that she had great provocation, and that in Italy she would either have been acquitted or sentenced to a short term of imprisonment. Very likely. But New Jersey is not Italy. [...] the end of justice is impartiality – the essence of law is equality." However, the dissenting voice here was in the minority in the tabloid press – Valentini had the sympathy of the majority of American journalists.

Barsotti's newspaper continued to express national indignation and to capitalise on the growing popular interest in her appeal process through a constant reference to Italy's national power. He started by publishing an interview with Tosti, happily reporting Tosti's praise for his efforts: "La nostra azione, l'azione dell'ambasciata, del consolato, dell'agente consolare, fu parallela, ma puramente diplomatica; benchè in un diverso, il nostro lavoro aiutasse moltissimo l'azione iniziata dal "Progresso" per la salvezza della Valentini e tutto che noi facemmo fosse coordinato in questo senso. Ma noi non potevamo entrare nel campo giudiziario nel quale combatteva così efficacemente il "Progresso" con i suoi avvocati Trimble e Kussy. Quello che ha salvato sino ad ora Anna Valentini con la difesa giudiziaria è stato il solo "Progresso". Esso solo ha raccolto i denari, esso ha pagato gli avvocati i soli avvocati [sic] che la Valentini ha avuto. Ed io ho proprio piacere nel rallegrarmi con voi dell'esito sin qui ottenuto." Barsotti then coaxed further international attention for his agenda to head an Italian-American society by involving the sympathy of the ultimate "madre italiana", Queen Elena di Savoia.

Dated 5 May 1905, Barsotti's telegram to the Queen read: "Nonostante sforzi riuniti autorità, stampa colonie italiane, Anna Valentini sarà impiccata; prima madre italiana, dodici maggio. Unica speranza salvezza appello diretto cuore Maestà Vostra e Mrs. Roosevelt." This news not only reaffirmed Il Progresso's representative authority over Italian-American associations but also linked the two most powerful women in Italy and the United States, respectively, in one announcement. And, in the eyes of the newspaper's readers, it connected Barsotti to the highest echelons of geopolitics. The report in the Sunday edition of 14 May 1905 that reproduced this telegram was illustrated by

the photographic images of both Vittorio Emmanuele III and Elena di Savoia. In the opening article, Barsotti shared his personal dilemma: 
«Il direttore di questo giornale lottava con due sentimenti opposti. Quello del cuore gli diceva: – Avanti, Anna Valentini non deve morire! lancia il tuo “Progresso” nella grande battaglia per la vita d’una donna italiana. L’anima della patria è con te! – La voce della testa diceva: – Non si stancheranno i lettori? Ma il cuore prevalse e la lotta corpo a corpo con la morte cominciò». A direct and personal admission of this man’s anxiety over pursuing a campaign to save Valentini at the risk of losing sales might have evoked more public support, especially when accompanied by images of Italy’s monarchs, but it also speaks to the political machinations behind the scene. Moreover, within the Sunday spread was an interview with Valentini herself.

One of Il Progresso’s journalists had accompanied Dr Alfredo Magnani, the Italian consular agent of Newark, to Hackensack prison. The unnamed journalist reported introducing himself to Valentini in this way: «– Come state, Annina? – le dissi tendendole la mano. – Io vengo sin qui a portarvi i saluti del giornale che vi ha salvato dalla morte, del suo direttore il cav. Carlo Barsotti, della redazione, dei lettori che sono migliaio». Although her sentence would not be commuted from execution to life imprisonment until 1906, this description of the encounter also hinted at Valentini’s victimhood, emphasised through her racialised atavistic appearance – «il carnato scuro: e in due orbite piccole, infossate scintillavan due occhi neri» – her uneducated accent – «Cumme m’a passu? Ah, signure! Ho sofferto [...]» – and her popular spirituality from the Carmelite scapular she wore – «[...] indicava un di quei bottoni di celluloidi con l’immagine della Vergine che vediamo spesso sul petto delle nostre donne». By implication, only a white, educated and rational Italian patriarch was capable of redeeming her. In sum, as the journalist put it, «il “Progresso” rappresentava per lei la famiglia». Finally, the Sunday edition announced «L’Albo d’Onore», naming 43 Italian-American associations, mostly from New York, that had given their commitment to «il movimento del “Progresso” per Valentini» and listing a number of others90. This «sintomo confortante», according to the newspaper, marked how «non è impossibile una “Unione Nazionale delle Società Italiane degli Stati Uniti». The piece ended with the proclamation: «ITALIANI! TUTTI SONO UNITI IN AMERICA! UNIAMOCI ANCHE NOI!».

Within four months after Valentini had her sentence commuted, the Italian government was asking Italian migrant newspaper directors across the diaspora to co-ordinate community representation for

the 1908 Congresso degli italiani all’estero to discuss the «rappresentanza permanente» of Italian migrant communities in Rome. Barsotti managed to attend on behalf of Il Progresso and the «italiani residenti negli Stati Uniti».

Conclusion

Lifting the veil on Carlo Barsotti’s devotion to and exploitation of Anna Valentini’s predicament was an exception to the general approach of the conservative foreign language press. He was, of course, attempting to create a sense of unity amongst members of his local ethnic community, like both conservative and radical newspaper directors of the time. And, this formed part of the varied responses to the heightened nationalistic setting in order to secure political and social acceptance of Italian migrants. But Barsotti’s private political ambitions demonstrated his acute skills in conceptualising transnational possibilities. Analysing Il Progresso’s broadsheets allows us to glean insight into one way Italy’s imperialist program was interpreted abroad. While the idea of migrant representation in Rome was short-lived, dissolved by 1912, Barsotti borrowed power from the Italian state, which was being exerted across the diaspora contemporaneously, to legitimise his goals. In the process Valentini served an ideological purpose, bigger than the worthy sentiment to save her from execution, wherein her criminality was negated. Becoming an endangered «madre italiana», the stigma of her gender, class and ‘race’ was transformed to make her another symbolic marker of Italian respectability, local community cohesion, and Italy’s global program of colonialism. In the polemics over Italian-Americans in the United States and Italy’s foreign policy directions for diaspora political representation, Valentini proved a useful decoy in contemporary transnational politics as did the emotional scope of the discourse on Southern Italian female criminality.

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91 Il Progresso Italo-Americano, 1 settembre 1907, p. 1.
92 Il Progresso Italo-Americano, 8 settembre 1907, p. 1; 23 agosto 1908, p. 1.
Abstract

The Italian imperialist program of the period before the Great War went beyond the project to annex other Mediterranean territories in order to include the colonization of the immigrant communities. Today, historians tend to concentrate on Italian foreign policy rather than on the perspective and experience of migration. This essay begins with a murder case in the United States to show a type of Italian response to the international agenda, by deepening the role of the press abroad, and especially of a newspaper editor. The analysis of the pressures on a worker who emigrated from the southern Italy allows us to evaluate the function of gender, class and race in the discourse of transnational politics.

Riassunto

Il programma imperialista italiano del periodo precedente la grande guerra andò oltre il progetto di annessi altri territori mediterranei per comprendere la colonizzazione delle collettività emigrate. Oggi la storiografia tende a concentrarsi sulla politica estera italiana piuttosto che sulla prospettiva e l'esperienza migratoria. Questo saggio parte da un caso di omicidio negli Stati Uniti per mostrare un tipo di risposta all'agenda internazionale italiana, approfondendo il ruolo della stampa all'estero e in particolare di un direttore di giornale. L'analisi delle pressioni su una lavoratrice emigrata dal Meridione italiano permette di valutare la funzione di genere, classe e razza nel discorso della politica transnazionale.
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