

Encounters with the “peasant”:

Memory work, masculinity, and low fertility in Italy

ABSTRACT

The peasant in Italy has all but vanished as an exemplar of an economic way of life but as a social figure has relevance to trends such as the transformation to small families. Ethnographic “encounters” provide the basis for my explorations into the trauma and meaning of the historical experiences that find expression in Italian women’s low fertility rates. Current family-making practices have resulted from historical adjustments deeply linked to economic shifts that involved the unraveling of a patriarchal hierarchy and necessitated a subsequent reworking of gendered subjects situated in new socioeconomic conditions. An ethnographic focus on memory work reveals that the social figure of the peasant persists in meaningful ways that shape people’s family-making practices. [*ethnography, memory work, peasants, masculinity, low fertility, Italy, Europe*]

Everywhere, historical experience bears the stigmata of trauma and strife, of interference and rupture with the past, as well as the boon of continuity, of successful adaptation and adjustment—engrams of events not easily erased and often only latent in the cultural memory until some greater event serves to draw them forth again.

—Eric Wolf, 1969

I had not anticipated that my ethnographic study of Italian women’s record-low fertility rate would lead me to encounter Italian “peasants” in the flesh and also in memories and at festivals, but it did, and I could neither stop this turn nor ignore it. Writing abstractly about peasants is one thing; encountering them in person or in vivid, nostalgic, and even angry memories is quite another. The frequency and tenor of my encounters led me to investigate whether and how the peasant figure holds relevance to current-day, family-making practices among Italians living in central Italy.

Discursive incitement surrounds family-making practices in Italy. There, women reached “super-low” birthrates in the early 1990s, and in the past decade key demographers described the trend as provoking “real ‘mutation’ ” (Golini 1994:8); as revealing “profound transformations that have radically modified, and in some cases unhinged, the entire structure of the whole society” (Lori et al. 1995:1); as indicating “demographic malaise” (Golini et al. 2000) that signals a pathology of the national social body; as having “downright perverse effects” (Sgritta 2001:4); and as reflecting a “reproductive balance” that is “dangerously distorted” (Livi-Bacci 2001:145). I suggest that such expert analyses erase and keep submerged the historical experiences that have led to a total fertility rate of 1.2 births per woman. Super-low fertility in part results from ongoing protests against patriarchy as well as from social reforms toward gender equality within and beyond the family.¹ This trend, however, is not reducible to a feminist revolt (see Amoia 2000). Neither are women merely “choosing work and education over having children” (Specter 1998: A1; see also Delgado Pérez

and Livi-Bacci 1992). Rather, the trajectory toward the one-child family reflects a dramatic shift in the play of symbolic and material forces in Italian society. The dominant stories that economists and demographers narrate, wherein small families result from cost-benefit calculations in which children are increasingly expensive in terms of time and money to their parents (see Livi-Bacci 2001:146), conceal a central dimension of the cultural roots of this transformation: the process and power of modern subject formation.

In this article, I make three central claims. First, contemporary family-making practices result from historical adjustments, deeply linked to economic shifts that involved the unraveling of a patriarchal hierarchy. Second, the upending of the patriarchal family and household economy destabilized masculine authority and necessitated subsequent reworkings of gendered subjects. Third, these reworkings of subjectivity, which, significantly, included class standing, are largely submerged but recoverable through social memories, in which the social figure of the peasant persists in meaningful ways that shape people's family-making practices.

The line of inquiry I propose emerges from my attempt to bring together anthropological literatures on social memory and demographic-oriented literatures on fertility decline. It is my contention that this cross-fertilization offers benefits for each field. The former is concerned with history and experience yet has tended to relegate topics involving demography to the doldrums of the disciplinary periphery.² The latter's turn to the anthropological concept of "culture" has produced largely wooden results. In the words of E. A. Hammel (1990), "the use of 'culture' in demography seems mired in structural-functional concepts that are about 40 years old, hardening rapidly, and showing every sign of fossilization" (Greenhalgh 1995a:19). Indeed, the term is often appropriated and applied as though it were a bundle of traits that hold people back and negatively mark them as "irrational" or "laggards."³

I strive for a historically grounded anthropology that exposes how specific figurations, that is, metaphoric and other social representations (Elias 1983; Rebel 1999), shape the lives and social relations of historically constituted individuals acting both within and against social fields of force (Roseberry 1994; Williams 1977). This approach may be of use to anthropologists working in disciplinary interstices as well as to demographers seeking to improve their appreciation of the use of culture in population trends (see Douglass 2005; Eberstadt 2001). Cultural perspectives may be particularly urgent in light of the European Fertility Project's disappointing findings: that no universal conditions explain the so-called quiet revolution from high to low fertility and that something called "culture setting" wielded mighty sway.⁴ Many demographers add on culture as yet another variable. This method of dealing with evidence converts dynamic and intimate cultural practices

into static, even fossilized, cultural types. I draw on another form of evidence—what I call "ethnographic encounters"—to demonstrate the utility of qualitative research for shedding light on what culture has to do with low fertility. I reveal culture as dynamic practices involving struggles over meanings and materiality.

I turn to memory work to grasp these struggles for several reasons. First, history provides people with moorings for orienting themselves to their social world. Hence, memories are socially situated. Second, memories are symbolically loaded. They involve individual as well as group engagements with, and sense making of, the past-present relationship (see Olick 2003; Olick and Robbins 1998). Third, memories constitute stakes in ongoing struggles for hegemony (Popular Memory Group 1982); however, these stakes are not always evident. Indeed, "historical discourses hide their hermeneutics so as to construct their 'credibility' and 'authoritativeness' vis-à-vis their audiences" (Alonso 1988:37). Memories may vary in the extent to which they make explicit the meanings and motivations for remembering. This threefold approach to social memory aims to emphasize social context, symbolic meaning, and cultural economies of power involved in experience and transformation. The term *memory work* (see Stoler and Strassler 2000) highlights the economies of power involved in engagements with the past and the ways such engagements inform the present.

The field of encounters

I use the term *encounter* because, as much as I designed my field research into population politics and family making to be systematic and holistic, the truth is that some of my most provocative data came to me when I least expected it. I argue that such a methodological approach structures into it spontaneity and, hence, brings the researcher into confrontations with social life as it unfolds and plays out on terms mostly of its own making. Just as improvisation in musical genres such as jazz or bluegrass builds on a foundation of competence, practice, and sensibility, so, too, does the art of ethnography. As Charles Mingus said, "free improvisation" is impossible; "you have to start with something" (Snow 2004:46).

As an anthropologist concerned with telling stories about social transformations that challenge those that have dominated tropes of Western modernity, I have come to conceive of my ethnographic research as a mutually constituting "space of encounter." The term *encounter* points to entities that are at odds with one another. Two well-cited examples from the anthropological literature include the "colonial encounter" (Asad 1973) and the "development encounter" (Escobar 1991), both of which suggest a power-laden, traumatic clash between Western and non-Western economies, social practices, and moral

orientations. Indeed, in reviewing scholarly usage of the term *encounter*, I observed an implied meeting between a self and an Other: intercultural encounters between tourists and natives (Khandelwal 1996); reconciliation encounters between two groups in conflict such as Palestinian and Israeli youth (Bargal 2004); service encounters such as those between Korean shopkeepers and African American customers (Ryoo 2005); encounters between different civilizations or scientific traditions (Tiryakian 2001); medical encounters between differently situated individuals within institutions, such as nurses and patients (Sjöstedt et al. 2001); or encounters between dissimilar domains of knowledge such as between popular film and academic discourse (Richards 2005).⁵

Reflecting on intercultural encounters via a review of *Rednecks, Eggheads and Blackfellas* (Cowlshaw 1999), Francesca Merlan praises a number of Australian works that “conceive the dimensions of ethnographic space as intersecting Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal domains” (2001:374). Such an approach lays bare the workings of the analytic–descriptive dialectic: “Analytically, there is no absolute ‘us’ and ‘them’ boundary even though empirically, field situations are often ones of quite stark separation between Aborigines and others” (Merlan 2001:374). Although “my people” were not Aborigines, parallels exist, particularly in terms of tensions between me, the U.S. anthropologist, and my Italian subjects: To “red,” or leftist, Tuscans, I stood as an icon for the colonizer, as many harbored resentments for heavy-handed U.S. manipulation of postwar Italian politics and ongoing global hegemony; numerous “white,” or Catholic, Tuscans viewed me as part of the liberation; various bourgeois industrialists saw me as an index of free-market capitalism. Self-referential jokes abounded about working-class Italians being primitive, whether they were “playing the peasant” or despairing over being a “vanishing species” of sweater makers, as a severe crisis had struck that textile sector by 2004, leading some professionals to consider retiring to take up a “peasant” lifestyle of gathering wild mushrooms, asparagus, and greens.

Several Italians whom I met assumed that, because I was an anthropologist, I would naturally be interested in “peasants” as an authentic object of folklore. I tried hard to avoid seeking out peasants because of my interest in participating in an “anthropology of modernity,” a scholarly enterprise self-conscious in its aversion to any kind of exoticization. Nevertheless, I grew increasingly open to these encounters and, in the end, I believe this openness was useful in producing what Paul Willis and Matt Trondman, in their “Manifesto for Ethnography” (2000), call “ah-ha” moments. Chance meetings imply neither arbitrary nor irrelevant evidence. Rather, unexpected data arrive that are beyond the direct control of the ethnographer yet result from his or her systematic perseverance and

careful attention to social life. As the ethnographer “goes with the flow,” she or he develops an ear for what is important in the reproduction of social life. Conceiving of ethnography as a “space of encounters” contrasts with nonimprovisational scientific or demographic methods such as focus groups or quantitative surveys. A methodological approach grounded in contexts of social life can shed light on how people become “conditioned social beings” (after Willis and Trondman 2000). In a best-case scenario, an ethnographic approach that follows paths of structured spontaneity may participate in challenging social conditioning and in opening up new possible worlds. It may lead to more desirable, equal, and just social orders. At the very least, my ethnographic encounters shed light on how subjectivities are formed in fields of social practice.

My encounters occurred primarily during 22 months of fieldwork in the Province of Prato, primarily in the communes of Carmignano and Poggio A Caiano, between October 1995 and August 1997, with return visits there in June 1999, November 2002, and January–May 2004. Prato is located in central Italy some 20 kilometers (about 12.5 miles) northwest of Florence, Tuscany, outside the Renaissance tourist belt. I based my research in two communes comprising industrial and rural towns with histories of integrated agriculture and industry. My ethnographic research consisted of my working in a sweater factory and family firm, serving as a parent representative in my daughter’s first-grade class, joining a morning coffee group, conducting numerous interviews, carrying out archival research, participating in local festivals, assisting in an oral history project, and engaging in ongoing observations and systematic recordings of daily life. In sum, I immersed myself in local life so as to understand how people in central Italy recalled and experienced the shift to low fertility.

The neighborhood where I lived for the first year of my field stint was part of a *frazione*, or hamlet, with left political leanings. It was a postwar, worker–artisan zone connected economically with the industrial district of Prato as well as with the global economy. Many families had moved to this neighborhood from the south and from the Tuscan countryside in the 1950s and early 1960s, as its workshops, houses, and streets attested. Not by mere coincidence was Via Gramsci a block from my apartment; I crossed it each time I walked to my daughter’s preschool and was continuously struck by the naming of a street after an intellectual that any number of humanities and social science graduate students, including myself, had read in the 1990s. For the people in the neighborhood, Antonio Gramsci served as a quotidian reminder of the relationship between peasant and proletarian struggles, particularly as Prato emerged as a postwar industrial district with a strong communist worker identity. Gramsci’s (1971) work on critical consciousness led me, the “American anthropologist,”

to listen to stories with an ear toward hearing the connections between economic dislocation and personal adjustment, including family-making practices. Economist Giacomo Becattini noted that the family and community, often seen as “reservoirs of conservatism, paradoxically ended up as the springboard for the very special form of modernization that happened in Prato” (2001:90).

Instances of critical consciousness regarding peasant protest against the old rigid patriarchal family form, however, have been largely silenced beneath the clamors of demographic experts who construct the fertility trend as a crisis on the order of a social pathology (Golini et al. 2000; see Krause 2001, 2005a). Descriptors such as “postponement syndrome” (Livi-Bacci 2001:147; Sgritta 2003:74) to characterize the prolonged residence of adult children with their parents appear in official European Union reports on family matters and lend legitimacy to a “crisis” in which the social body has become ridden with pathos.

The alarms erase debasing historical experiences that led people to embrace small families as “normal” and morally right. Covered up in these explanations of the quiet revolution is an emergent postwar class transformation that destabilized a form of masculinity profoundly anchored in male patriarchal power.⁶ Similarly submerged is the trajectory away from a peasantry and subproletarian workforce toward a middle-class striving, in which intense caring for one or two children has become the order of the day (Krause 2005b). Displays of respectability (after Schneider and Schneider 1996), particularly those related to raising, educating, and providing for children, make sense when placed in the context of memories about the peasant past.

My topic provoked memory work related to the peasant past because asking people about changes in family making, in particular, the demographic shift to small families, frequently led them to recall a bygone era when large families predominated. The most common explanation I heard for the large size of families in the past was connected to the labor needs of an agricultural economy: The *mezzadria* (sharecropping system) required many arms to work the fields to meet subsistence margins and pay rents.⁷ Because the system was not based on wage labor, an estate’s productivity depended largely “on matching household size to each farm” (Pratt 1994:35). As the sharecropping agricultural economy in central Italy gave way to mechanization, corporate estates, wage labor, and European subsidies and as workers traded a way of life tied to the land for one bound to the factory, children became less of a “necessity”; in fact, in local parlance, they became economic liabilities.

At first, I paid little attention to memories about peasants. After all, I was a Europeanist anthropologist in the late 1990s. I was suspicious of themes that I viewed as Othering and dangerous because of their potential to lure

me onto a trajectory in which I would find myself searching for some “authentic” folkloric Italian. My caution was twofold: First, I was suspicious of narratives about authenticity because I approached culture as historically interconnected practices and struggles over meanings situated in processes of state formation;⁸ second, I was aware of the fascist regime’s efforts to rediscover rural traditions and promote pronatalism.⁹ Fascism encouraged ethnological investigations into the “folk” to foment sentiments of national spirit at home and, in the colonies, to set “civilized” Italians apart from “primitive” Africans (Puccini and Squillacciotti 1980:79).¹⁰ As my encounters with “peasants” multiplied, however, I felt compelled to investigate the significance of what was becoming a persistent occurrence in my field experience.

The figure of the peasant in the 1990s and early 2000s evoked a range of contrasting and contradictory memories, sentiments, and stories. People in Carmignano and Poggio A Caiano often talked about *contadini* (peasants) with varying degrees of nostalgia, pride, and repugnance; they identified with ambivalence as having been a *contadino*; they recalled vivid stories from “back then,” when they were not only subordinate to the *padrone* (landowning master) but they were also self-reliant and possessed know-how for cultivating the land with respect. On occasion, I heard people mutter with disgust, “contadino,” as when a self-identified progressive leftist called a Lega Nord political candidate a “peasant” after he made a racist slur but then, embarrassed by her word choice and remembering her father’s humble roots, the leftist quickly excused herself. A picnic with friends brought uncomfortable laughter after a joking reference to *compagni di merende* (snack buddies), a term that serial killer Pietro Pacciani, from the countryside near Florence, had used to describe his partners in the horrific murders of young lovers making out along rural roadways. Pacciani’s background was a sharecropping peasant, and all of his rhetoric drew from peasant culture. Recounting my own outing to a couple’s country home near the otherwise idyllic rural hamlet of Montefiridolfi, in Chianti wine country, a displaced sweater worker-cum-housecleaner from Prato remarked, “Oh, that’s the hometown of the mostro di Firenze” [the monster of Florence].¹¹ Media coverage retarnished and recharged the figure of the peasant from caretaker of Eden to custodian of brutality. Peasants stood simultaneously as the source of *roba fresca*, of all things fresh, and as a *figura brutta*, the brute underbelly of humanity.¹²

Such recollections and references can best be grasped if anchored in the context of economic transformation. Before World War II, about 50 percent of employed Italians worked in agriculture, a number that declined tenfold to five percent by the 1990s. Widespread abandonment and depopulation of the countryside after the war led to a

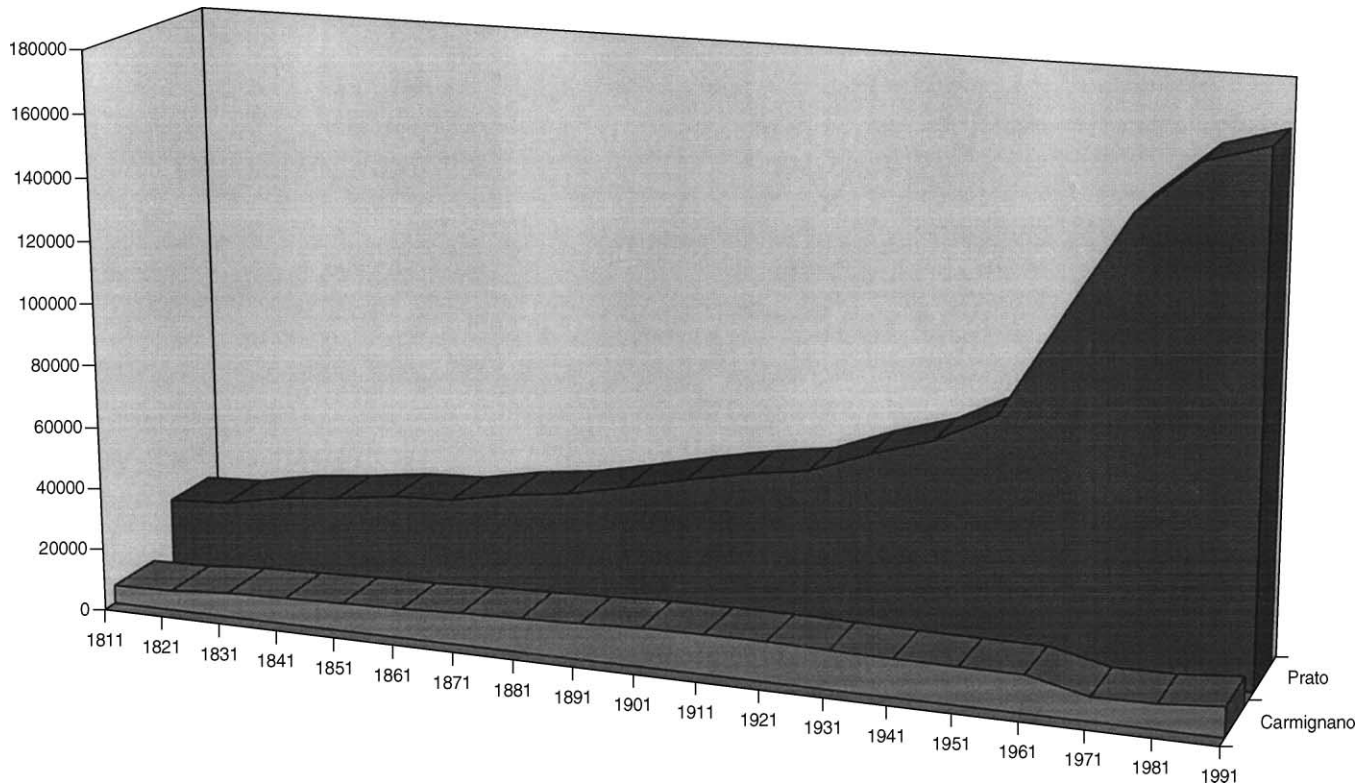


Figure 1. Population of Carmignano and Prato, 1811–1991.

sweeping decline in rural labor (McCarthy 2000:10). Migration trends are reflected in population data from Prato, where the industrialized urban area witnessed dramatic growth after 1961, against a backdrop of rural depopulation (see Figure 1 and Table 1). The historical commune of Carmignano experienced an exodus from the land in the postwar decades. People living in the countryside between 1951 and 1971 declined by more than half, from 31.6 percent to 14.2 percent living in isolated farmhouses, whereas those living in a town center increased from about 49.6 percent to 71.8 percent in that same period (see Table 2). Similarly, nearly 39 percent of the active population worked in agriculture in 1951, a figure that, by 1991, had dropped to a mere 3.3 percent of the population (see Table 3).¹³ Remarkably, in 1951 there were only two main census categories: agriculture and all “other” types of economic activity. Within four decades that “other” category had expanded to 16 categories, a powerful indicator of a diversifying economy in which agricultural activities played a smaller and smaller role.

Well into the 20th century, the peasant continued to stand for the most degraded, backward internal Other within the Italian peninsula. The prevalent urban elite’s view of peasants was that they were inferior and radically different from the “citizens,” that is, the elite city dwellers. Wealthy urban families controlled peasant sharecroppers’

lives, not to mention their destinies. A popular publication, *Cultura Contadina in Toscana*, available at newsstands in spring 2004, reminded readers of short stories and fiction dating from the 1300s that distinguished between a rural world of *incultura* (cultural absence) and an urban world of *civilizzazione* (cultural richness). The city was recalled as the cradle of civilization. This hegemonic sense of urban superiority rendered peasants as ignorant, thankless, and brutal individuals who were incapable of profound sentiments or innovations (De Simonis et al. 2004:19). They were, hence, closer to beasts than to humans.

Northern European men of letters such as D. H. Lawrence and George Dennis perpetuated such stereotypes of rural-dwelling folk. Traveling between Tarquinia and Vulci in 1927, Lawrence mistook migrant day laborers for natives (Kezich 1999:20), an error that enabled his stark contrasts between the sixth-century B.C.E. Etruscans, on the one hand, and modern “men” as well as “natives,” on the other hand. He described Etruscans as “a vivid, life accepting people who must have lived with real fullness” (Lawrence 1994:72). Such characteristics were lost with the Roman empire. “It is different now. The drab peasants, muffled in ugly clothing, straggle in across the waste bit of space, and trail home, songless and meaningless” (Lawrence 1994:94). In his next literary breath, Lawrence draws a parallel with his own kind: “We have lost the art

Table 1
Population in Communes of Prato and Carmignano, 1810–2001

Year	Prato	Carmignano	Poggio A Caiano	Total Historic Carmignano
1811	22,724	5,928		
1821	23,779	6,446		
1831	27,507	7,905		
1841	29,458	8,476		
1851	32,101	9,066		
1861	32,990	9,485		
1871	36,656	10,364		
1881	39,123	10,899		
1891	43,192	11,587		
1901	47,712	12,327		
1911	51,690	12,600		
1921	54,613	12,736		
1931	61,986	12,450		
1941	68,059	12,097		
1951	77,968	12,021		
1961*	111,285	12,022		
1971*	143,232	7,668	4,539	12,207
1981*	160,220	7,946	6,286	14,232
1991**	165,707	9,584	7,941	17,525
2001***	172,499	11,857	8,622	20,479

Note: Through 1961, the Commune of Carmignano included Poggio A Caiano. Empty cells indicate that the latter split off to form its own commune in 1962.

Sources: Bandettini 1961:101, 118, 93, for Comune di Firenze, Comune di Prato, and Comune di Carmignano, respectively.

* Comune di Prato n.d.

** ISTAT 1994.

*** ISTAT 2003.

of living; and in the most important science of all, the science of daily life, the science of behaviour, we are complete ignoramuses” (1994:94–95). Moderns and peasants came to resemble one another in their loss of love of life; however, Lawrence did not depict them as on the same footing. He relied on hegemonic tropes to portray as relatively backward the “natives” he encountered: “The homes seem dark and furtive, people lurking like rats” (Lawrence 1994:114); “They were queer-looking men, youngish fellows, smallish, unshaven, dirty; not peasants, but workmen of some sort, who looked as if they had been swept together among the rubbish. . . . They were, in reality, the queer, poorest sort of natives of this part of the Maremma” (1994:127). Dennis, decades earlier in 1842, implied that shepherds were hopeless illiterates, and he missed altogether their great love for poetry (see Alexander 1885, 1897);¹⁴ he was clueless that they were “devourers of chapbook literature” and “renowned improvisers in octave” (Kezich 1999:20–21), a peasant form of improvisational poetry. Through the distorted lenses of travel, these well-known writers failed to consider the possibility that the peasants might be poets or that the disheveled workers might not be rural locals but

wayfaring migrants—distinctions that would have gone against the grain of reproducing stereotypes of the internal “Other.”

Recently, a trend has emerged that revalues the peasant past and practices, although certainly in selective ways, as Raymond Williams (1977) predicted. A rural renewal took hold with force in the 1990s, a period in Prato that witnessed a repopulation and revaluation of rural spaces and houses along with burgeoning agritourism businesses. This renewal was noteworthy in the rural parts of my otherwise industrial field site, renowned for its textile production. As the postwar economy boomed, the same rural landscapes that were once viewed as impoverished backwaters became home to people with the means to update, modernize, and maintain the centuries-old, dank, stone farmhouses. Granted, exceptions had always existed to the association of rurality with poverty, such as the villas of the wealthy counts who oversaw peasant sharecroppers, although these nobles and their families spent much of their time in upscale urban residences. The revaluation of the figure of the peasant and of his and her cultural products, practices, and histories has been simultaneous with postwar well-being and the emergence of a popular and diffuse critique of urbanization and its concomitant consumerism, pollution, and ill health. Professional-class Italians who lived in restored country homes outside of Prato in 2004 were wary of city life and its effects on children. City kids lived in “cement boxes,” suffered from “chronic bronchitis,” and appeared perpetually pale. A Prato conference aiming to construct a child-friendly city described urban *bambini* as “imprigionati dalla città” [imprisoned by the city].¹⁵ For the new ruralites, carting kids back and forth, before and after work, across washed-out “white” (unpaved) roads from home to school, social events, and extracurricular activities, became a habit, not a hassle. “Living in the countryside is worth it,” proclaimed one working mother who described her two children as healthy. She then added, “Tocca ferro,” referring to the old belief that touching iron protects against misfortune, a reminder of how modern lifestyles still winked at the peasant past.¹⁶

The question debated in the 1970s—“Does the peasantry exist?” (Mintz 1973:92)—and revisited in the

Table 2
Rural–Urban Residence Patterns, Carmignano, 1951–71

Year	% Living in Town Center	% Living in Housing Clusters	% Living in Isolated Farmhouses
1951	49.6	18.8	31.6
1961	61.4	18.2	20.4
1971	71.8	14.0	14.2

Source: Palumbo 1988:41.

Table 3

The Decline of Agriculture: Resident Population According to Economic Activity, Carmignano, 1951–91

Year	Agriculture	%	Manufacturing	%	Total in All Categories	Number of Census Categories
1951	1,861	38.7	2,948*	— ^a	4,809	2
1961	1,150	24.6	2,291	49.1	4,669	9
1971	429	15.2	1,530	54.3	2,817	9
1981	234	6.8	2,012	58.8	3,425	9
1991	144	3.3	2,088	48.2	4,331	17

Sources: ISTAT 1956:36–37, 1965:38–39, 1973:14–15, 1984:18–19; IRPET 1991:220–221.

^aThe manufacturing percentage was not calculated for 1951 because it would be misleading; in that year “all other” types of economic activities were collapsed under one heading.

1990s—Is the peasant past “irrevocably gone”? (Rebel 1998:195)—might seem irrelevant in the third millennium.¹⁷ The peasant in Europe may be gone as a figure involved in a viable production mode but persists as a process linked not only to personal and social histories but also to transforming market niches, relations, and professional specializations (Mintz 1973:91, after Wolf 1955; Rebel 1998).¹⁸ Furthermore, my fieldwork suggests that the peasant is actively produced in memory work, performances, and discourses. It persists as a figuration that is culturally meaningful and productive. Drawing on seven peasant-related encounters, I suggest that peasants figure centrally, although unpredictably, in the embrace of small families as a sign of “modern” times, as a symbol of “progress,” and as a distancing mechanism from debasing and traumatic dislocations.

First encounter: Rejecting peasants, fostering men

As the socioeconomic conditions in Italy changed, markedly rapidly after the 1950s, so, too, did the meanings of *il contadino* (the peasant). In the immediate postwar era, the term denoted backwardness and poverty. The second year of my fieldwork, I moved from the bustling sweater-producing township to a bucolic neighborhood. There, I lived in a restored farmhouse on a dead-end street that gave way to olive trees, grape vines, and a meadow. My neighbors included a retired couple who had once lived in my house and worked as sharecroppers under my landlord; in fact, the woman, Emilia, was born there and had vivid memories of working as a girl in the 1920s as a straw weaver making leghorn hats for the transnational market. Her husband, Parigi, was a former peasant and retired factory worker, in his late seventies when I spoke with him in 1997. In the factory where he worked, in Pistoia, not one of the workers would admit to having been a contadino. Similarly, as the economy changed in the 1960s, the crumbling of the mezzadria system hastened as young men and women contested patriarchal authority vested in the *capoccia* (male head of household); among the strategies

of everyday resistance was women’s refusal to marry peasants (Contini 1993:19; see also Gal 1984; Scott 1985). Several scholars have identified this refusal as a revolt against the mezzadria institution and its hierarchical organizations. Patriarchal structures, along with economic changes, were among the principal pressures that pushed sharecroppers to abandon agricultural life and to accept factory work.¹⁹

The patriarchal family increasingly became stigmatized for its rigid class and gender hierarchies, emasculated junior men, and oppressed women. Giovanni Kezich, who during the 1970s and 1980s followed the friendships and rivalries of peasant poets from far-flung villages between Rome and Prato, offers a dismal description of life under the rule of the patriarchal family even circa 1980: “Besides those youngsters who do grow up to be the image of their fathers, never having a say in family matters until they are fifty-plus, there are those who are out of work and those who try, in the name of various brands of rebellion, to escape the relentless, silent cruelty of family reproduction” (1999:65). Mounting tensions pushed sons and daughters, but also wives, to challenge the patriarchal family form and its reproduction. Indeed, Becattini suggests that these tensions led to a “peasant protest, particularly by women and youth, not so much against the countryside itself as against the rigidity of the pecking-order in the family and against their close economic dependence on its older male members” (1998:83). Becattini attributes the rejection of an economic form and the social structures it required to individuals’ self-assertion in monetary matters. People began rejecting sharecropping and embracing industry.²⁰ Under the mezzadria system, the powers of decision making and the availability of income were inconsistent with the distribution of workload, capabilities, and responsibilities. Peasants began objecting to a social structure and ideology that permitted, even necessitated, an unfair distribution of duties and rights (Becattini 1986:908). The unraveling of this patriarchal family and landholding system had deep and lasting repercussions for gender relations.²¹

In 1975, reforms in family law lent legitimacy to the social unrest related to institutional patriarchy and

called for egalitarian families (on modern families, see Barbagli 1996:387–392; Saraceno 1996:143–148). Over time, domination has been largely dethroned: A 30-something male researcher at a working seminar at the University of Padova, for example, observed that the desire of men to satisfy their partners physically has become a key measure of masculine sexuality.

“Since when was this the standard?” he asked.

“Since yesterday,” replied a 20-something woman in attendance. That a man felt manly when he satisfied his lover was an altogether new standard for measuring masculinity and holds revolutionary implications for gender relations (Luca Trappolin, personal communication, April 30, 2004; see Trappolin 2004).

The roots of unraveling patriarchal authority are revealed in the memories of Irene, who had worked for years as a tailor after migrating from Calabria to Tuscany as a young woman. She recalled how in 1965, at age 23, she married a local day laborer who later developed a successful family painting firm specializing in luxury techniques. During the 1960s, the peasant was marginalized. She recalled:

Io dicevo sempre,
I used to always say,

prima di sposare un contadino rimango zitella.
before marrying a peasant I'll remain a spinster.

Perché un contadino era-era una cosa terribile.
Because a peasant was-was something terrible.

The idea of the stigmatized peasant man was widespread. Oliviero, a sweater maker in his mid-forties, told me that, for a woman to marry a peasant, “Era l’ultima cosa da fare” [It was the last thing to do]. His family had moved to Prato from the outback region of Maremma after the war. He and his wife, Laura, recalled people saying of someone who married a peasant, “Oh that poor woman, ha preso un contadino” [she took a peasant]. As the economy boomed in the 1950s and 1960s, peasants were devalued and seen as backward, less “civilized,” and questionable providers as compared with artisans or factory workers. Furthermore, being a peasant meant being dependent on the mezzadria system of sharecropping, which rendered a man anything but independent. This dependence may have implied that women, in particular, saw the peasant man as a *mezzo-uomo* (half-man), one who did not work for himself. The postwar textile boom in Prato, dominated as it was by small artisan-industrial shops with several looms, offered individuals a sense of autonomy. As *terzisti* (subcontractors), even if they had to answer to contractors, their relationship contained significant space for negotiation and autonomy—

demonstrations of manly competence—compared with the peasant–patron or peasant father–son relationship.

Second encounter: Breeding rabbits, breaking contracts

The rabbit occupies a complex and contentious place in the memories of Tuscans. Small and quick to breed, rabbits were animals that peasants viewed as worth breaking rules to raise as a way to make a little extra cash.²² The rules were codified in sharecropping contracts that, among other things, spelled out what crops and animals a peasant could and could not raise. “At all times it is forbidden for the sharecropper to keep rabbits in the hayloft and in the stalls,” stated the 1929 provincial contract (Federazione Provinciale Sindacati Fascisti Agricoltori e Unione Provinciale Sindacati Fascisti Dell’Agricoltura di Firenze 1929:19). A sharecropper could raise a few animals (geese, ducks, chickens, rabbits, or pigeons) but only for the purpose of family consumption. Sample contracts from 1900 and 1929 were typical of the prefascist and fascist periods.²³ The prefascist contract, from 1900, consists of two pages, whereas the fascist contract, from 1929, is a 29-page booklet. The fascist-era document drew on past customs as it reaffirmed rigid hierarchies and detailed the obligations of both the peasants and the landowners. Its guidelines for resolving disputes revealed tensions in class relations.

Memories are provoked in the stirring up of dust.²⁴ The second year of my field project, I pursued research in public as well as private archives. By May 1997, I found myself seeking permission to make use of one estate’s *conti colonici* (account books) from the early 1900s. The fascist contracts provided a context in which to read the account ledgers. The books were not stored in the main private archive with the older materials dating to the 1700s but, rather, in a cluttered closet in the salon. The sour smell of dust saturated the air. The small count who owned the estate, who was made smaller still by seven decades of life, had to stand on a chair to reach the shelf. He handed me tarnished tea-set pieces, which I placed one by one atop an antique flour grinder. He then came across a shredded account book. A cat had gotten into it, he grumbled. He passed me the volume I was after and suggested I go sit at the big dining table where there was more light. Meanwhile, he took the shreds and placed them next to me, then retrieved a jar of glue and with a brush smeared it onto a page. Eventually his three sisters appeared—only one brother had ever married and moved away—and one of them offered me tea.

I continued to flip through the ledgers detailing the ways in which farms had been enterprises, ones that often carried debts from year to year. The system stood out as a vivid example of Wolf’s (1982) articulating modes of

production: a modified feudal mode defined by patron-client relations, which, in turn, depended on kin social relations, and these articulated with a capitalist market. The latter included the extensive work of women straw weavers, which was not noted in the estate ledgers but, rather, in the household census records in the communal archive. At times, these various modes of production came into conflict.

Rabbits were the source of one dispute, and it was doubtless the context of retrieving dusty ledgers and fragments from the closet archive that stimulated the count's recollection of the dispute. One day, the count told me, he and his hulky *fattore* (estate administrator), showed up to take a census of the rabbits one of his peasants had on the premises. “It was a battle,” the signore told me. The peasant refused to let the administrator count the rabbits. He was raising them in the space that was supposed to be used for large animals, for example, cows, because the milk from the cows fell under the sharecropping system whereas the rabbits did not; hence, the overlord preferred that the peasant exploit the space for something that fell under the 50–50 split rule so he, too, could reap any economic benefits. Raising the rabbits was a way for the peasant to earn a little extra money for his family alone. “But it was against the rules, really,” the count said. The peasant and the administrator nearly came to blows.

The count's sisters giggled, then caught themselves: “Povero uomo” [Poor man].

I knew the peasant they spoke about, and one day, without prompting, he had told me the same story. He was clearly still angered by the confrontation. The event represented an assault on his autonomy. It was surely a painful reminder of his limited agency in those days.

The recollections about the subterranean economy of peasant households expand on the subversive potential of raising rabbits—a potential alluded to in sharecropping contracts and realized in the maneuvers of peasants who refused to merely “obey” the rigid stipulations spelled out in official documents. As products of fascist agricultural unions, these documents represent artifacts of the state's discursive routines, which gave and give legitimacy to quotidian acts of statecraft. The volume of the state's parlance increased amid the centralizing motion of the fascist state.²⁵ The story of the rabbits indicates the stigma associated with being a peasant sharecropper. Breeding rabbits was a subversive strategy, but breeding like rabbits was a practice that could lead to the reproduction of one's subjected position through a too-close affinity with nature.

Third encounter: Reproducing caterpillars, emasculating men

The emasculating effects of being a peasant emerge as a strong theme in one of the most popular depictions of

peasant sons and rural–urban poverty for central Italians who came of age in the 1960s. Academy Award-winning comic Roberto Benigni's first film, *Berlinguer ti voglio bene* (Berlinguer, I love you; Bertolucci 1977), is set in the outskirts of Prato, where Benigni grew up, in the town of Vergaio. Little known beyond Italy but of cultish popularity within Tuscany, the film follows the escapades of four males whose awkward sexuality is a source of humor. Benigni's character lacks masculinity: He climbs in bed with his mother during a lightning storm; he attends porn movies with his buddies; and he bumbles his way across the dance floor with a “woman” whom he does not seem to notice is actually a transvestite.

The theme of poverty as emasculating is especially evident in one scene in which Benigni arrives home to his mother's tirade. Unaware that he was grieving her “death,” thanks to his friends' prank, she is outraged that he stayed out all night. She hurls insults at him: “You're so ugly! I can't stand you!” As he grovels at her feet, more infant than man, she blurts out resentments about her failed attempts to abort him. That the peasant woman would have tried to abort her son, and resented that she failed, reminds the viewer that peasant women did not always welcome their pregnancies, that unwanted pregnancies may have caused anger and sacrifice, that there was a reason in centuries past that so many women abandoned their babies on the wheel for anonymous passage into the Hospital of the Innocents in Florence (see Kahn 2002; Kertzer 1993).

Benigni emerges from his mother's tirade and is seen walking through a field, where he stops to gaze longingly at a poster of Enrico Berlinguer, then-leader of Italy's Communist Party and, in the 1970s, an icon of hope for the poor and working classes.²⁶ He sets off on a bicycle; his friend, riding on the handlebars, recites a poem that speaks to poverty's emasculating effects and its reproductive conditions. I heard several Pratese friends recite this poem extemporaneously well before seeing the film, an indication of its popularity:²⁷

Noi siamo quella razza
Che non sta troppo bene

Che di giorno sarta
i fossi
E la sera le cene

Lo posso gridà forte
Fino a diventà fioco

Noi siamo quella razza
Che tromba tanto poco

**We are that race
That doesn't have it so
well
That by day we jump
the ditches
And by night we skip
dinners**

**I can scream it loud
To the point of
becoming hoarse
We are that race
that screws so little**

Noi siamo quella razza Che ai cinema s'intasa Pe' vedè donne gnude E fassi seghe a casa	We are that race that packs the movies to see naked ladies and then jerks off at home
Eppure la natura c'insegna Sia su' monti sia a valle	Yet nature teaches us Be it the mountains or valleys That you can be born a caterpillar but become a butterfly
Che si po' nasce bruchi E diventà farfalle	Well, we are that race That is among the strangest For caterpillars we are born And caterpillars we remain
Ecco, noi siamo quella razza Che l'è fra le più strane Che bruchi siamo nati E bruchi si rimane	That race is us It's useless to pretend otherwise Poverty screwed us And we ended up pregnant.
Quella razza siamo noi L'è inutile fa' finta C'ha trombato la miseria E siamo rimasti incinta.	

Poverty emasculates these sons of peasants and prevents them from reaching their full potential. The poem associates “race” or “stock” with poverty and, therefore, implies that poverty is inescapable because it is encoded in the blood. The “race” described in this poem has several important attributes. First, its men, sons of peasants in the process of becoming proletarianized, rural-cum-urban, workers, lack the means to attract female sexual partners. These men very rarely manage to have sex with real women. That most of their sexual experiences involve masturbation implies that the only type of generativity of which they are capable is reproducing a culture of impoverished, self-encapsulated celibacy (in the sense that they remain unmarried). Second, these men are unable to realize their full human potential. The poem draws on the powerful transformative metaphor of *bruchi* (caterpillars), which normally become *farfalle* (butterflies). The term *caterpillar* refers to a wormlike larva, and although caterpillars bring to my mind fuzzy childhood memories, Italian usage tends to emphasize the transformative potential of the wormlike larva, as when one contrasts worm with butterfly to offer hope to an awkward, unattractive adolescent: “Even ugly caterpillars become beautiful butterflies” (Matilde Zampi, personal

communication, 1999). Or as in the title of Becattini’s (2000) *Il bruco e la farfalla* (The caterpillar and the butterfly), which documents Prato’s postwar transformation from the “city of rags” to the city of riches. In addition, in the Florentine dialect, the term *nudo bruco* (bare caterpillar) is used to signify somebody who is half nude with torn-up clothes (Lapucci 1991:46). The poem from Bertolucci’s film similarly uses the caterpillar as a figure for poverty.

The equation of this “race” of people with a species that is born a wormlike larva and remains a wormlike larva strongly suggests a hopeless destiny, at a material as well as a spiritual level. These men’s inability to transform themselves results from emasculated, nongenerative male sexuality, which has its roots in poverty. The depiction of poor men as emasculated offers the warning that, even if one does manage to have sex, the conception will create a strange breed of caterpillar, one that will never metamorphose. Ultimately, the poem offers a moral warrant against having children if one is poor. The last two lines of the poem reveal a tragic, darkly humorous conclusion, which conveys the sense that poverty is inescapable. It flows in the blood. Like the peasant woman who could not abort her son, there is no aborting poverty. Being pregnant with poverty means that one is destined to reproduce poverty itself.

Fourth encounter: Consuming “chocolates,” modernizing sex

The theme of emasculated male sexuality also occurred in my conversations with the former peasants Emilia and Parigi. A strong theme of modernity emerged as the retired couple spoke about the shift from large to small families (see Krause 2001:588–591). They themselves only had one daughter. Having small families had come to be associated with being modern by the time they got married (see also Kanaaneh 2002; Paxson 2002; Schneider and Schneider 1996). The modern trope “requires” those engaged in sex to be in control; the former peasants in my field site implied a willingness “to suffer” (i.e., rely on coitus interruptus or abstain from sexual relations) because “the methods of today”—that is, contraceptives—were unavailable to them in the past. Parigi enjoyed getting a rise out of me, and he sometimes played on the image of the ignorant, backward peasant to do so:

Parigi: Gli era un problema sa!
There was a problem, y’know!

Emilia: Erano famiglione si diceva “patriarcale.”
These were big families called “patriarchal.”

Betsy: Ma il capofamiglia decideva
But the head of household would decide

quanti figli voleva o venivano?

how many children he wanted or did they just come?

P: No! veniano a regola.

No! They normally just came.

Un sapeano mica neanche se andà diritto o torto.

They didn't even know if it went straight or crooked.

Un lo sapeano mica.

They had no clue.

B: No!

Come on!

P: No! Un lo sapeano.

Really! They didn't know.

Dimorti rimaneano zitelloni

A lot of them remained old bachelors

perchè gli avevano paura delle donne.

because they were afraid of women.²⁸

The reference to “straight or crooked” is a humorous turn of phrase that allowed Parigi to talk about males who were sexually incompetent. He linked this incompetence to male celibacy (both in the sense of unmarried and asexual). Another emasculating attribution came in the form of these men’s fear of women: They were afraid that women would bite them. Parigi did not specify where or why; rather, the fear of being bitten (possibly a fear of castration) indexed a general suspicion about women and a sense that one should avoid getting too intimate with them. For Parigi, this kind of fear was the ultimate outward expression of ignorance and backwardness.

The theme of backwardness was also connected to dialect, as Emilia chimed in to tell a story about an uncle who used a very marked linguistic form to ask her the time. He used to say, “Che otta è?” [What eight is it?], a dialect version of asking “Che ore sono?” [What time is it?]. Using the formal *voi* form as a sign of respect, she used to chastise him for his way of speaking: “Se vu mi dite ‘che ore sono’ io ve lo dico, se nò ‘un vi dico più nulla!’” [If you ask me “what time is it,” I’ll tell you. If not, I’m not telling you a thing!]. To which Parigi replied, using a mode of speaking that still had a rural cadence: “S’era dimorto arretrati prima” [They were really backward back then]. The “backward” peasants were contrasted with the “progressive” townfolk, who, in terms of sexuality and birth control, were *più esperti* (more expert). Given this suggestion, I then asked how they learned about birth control.

Emilia’s recollection of her first experience with a condom positioned her as a global subject:

E: Mi credevo fosse una cioccolata, in tempo di guerra.

I thought it was a little chocolate, the war was on.

C’era un giovane più giovane di noi si chiama Paolo.

There was a guy, younger than us, named Paolo.

Cioè una mia amica si stava insieme e s’eramo costì

So one of my friends we were really close, like this

e si lavorava si faceva le ciabattine

and we were working we were making slippers

e insomma questo Paolo gli stà quasù alle corti

and so this Paolo he lives down there at the angle

e ci disse e s’eramo a lavorare, gli era in tempo di guerra.

and he said and we were working, during the war.

C’era belle venuto gli Americani, gli era fatti?

The Americans had come, what did they do?

Pe’ accomodare la ferrovia e ci disse Paolo,

Fix the train tracks and Paolo goes,

“Che la volete una cioccolattina Americana?”

“Do you want a little American chocolate?”

Ba! noi gli si disse “daccela,” e ci dette questo preservativo;

We go, “Give it to us,” and he gave us this condom;

noi si prese questo preservativo.

we took this condom.

“Accidempolate!” gli si disse

“Damn you!” we told him

e questo figliolo moria da i’ridere.

and this kid was dying from laughter.

Gli era un giovanottaccio io lo vidi allora

He was one of those tricksters I saw it even then.

B: E allora voi?

And so you guys?

E: E allora si prese via e dopo si vedde

And so we took it and after we realized

questo gli è un poppino.

this is a rubber.

Dice Lirua questa signora la stà quaggiù l'ha quante a me

Says Lirua this lady who lives there she's my age

siamo amiche, disse, "Gli è un poppino, bischero."
we're friends, she goes, "It's a rubber, idiot."

The humor here is significant. A condom, as an anti-clerical, modernist symbol, an "American candy" of sorts, points to a new world with new subjects who can engage in pleasurable sex without immediate consequences. In both Emilia's and Parigi's stories, the ignorant and backward peasant becomes the butt of the joke. Implied is the notion that to be a modern subject requires sexual competence. To be competent means to separate procreative from nonprocreative sex, to possess knowledge about contraception, to have the capability to exercise restraint, and to grasp sexual pleasure as well as desire. Parigi sets himself—a married man, father of an only child—against these fear-ridden celibates. Emilia depicts herself amid a coming-of-age story and in the process of becoming sexually knowledgeable, hence, modern. In both instances, Emilia and Parigi were also poking fun at themselves to the extent that they were related to "those" people, that is, peasants. They could do so because they were more modern; they even spoke a dialect that was closer to standard Italian. The contrast between sexual knowledge as an indicator of modernness and sexual ignorance as an indicator of backwardness was revisited when Parigi brought the conversation back to the fear-ridden celibate uncles:

P: Però loro un lo sapevano che c'era una roba
But they didn't know that there was something

tanto meglio da mangiare perchè un l'aveano provato,
a lot better to eat because they had never tried it,

bà! Icche c'era meglio di quella roba lì?
huh! What's better than that stuff there?

E: Arretrati troppo.
Way too backwards.

The reference to oral sex (the implication here is of men taking enjoyment in performing oral sex on women) suggests that sexual knowledge and being modern includes the acknowledgment of sex as involving desire and that modern men know it. To view sex otherwise is a sign of backwardness, just as remaining celibate signals backwardness. Emilia and Parigi can laugh at those "other" celibate men who, borrowing the poem's metaphor, were born caterpillars and remained caterpillars. Parigi was able to transform—to metamorphose from caterpillar into butterfly, so to speak—because of controlled sexual practices

undertaken for the sake of enjoyment and not just for blind procreation; this type of sex creates a modern subject, one that has transformative capacity, not destined to remain forever stuck in the caterpillar stage.

Fifth encounter: Playing the peasant, transgressing modernity

My encounters with peasant-related memories led me to conclude that the figure of the peasant stood in an antithetical relationship with a modern sense of one's self and one's sexuality. But in central Italy, the peasant has a contradictory aspect in that this figure also continues to stand for all that is fresh and healthy about the countryside.

In February 1996, a prominent and politically active community woman invited me to assist oral historian Giovanni Contini Bonacossi in an interview focusing on a special peasant digging technique: the *vangatura*.²⁹ The encounter was part of an audiovisual project documenting peasant crafts and lifeways in the territory of Carmignano. Contini worked for the Sovrintendenza Archivistica per la Toscana, Tuscany's regional archive, then housed in the same building as the Uffizi museum in Florence. Contini was a household name in Carmignano and had reluctantly accepted the assignment. He was the eldest son of a former count; his sister ran the family wine and olive oil estate, one of the commune's major employers of agricultural wage laborers. Once, not too many decades ago, it would have been peasant sharecroppers or *braccianti* (day laborers) who occupied that labor niche. In the mid-1990s, it was often retired factory workers or migrant laborers from points south and east, in particular, Sicily and Albania.

I met Contini in the piazza, and even on a misty winter day the square bustled with locals. Men clad in dark leather coats spilled out from one of the two *circoli* (clubs): the leftist bar or the church bar. Contini wore a long, khaki-green sweater coat, stylish yet understated, and a large video camera bag hung from his shoulder beneath ringlets that cascaded onto his coat collar. I had imagined the historian son of a count to look somehow different, clean shaven and Oxford collared, so was taken aback by his stylish '68er-grunge look. As we entered a snack bar, I wondered if everybody knew him as the wealthy count's leftist son. Given the reactions I would hear a few weeks later from the sweater-maker Oliviero—whose brother-in-law's father had worked as a peasant and later as a paid worker for the Contini family estate—I soon realized everyone had something to say about the family: how Contini's grandfather moved to the area in the 1920s from Rome after making a fortune selling works of art; how the patriarch, after purchasing his noble title, arrived at the estate and said that he would buy all the land he could see from the villa and, in fact, ended up with some 120 *poderi*, five times more holdings than most local noble families; how the fattore, the

administrator of the rural properties, made off with a fortune after the sale of all the old land and farmhouses; and how the original count donated his fine collection of artwork to the Belle Arti, the state’s fine arts division, which deemed the various paintings, sculptures, majolica, and furnishings worthy of display in the Uffizi.³⁰ No wonder his grandson, Giovanni Contini, had been reluctant to go back “home” for this documentation project. Clearly, it would involve transgressing and confronting class boundaries. My participation in the project would also entail social transgressions, with implications I would only later come to grasp.

Contini’s loyalty to oral history won out over his hesitations concerning potential transgressions (see Contini 1997). In the realm of official Italian history, as with much world history, peasants have not typically been perceived as important agents (after Wolf 1969, 1982). Hence, local efforts at keeping the peasant past alive in local memory cannot be dismissed as pure nostalgia but may also be attempts to expand the limits of social history (see Popular Memory Group 1982). For example, Carmignano’s cultural affairs councillor’s interests were in “high” culture: fine arts, music, and Etruscan tombs and artifacts. She was not inclined to support projects about peasants. Contini was set on convincing her of the importance of peasant history. Evidently, she needed convincing. Her ilk of cultural-affairs arbiters, Contini explained, attached low symbolic value to peasants and oral history. Such cultural “experts” viewed peasant “culture” as the stuff of lowbrow provincial festivals dedicated to specific rural crops: cherries (Sagra delle Ciliegie in June), figs (Sagra del Fico in September), and chestnuts (Sagra della Castagna in October). Indeed, these festivals were mentioned in a recent tourist brochure, but a subheading revealed that the selling point for the commune was its location “at the center of Etruria,” home to the Etruscans, those ancient artistically inclined peoples who occupied the middle of Italy in early Roman days and whom Tuscans claim as their ancestors.³¹ The video–oral history project sought to revalue the peasantry and make peasants historical subjects through documenting their knowledge and skills.

From the snack bar, we headed off to meet the peasant interview subject. My level of anticipation was high, for I had never met a “real” peasant. What would he look like? Was there such a thing as a real peasant living just 22 kilometers (13.5 miles) from the center of Florence? I sensed old intrigues of exotica churning as we headed off to meet “Luigi.” My disciplinary training came to mind, and echoing through my thoughts were my mentors’ critiques of orientaling, colonialist discourses of older generations of anthropologists and of legacies of studying the exotic; was I walking straight into a trap I myself had been complicit in setting? The encounter would make me rethink these rather formulaic anxieties and castigations.

Luigi’s house was built in the 1970s after his family abandoned the land they had farmed for some 130 years. The house’s immodest architecture was designed to accommodate two integrated ways of life: that of peasant and that of entrepreneur. Except for a large container of olive oil that sat in a corner ready to sell, the major activity here was the production and sale of sweaters. This “peasant” was the owner of a *maglificio* (sweater firm). The ground floor served as a sweater warehouse. Stacks of acrylic–wool blend sweaters filled boxes and covered counters. The second floor of the home was the living space. Taxidermic animals stood on the marble tiles and hung from the walls, staring back at us like still lifes of another era. Luigi offered us each a full glass of *vin santo*, a potent and sweet Tuscan wine made from grapes dried for six months then aged for five years. The third floor contained an expansive storage space with a cornucopia of foods: wine, *vin santo*, prosciutto, grappa, olives, dried figs, and drying grapes. The aroma was rich, fermenting, and musty. I could only associate the smells with another time, although not a time I had ever known. They were not part of my “sensory structure of everyday life” (Seremetakis 1996:19; Stoller 1996). Hence, my perceptual vantage point was one of unfamiliarity. I came of age in the segregated, middle-class, consume-or-die, established town of Webster Groves, Missouri (see Franzen 2005); I am a (cynical) product of metropolitan St. Louis, an urban U.S. city of commerce. How was I to understand such ripe, fermenting smells? They certainly were not the odors of European or Western progress and modernity.

I observed with curiosity as Giovanni Contini bought various cured foods as well as fresh garden produce from the peasant–entrepreneur. He also attempted to buy a sweater, but Luigi would not hear of it. It was the moment Giovanni had dreaded.

“These are sweaters for poor folks, not someone wealthy like yourself,” Luigi said with a deferential tone.

The peasant was acknowledging the count’s son as his social superior. To do so required placing himself in a social position below that of the *padrone*. Certainly Luigi realized that Giovanni tried hard not to place himself above the peasant. But was Luigi serious? Granted, the histories of class divisions were deep and, by those who have experienced the differences, not easily forgotten. Nevertheless, why was Luigi unwilling to sell the sweater but eager to sell his agricultural products to Giovanni, who Luigi certainly knew had access to some of the best and most prestigious wine and *vin santo* in the area? Luigi’s self-deprecation was contradictory. He took pride in playing the peasant and had the luxury to do so: He embodied flexibility, a quality that was highly esteemed in the small-firm textile context of Prato and its environs.³²

Once outside in the backyard, he showed us a farm in miniature: grape vines, olive trees, and fruit trees. Hens darted among the plants. A skinned rabbit (also for sale)

dangled from a fence. Luigi “il contadino” opened a garage to find a special garden tool; beyond the door he revealed a row of heavy machines used for spooling yarn. The integration of rural and industrial ways of life was endless. This, too, had a long and hidden history (see Pescarolo 1991).

Our oral history interview placed no importance on this integration but focused on several agricultural techniques such as the *vangatura*, shoveling the ground to prepare it for planting, and the *falcatura*, clearing tall grass using a pole with a sickle attached to the bottom. In a grassy field before the videotaping, as “our peasant” practiced his technique, he told a story about a situation he described as *grave* (serious). Urban schoolchildren in Milan had become so detached from nature that they no longer knew what a live chicken looked like, and a TV newscast had just reported on the mayor’s proposed solution. To me, this framing of the demonstration was more interesting than the demonstration itself, for it reflected on Luigi’s sense of value in the contemporary world. I asked him to repeat the story. He happily did so, giving me permission to audiotape the telling:

Allora, mmm, nel periodo della scuola durante le lezioni
Well, umm, in the period of school during the lessons

la maestra glie fece dipingere un pollo questi ragazzi.
the teacher had these kids she had them draw a chicken.

Allora, questi ragazzi eh abitanti in queste zone tutto cemento,
So the kids, they live in these entirely cemented areas,

che il pollo non l’avevano mai visto loro . . .
they had never seen a chicken . . .

dipinto come loro l’avevano visto.
they drew it how they had seen it.

Quindi, alcuni lo avevano visto già a tavola, ah pronto,
So some had seen it at already at the table, ready,

a tavola in vassoio pronto per mangiare, allora dipinto cotto.
at the table on a platter ready to eat, so drew it cooked.

Alcuni eh- lo aveano visto dal macellaio
Others they had seen it at the butcher’s

o al supermercato appeso ciondoloni.
or in the supermarket dangling down like a weight.

Però vivo non l’aveano visto.

However, they’d never seen one alive.

Allora eh si è visto sui emm emmm sui disegni
So uh you see their umm, umm, in their drawings

si e visto il pollo a tavola
you see the chicken at the table

o il pollo del macellaio;
or the chicken at the butcher’s;

e vivo non sapevano niente.
but they knew nothing of a live chicken.

Allora, è venuto questa denuncia del sindaco
So there arrived this proclamation from the mayor

di prendere ogni tanti giorni,
to take every once in a while,

di prendere dei pullman e con questi ragazzi
to take a bus and with these kids

e portarli nelle fattorie dove ci sta i’ pollo
and take them to farms where there are chickens

come a casa allo spanto e vivo.
like at home loose and alive.

Capito?
Understand?

The mayor’s solution to bus the children out to the countryside and show them a live chicken led Luigi to reflect on their distance from nature as *gravissimo* (very serious).³³ “These kids are at risk of getting *this far* out of touch,” he commented. Like-minded Italians living in Tuscany took pride in the countryside and what it produced: green, spicy olive oil, new red wine, wild mushrooms and asparagus, fresh eggs, and fresh air. In the context of news reports about mad cow disease, dioxin-contaminated eggs, and poisonous Coca-Cola, even a peasant-cum-sweater maker like Luigi could stand for all that was pure.

After the demonstration and videotaping of the grass-cutting technique, Luigi suggested that Giovanni and I each give it a swing. As I took the tool in hand, Luigi instructed me on the proper body position, but I could not even come close to repeating the motion and rhythm he so easily struck, one in which the moment of work entwines with that of rest. Memory of a particular history was embodied in his muscles and transformed into his rhythmic movements. This contact with muscle memory—along with his awareness that Giovanni and I were not

unlike the kids bused from the city—stimulated the moral trope about chickens that spoke to a revaluing of country people and lifeways (see Berry 2002).

Having finished the cutting activity, Luigi played peasant–entrepreneur and offered us a variety of produce freshly picked from his garden: fava beans and greens. Giovanni accepted and paid him. Back at the house, Luigi had one more thing to show us: his pet *cinghiale* (wild boar). Giovanni and I watched safely from the rabbit pen as Luigi hammed it up: He placed a chunk of bread in his own mouth, leaned over, and let the boar grab it. Lip met snout. We chuckled uncomfortably.

What was behind his relish in playing the contadino for the count’s son–oral historian and the American anthropologist? Was he making fun of the whole notion of “peasant” as a category, given that he was an expert at exploiting the image of the peasant to make part of his living, selling wine, oil, figs, produce, and rabbits while also occupying the niche of sweater maker? The performance invited inversion. As a gesture, it sent a message about his power to imitate the rigid patron–peasant hierarchy of the mezzadria system. He turned the power relation in on itself. He knew he was not really a “peasant” but a peasant–entrepreneur playing the peasant.

Luigi’s play with the boar together with his parable about the chicken denaturalized the continuum of modernity in which “progress” occupies a privileged status. His performances disrupted what C. Nadia Seremetakis has described as “normative and perceptual grids . . . which exclude whole spheres of historically discordant experience in favor of a dominant public memory of continuity and linearity” (1996:20–21). The story he told might be read as a rupture in dominant public memory vis-à-vis the mandate of progress. His way of interacting with us, one could argue, revealed critical consciousness: He did not idealize the peasant as outside of history, as outside of power, or as outside of entrepreneurship. His enactment of past moments ensured the existence of the peasant and fed a nostalgic longing for a purer, more tasty time; yet he complicated discourses about progress and modernity that typically obscure the ongoing existence of the peasant—whether real, performed, imaginary, or discursive.

But one more point to this encounter remains to be considered, one whose consequences extended well beyond that day such that I began to see it as a fragment of evidence linking memories and valuations of the peasant past with contemporary family-making practices. When I returned to my apartment, my host family pressed me for details about the interview. Before long, my landlady, Nicoletta, was asking me for Luigi’s phone number. She wanted a rabbit to cook for a Sunday lunch at which her two-year-old nephew would be among the guests. Number in hand, she dialed it:

“Do me a favor,” she began. “Sell me a rabbit.”

Luigi refused. He claimed he did not have one available to sell her.

“Come on,” Nicoletta pleaded.

He held his ground.

Nicoletta changed her strategy. She explained that we lived together. “The rabbit is for the *Americana*,” Nicoletta pleaded. “Dai” [Come on].

At this, Luigi finally gave in. The rabbit would be prepared.

Why did it make a difference that the rabbit was for the American? I can only imagine that it was not my being an American per se that was significant, but my being associated with Giovanni Contini and, hence, someone who was part of the complex of social obligations important to Luigi’s world. Furthermore, why did Nicoletta frame her negotiation as a favor on the part of the “peasant” seller? These are key moments, for they call attention to the existence of a complex overlay of a peasant “moral economy” of patronage and obligation with a late capitalist economy of business for profit (Chatterjee 2001:36–37; Hill 1995; Thompson 1971).

The forces of capitalism, here defined as the pursuit of financial profit as an end in itself (see Schneider 2002), oppose the obligations and emotional ties that impregnate a gift economy. Modern Western societies, writes Marcel Mauss, “have recently made man an ‘economic animal’. But we are not yet all creatures of this genus” (1990:76). In Prato, I observed that people experienced these two forces as deeply opposed. Trying to live up to economic orders and social obligations, many of which were connected to reciprocity and trust, posed an ongoing source of stress yet also satisfaction in people’s lives.³⁴

For the new urbanized families of the Province of Prato, such as those living in densely populated and industrialized zones, procuring fresh foods required a network of contacts. On more than one occasion, this network even included an anthropologist. It was no coincidence that the incident retold here concerned acquiring fresh local meat for a dinner involving a young child. Not only was the youngster Nicoletta’s nephew but, in addition, his status in the family was all the more important because, much to her disappointment, neither of Nicoletta’s two grown daughters, 39 and 41 when I met them, had children; thus, the toddler was like a grandchild to her. Indeed, I observed a widespread sense of nurturing that placed a premium on providing children with fresh, local, healthy foods. It included having the social resources necessary to provide those children with a taste from another era—an era when things were not only untainted but they also tasted better. The present, by comparison, is tasteless (Seremetakis 1996). The person who got hold of fresh foods became viewed as possessing networks, skill, and know-how. At the same time, the “peasant” value of the seller was enhanced, as she or he became framed as a

scarce resource whose willingness to sell was more a favor than purely an act of profit making. This mode of nurturing exposed fractures and tensions in the modernist narrative.

Sixth encounter: Herding sheep, resenting destiny

In contrast to the playfulness of Luigi, I encountered anger from an unmarried shepherd, the only child of a widow who sold pecorino cheese from her centuries-old, dark and crumbling, unrestored farmhouse. The mother and son still rented the property under a special sharecropping contract with the heirs of their former landlord's estate. One day in May 1997, while my husband Chris and I were walking together, we ran into the shepherd. I had noticed that I made him uncomfortable, given that he was unmarried and not much older than me (in his late thirties or early forties). He used the formal *lei* form when addressing me and called me "signora," a linguistic practice that most men my age did not bother with. So I encouraged my veterinarian husband to talk to him.

"Come stanno, le bestie?" [How are the animals?], Chris asked him. The shepherd raised a breed of sheep with origins near Massa Carrara.

"They are a lot better off than me," the shepherd replied. "They don't have any worries. Io, invece . . ." [Me, on the other hand . . .]

"This lifestyle would seem peaceful, without too much stress," I said.

"Actually it's not. Ho tante preoccupazioni" [I have a lot of worries].

He kept his comments vague, but knowing that he and his mother were fighting with their property owners (nieces or nephews of their original count) to stay in their house, that his mother was a widow, that he was an only child, and that selling cheese certainly was not a huge money maker, I could imagine their worries. His mother had spoken of her situation as *destinaccio* (an awful destiny). Her son, the shepherd, seemed unhappy. Visibly frustrated, in fact. Angry at life.

"At one point, when my father was still around, I would do some work, shower, then go out," he offered.

"Oh, so your father was also a shepherd?"

"Yes, and my grandfather. But after me, that'll be it."

"Well then," I dared to say, "you need a son!"

"No! no!" he protested. "Even if I had a son, I wouldn't let him do this work. I wouldn't let him follow in my footsteps. There's no future in this work. But now, forget it. I'm here night and day, working these animals. If I were like you all, I'd be out dancing. But with this work, you can't leave. Who would do it? Besides, to really be set for life, first of all you need a university degree."³⁵

A few weeks later, I phoned the oral historian Giovanni Contini to suggest that we interview this shepherd for

the video project. Contini was interested, so I approached the shepherd. He replied emphatically and angrily, "No! Never. There aren't any more shepherds. There aren't any more peasants. There is no need to talk to me. I have nothing to say." It is one thing for those who have managed to escape a way of life to indulge in nostalgia or in mockery; it is quite another for those who are fulfilling that *destinaccio* to be anything but cynical. As a celibate shepherd, tied to his sheep, his mother, the land, and an archaic rental contract, he did not have the ability to metamorphose into something that could fly away.

Seventh encounter: Confronting hostility, contesting nostalgia

About a year after my first encounter with the sweater-making, rabbit-selling, digging technique-demonstrator Luigi, the oral historian Contini recounted to me his mixed reception when he gave a local presentation on peasants. The talk coincided with an event known as the "Festa della Battitura del Grano" (Festival of the Grain-Threshing).³⁶ There, Luigi again played the peasant, joining friends of a local chef-electrician to serve food to several hundred guests gathered in the Parco-Museo Quinto Martini, an outdoor sculpture-museum park. The educational aspects of the festival in 1997 included Contini's presentation on the continuing oral-history video project. One audience member angrily questioned Contini about the project's *raison d'être*:

"Why are you talking about peasants?" the audience member shouted, echoing my experience with the shepherd. "After all, peasants don't exist any more."

I later wrote to Contini, asking him what motivated the anger. Contini suggested that his efforts to interpret peasant culture might have been taken as a "romanticization" of the peasant past because such rememberings of peasant culture have evolved as a reaction against an earlier attribution of peasants as "uncivilized." He offered a story that speaks to the complex relations between sentiments of nostalgia and loathing as well as practices of collective forgetting.

Several years ago we rented our farmhouse to some youths from Prato for Christmas vacation. They arrived with their girlfriends, all elegant and wearing fur coats. They told me they were all grandchildren of peasants. And among themselves they were saying: "What idiots, those peasants, to leave this house, these places, to go and *infognarsi*, throw themselves into the sewers of Prato." I had to point out to them that the house, now, was complete with two bathrooms, with a heating system, with hot and cold running water, and in addition with an insulated roof. . . . They were well-dressed, well-fed, and they could not therefore judge the decision of those peasants (maybe their own grandparents?) who had

left such houses before, without lights (electricity), water, bathrooms, heating; and above all, who had left *that work*, which had to be performed on those very steep hills, so beautiful (today) but so very hard when they had to be all dug up (remember the vangatura? Not really an easy job ...) on a steep incline, maybe with a little help from a donkey. And as such there are celebrations of peasant civilization, of recent discovery and recent ritual. ...

The thousands of festivals of the boars, cherries, frogs, wheat harvest, crostini, hares, that have flourished in Tuscany in the past twenty years make for a good example of how the new rite functions: I’m talking about ... how the festivals are designed to evoke nostalgia. One would need to organize different festivals as well to counterbalance this tendency: the festival of peasant *hunger*, of peasant *frustration* (above all female frustration), etc., etc. And this not only for the old ... but for the young, who risk truly to no longer understand anything, as happened with those young renters at Christmas several years ago. [Contini, personal communication, July 1, 1998, my translation]

Collective forgetting enabled these sons and daughters of wealthy Pratese textile entrepreneurs to make disparaging comments about peasants who, after the war, abandoned centuries-old farmhouses, which have since been restored and updated. Their nostalgia covers up the hierarchical, asymmetrical peasant–patron relationships under which sharecroppers, perhaps their grandparents, labored, produced, consumed, and reproduced. This romanticizing of the peasant past, what Pietro Clemente describes as *Toscanismo*, produces a myth in which the peasant status as debased internal Other is easily forgotten.³⁷ That the youths’ remarks included the verb *infognarsi*, derived from the word *fogna* (sewer) is noteworthy, as it implies that the peasants’ fleeing to the city was akin to drenching themselves in a sewer, that is, covering themselves in shit. Such a dirty, unclean figure to describe these former peasants who abandoned the land contrasts sharply with the youths’ longing for a pure, uncontaminated countryside. These youths have apparently forgotten that, had their grandfathers remained peasants, their grandmothers probably would not have married them, and they would very likely not have been born to return and talk about those “ignorant” peasants, who, incidentally, might literally have been covered with shit from fertilizing fields, raising chickens, and sharing quarters with le bestie for warmth come winter.

Selective modes of remembering the peasant past rely powerfully on nostalgia and loathing to shape people’s lives as well as their social relations.³⁸ The youths’ disdain toward the ignorant peasants who abandoned the countryside celebrates consumer culture and perpetuates

a middle-class ideology that simultaneously revalorizes access to that rural past.

Conclusion: Encountering peasants, enriching interpretations

How are social memories about the peasant past significant to family making? How is destabilized masculinity relevant to fertility decline? Large families were associated with peasants. The sun set decades ago on the Tuscan mezzadria, and most “peasants” in central Italy have long since abandoned agriculture and the large families necessary for living off the land or engaging in rural industry, yet the peasant as a social category is still being actively drawn on.³⁹ It is a figure loaded with sensory meanings that has continued to influence women’s and men’s paths to family making. Thus, understanding the process of family transformation calls for an exploration into the social figure of the peasant and the ways people and social groups give life to it. My encounters focused on males and masculine dimensions of the peasant because the peasant is typically “keyed” as male.⁴⁰ In addition to protests against rigid hierarchies, the encounters demonstrated an undoing of the desires and sensations that led men and women to come together and make families. Wholly devalued were the old forms of masculinity.

My encounters with peasants exposed a range of memories. Some people became angry when the social scientist or historian probed into the peasant past. Others “performed” the peasant or nostalgically evoked the peasant in political discourse. As a counter to this nostalgia, still others embraced discourses about progress and modernity as they revealed a sense of loathing for the peasant and what this social figure signified. My encounters covered a spectrum of sensibilities and revealed that the “peasant” was being kept alive through memory work. Memories revealed sentiments that serve as moral tropes for each generation’s limitations and possibilities with regard to forming families and transforming social life.

Loathing toward the peasant past sends a strong moral message. It supports the hegemonic attainment of middle-class status and consumption practices as well as subsequent social distancing from the degrading, backward, irrational, humiliating status that peasants occupied and occupy in this dimension of social memory. Family-making practices appear as personal choice but are exposed as the outward expression of class and gender relations. The socioeconomic context and social memories lend symbolic and material values to family making. Historically one of Europe’s internal subalterns, the “peasant” has continued through cultural processes to influence family making by helping to perpetuate ideologies that promote small families as a signifier of middle-class affect, distinction, and rationality. Memories inform the past–present

relationship and how people think about themselves and their class positions as well as how to reproduce both of these: through having or not having children.

Most of the encounters revealed a stigma attached to the peasant past. This stigma had strong social consequences and emasculating effects for men. Stories recalling peasant men as bad to marry (first encounter); memories bringing forth castrated attempts at achieving male autonomy through breeding rabbits as part of an “illegal” backyard economy (second encounter); recitations of a poem that figured poor men as caterpillars (third encounter); stories conjuring up backward male sexuality (fourth encounter); conversations provoking angry sentiments from a celibate shepherd (sixth encounter); even the disparaging and forgetful remarks of youthful elites toward former peasants (seventh encounter)—each in their own way, I think, reveal how poverty is linked to emasculation. Impoverished men became the dispossessed underside of the changing modern subject.

Together, these selective social memories convey powerful moral messages about how making any family at all is impossible for the “backward” male subject. Striking in many of these recollections is the inverse relationship between potent sexuality and dire poverty. Certainly, a particular “structure of feeling” is at play here (after Williams 1977:132). The emasculating effects of one’s class position revealed the deep experience of an economy in transition in which a former mode of production, even if more complex than the label “peasant” or “sharecropper” would suggest, became, in essence, completely unmanly and undesirable. Forging a peasant identity posed deep problems for the individual. That identity threw into question one’s very sexuality and male prowess—unless exploited selectively, as Luigi the sweater-making peasant managed to do (indeed, he was married with children and grandchildren).

A focus on masculine subjectivity is central to comprehending demographic transition. Many excellent recent works related to fertility have framed reproductive politics as a feminist issue and for good reason (Gal and Kligman 2000; Ginsburg and Rapp 1995; Greenhalgh 2001; Hartmann 1995; Paxson 2002). Indeed, women tend to bear the brunt of reproduction and child rearing, and they often stand to gain much in terms of empowerment as family size decreases.⁴¹ I suggest, however, that unraveling the story of fertility decline stands to gain from considering how the dominant key of masculinity has been refigured. Patriarchy was already in crisis under fascism. The consequences were far-reaching. The patriarch once occupied a position of authority within the household, but that authority was rendered illegitimate. Initially, the whole hierarchy began to topple as individuals sought autonomy separate from the *padrone*, the landlord of the *mezzadria* estate, and from the *capofamiglia*, the patriarchal family’s father figure, whose once “privileged” inheritance of the position of household

head was, by the mid-1970s, no longer sanctioned by law. The shift away from the large patriarchal family toward the small (supposedly) egalitarian family became one way to redefine, rework, and reorder preexisting power relationships. Under the new order of threatened patriarchy, new masculinities had to be forged.

Encounters with both peasants-in-the-flesh and peasants-in-memory suggest that the “fate” of the peasantry has not been decided once and for all. Peasant history is not dead. The “end of history” has not arrived (cf. Fukiyama 1989). Sydney Mintz was correct when he predicted more than 25 years ago that anthropological studies of the peasantry “are here to stay” (1973:92), because the category is an evolving icon for social forms and interactions against which to measure present behaviors and life choices.

Traditions exist but not as convention would have it. The “peasant tradition,” then, is not something fixed but something that living people selectively exploit as they make their own history (Roseberry 1989:26–27, after Williams 1977; see also Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). My exploration of individual, social, and selective memories exposes the peasant not as a remnant—something to be discovered only in dusty archival volumes or folk festivals or tourist events—but, rather, as a processual figure that impinges in meaningful ways on social life, in general, and family making, in particular.

Notes

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1. See European Observatory on the Social Situation, Demography, and Family 2002. See also Sgritta 2001.

2. See Alonso 1988, Chatterjee 2001, Ginzburg 1991, Passerini 1986, Popular Memory Group 1982, Rebel 1989, Roseberry 1989, Scott 1991, Seremetakis 1996, Sider and Smith 1997, Striffler 2002, and Wolf 1999. Anthropologists have produced excellent studies on fertility decline and population politics (Anagnost 1995; Greenhalgh 1995b, 1996; Kahn 2000; Kanaaneh 2002; Kertzer 1993; Schneider and Schneider 1996). Those appearing in a broader context of reproductive politics and globalization have had the greatest potential to influence the discipline.

3. Such language was common to the European Fertility Project (see N. 5). Jane C. Schneider and Peter T. Schneider (1991:891) have discussed the dichotomies between modern-rational and traditional-irrational appearing in Livi-Bacci 1977:244, 257. For a popular overview of demographic transition, see Livi-Bacci 2000:126–163.

4. The term *quiet revolution* derives from Gillis et al. 1992. The European Fertility Project, launched in 1963, was “one of the largest undertakings in historical demography” (Alter 1992:20). The investigators, based at Princeton University, sought to document the “momentous revolution of family limitation” (Knodel and van de Walle 1986:412) that occurred from the late 18th to the mid-20th century, during which women in virtually every European province reduced by 50 percent the average number of children they bore (Coale and Treadway 1986:31). Historical demographers mapped and calculated data from over 600 European provinces in an effort to discover universal reasons why women had stopped having children before reaching menopause (Watkins 1986:420). Ultimately, the data disproved the central hypothesis that fertility decline was a universal process parallel to modernization. Drops in birthrates began under diverse social, economic, and health and infant-mortality conditions. Among the few concluding generalizations of the investigators was that areas with a “common cultural heritage tended to be leaders or laggards together in the diffusion of birth limitation” (Kertzer and Hogan 1989:152). Ultimately, “cultural setting influenced the onset and spread of fertility decline independently of socio-economic conditions” (Knodel and van de Walle 1986:392). As a result of these findings, more and more demographers turned to “culture” as they sought to enrich their explanations of fertility decline (see Coale and Watkins 1986).

5. A search for the key term *encounter* yielded 225 results in the Anthropology Plus database and 608 hits in the AnthroSource database, of which the first ten percent were useful. In the Academic Search Premier database, the term produced a whopping 17,534 hits; I narrowed the results to 192 with subject terms and 83 with key-word terms, the latter being a manageable number that yielded several articles cited in my discussion.

6. The literature linking poverty to emasculation is disparate yet suggestive of a pattern. Memorable is Stanley Brandes’s *Metaphors of Masculinity*, especially chapter 6, “Jokes and the Male Identity” (1980:97–114). The initial section, “Jokes about Genitalia,” offers as its first example a joke that makes an “explicit metaphoric comparison between poor men, whose economic limitations reduce their ability to conquer women, and small dogs, who are jokingly considered incapable of mounting a female” (Brandes 1980:99). Brandes, however, does not develop systematically the theme of poverty in his work. My thanks to Jacqueline Urla for this reference. Another classic of this literature is “Peasant Men Can’t Get Wives” (1984), in which Susan Gal reports her findings that young women were the trendsetters of linguistic change. At the time of Gal’s publication, such findings were well documented, but adequate explanations

were lacking. Gal linked women’s role in language change to their social position in the community studied. Specifically, the young women became invested in a new identity that involved a new language, which, in turn, symbolized a distancing from male-dominated subsistence agriculture. The preferred status for young people became worker as opposed to peasant (Gal 1984:293), and young women made marriage choices that prevented them from occupying the role of peasant wife. A great deal of scholarship has focused on masculinity in the past two decades. Some of the other works that have influenced me include Connell 1995, Herzfeld 1985, hooks 1990, Lancaster 1992, and, not to be underestimated, Willis 1977. For an overview of anthropological investigations into masculinity, see Gutmann 1997.

7. In a discussion of A. V. Chayanov’s (1966) theory of “self-exploitation,” which describes how unimaginably hard peasant farmers will work for small increases in production, James Scott suggests that, in general, larger peasant families were willing to engage in greater degrees of self-exploitation, that is, they would pay higher rents than capitalist investors (whose decisions were determined by the market): “The larger the family (more mouths to feed and more hands to work), the larger the marginal product of any additional land and, hence, the larger the maximum rent the family is willing to pay. Because of its near-zero opportunity cost and its need to reach an adequate subsistence, the peasant household will work for very low implicit wages” (1976:15).

8. See, for example, Corrigan and Sayer 1991, Williams 1993, and Wolf 1982, 1999.

9. For a brief yet insightful discussion of fascism, see Eco 1995. On experiences of the pronatalist demographic campaign, see de Grazia 1992, Ipsen 1997, Krause 1994, Passerini 1987, and Schneider and Schneider 1984.

10. I cannot do justice here to this complex, fascinating, and disturbing history of ethnology and anthropology under fascism. Sandra Puccini and Massimo Squillacciotti (1980) provide an extended bibliographic essay and include several rich appendixes. Their discussion investigates the ways in which the fascist regime made use of science to further its ideological projects of colonialism (esp. between 1930 and 1940), hierarchical class relations (beginning in 1922 and continuing through 1945), and a racist social ordering (esp. beginning with the official state doctrine of 1938). A fascinating paradox, and one that remains relevant to contemporary issues, is how the local was used to claim and strengthen national identity. See also Grottanelli 1977.

11. Pacciani was actually from nearby Vicchio in Mugello, although he lived and died in San Casciano (Giovanni Contini, personal communication, August 2, 2005).

12. From author’s field notes, entitled “04.04.05 breastfeeding, lunch.”

13. These figures are based on my comparisons of census data from 1951, 1961, 1971, 1981, and 1991 (Istituto Centrale di Statistica 1956:36–37, 1965:38–39, 1973:14–15, 1984:18–19; Istituto Regionale per la Programmazione Economica della Toscana 1991:220–221). The data can be difficult to compare, as census categories change.

14. For example, the songs of Beatrice di Pian degli Ontani (1802–85), of the mountains above Pistoia, were transcribed by various literate collectors, including Francesca Alexander (1885, 1897).

15. The national convention *Per una Città a Misura di Bambini* (For a City Suited to Children), a UNICEF-linked initiative, was organized in Prato in April 1997 and reported in *Solitario* 1997.

16. From author’s field notes, “04.02.14, healthy, country, kids.”

17. Nearly three decades have passed since anthropology came “part way home,” to quote John Cole’s (1977) reference to

first-wave anthropological work in Europe, most of which focused on rural populations. In that context, prevalent modernization theories deployed structural–functionalist strategies that reified culture as shared and static; however, Cole, Wolf (1982), and others sought to destabilize an approach that dichotomized tradition with modernity. Rather, they emphasized historical interconnections, conflict, and process. Their call to historicize tradition paralleled the work of Stuart Hall (1981:236) in his linkage of social orders with capital's stakes in reeducation. Peasant-related work by Rayna R. Reiter (1975) examined gender relations as they articulated with the state in the context of research in rural France. See also Rogers 1991. Finally, although Wolf's influence on the discipline was deep and in some ways lasting, political-economy critiques of power have largely vanished in much of the anthropology of modernity (pace Appadurai 1996; Marcus 1995; Paxson 2002).

18. Wolf's (1966) definition of peasants, as expressed in *Peasants*, was influential: "rural cultivators whose surpluses are transferred to a dominant group of rulers that uses the surpluses both to underwrite its own standard of living and to distribute the remainder to groups in society that do not farm" (Mintz 1973:93). Shanin (1971:296), for example, followed Wolf in identifying the "underdog" status as a defining feature of peasants.

19. See Becattini 1986 as well as Ciuffoletti and Contini 1994:268. Author's field note "96.03.10 peasants as bad to marry." In reference to comparisons between working as a peasant in the fields versus working as a laborer in a factory, see author's field notes, "98.07.16, Book #4, conversation with Parigi": "It was harder to be a contadino. To work a machine, once you learned it, it was easy. Being a contadino and doing it well calls for some brains. There are lots of different crops and each has its secrets." See also Gal 1984 for a comparative situation in a bilingual community in Spain.

20. Much of Becattini's work has been devoted to untying the "knotty" situation that led to economic development in Tuscany—against a moderate, 19th-century antidevelopment political leadership. In this context, Becattini views the mezzadria as crucial. On the one hand, small-scale, diffuse industry meant cheap labor; on the other hand, it meant that many more people could be their own bosses—for example, industrial artisans proliferate in the Pratese environs. Of course, the autonomy of individuals within a firm varied, depending on their subject position and the organization of the firm.

21. It is worth reminding the nonspecialist of the historic character of fertility decline. Fertility patterns in Tuscany, Piedmonte, and Liguria had already begun to decline by 25 percent among the cohort of women making families in 1910–12, and these regions through 1960–62 showed the lowest marital fertility rates in the Italian record (Livi-Bacci 1977:68). By the mid-1920s, the fascist regime launched a pronatalist campaign to counter the declining rates.

22. Rabbits come to sexual maturity relatively rapidly, in five to nine months, and they are spontaneous ovulators, that is, they ovulate during active coitus. Gestation is 29–35 days. Litter size averages four to ten. See Harkness and Wagner 1983:9.

23. I obtained facsimiles from the Villa of Calavria in Carmignano. My thanks to Giovanni Michon-Pecori, a former count in Carmignano, for providing me with these documents during a return visit to my field site in June 1999.

24. Seremetakis (1996:12) reminds me of this. On Seremetakis's influence, or lack thereof, on U.S. anthropology, see Chioles 2002.

25. See Carter 1994. My thinking of the state as a process and not a reified thing has been shaped largely by the work of Philip Abrams (1988). My thanks to the late Daniel Nugent for introducing me to this way of conceiving of state practices.

26. For more on Italian communism, see Gundle 2000, Kertzer 1980, and Shore 1990.

27. My thanks to Matilde Zampi, a native Florentine, who in 1999 was lecturer in the Department of Italian, University of Arizona, for assistance with transcription and interpretation of this poem. The poem's popularity in Italy was affirmed once again as it circulated via e-mail on the Internet in May 2005.

28. "They didn't even know if it went straight or crooked"; this metaphor got a rise out of my local research assistant, Antonella del Conte.

29. My thanks to Stefania Martini, who has assisted Contini in this project.

30. From author's field notes, "96.04.17, Book #2." In 1969 Count Alessandro Contini Bonacossi (1878–1955) donated to the Italian state numerous works of art totaling 144 pieces, among them 35 paintings and 12 sculptures, considered to be among the most significant donations in the postwar era. See Musei di Firenze n.d.

31. Carmignano's location in the Etruscan heartland is emphasized in a tourist brochure, *Al centro dell'Etruria: Carmignano e i suoi colori*, produced by the Associazione Turistica Pro Loco (estimated date of publication 1998). In an Etruscan museum in Volterra, I picked up a copy of D. H. Lawrence's *Etruscan Places*, in which he contrasts Etruscan peasants with "modern" peasants (1994:93–95).

32. Zeffiro Ciuffoletti and Contini (1994:269) note the importance of "flexibility" to the postwar economy of Prato and the requisite entrepreneurial characteristics. See also Becattini 2000:55; my thanks to Massimo Bressan for giving me a copy of Becattini's rich book.

33. David Horn (1994) identifies the existence of similar fears during fascism, as the urban population became increasingly dense and large. Cesare Coruzzi, whom Horn describes as a "physician specializing in social medicine," identified the urban context as the cause for declining fertility. Coruzzi claimed that the "stresses of urban life . . . made women more vulnerable to various forms of neurosis," as summarized by Horn (1994:97–98).

34. Italian anthropologist Massimo Bressan (1997) conducted research into the cultural aspects of the textile district of Prato in the mid-1990s. He identified an important aspect of these trust relations to be a virtual ban on written contracts. One interviewee told Bressan, "With those from the north [including northern Italy] there are contracts; with those from Prato, there are verbal agreements and agreements of respect" (1997:27). Customers (or buyers) place their orders on faith, and as one machine warper told him: "They put trust in my words" (Bressan 1997:27). Becattini's (2001) ground-breaking work on the economic culture of Prato's industrial district is refreshing for its critique of the distorting effects of economists' not-so-neutral tools.

35. From author's field notes, "97.05.20 sheep, birthday party."

36. The festival menu was planned by gastronomer Leo Codacci and park committee member Stefania Martini, overseer of the Parco Museo, an outdoor sculpture garden in the township of Seano featuring the works of Quinto Martini, her late uncle. The festival did not include any threshing, just a small display to recall the grain harvest: the hands-on way it was practiced in the pre-war years. In the 1990s, grain was harvested with heavy machinery, and many fields have been converted to sunflower cultivation because of subsidies from the European Union and international market forces. The focus of the local festival was on a dinner, and the food expert helped plan the menu and select local wines (Codacci 1996). The festival organizers did not claim this to be an "authentic," unchanged tradition but, rather, more of a celebration, a remembering, of the peasant past and a way to bring social life into the community.

37. Clemente's essay, "I 'selvaggi' della campagna toscana," offers a Gramscian-influenced critique of the commonsense view

of the peasant world: This view participates in a “senile” nostalgia of the past and perceives in bygone peasants and rural landscapes a model of life that was more “humane,” more “natural,” less “reified” than the capitalist market (1980:16). Clemente’s analysis of 18th- and 19th-century agrarian literature seeks to undo myths about the Tuscan countryside that perpetuate a view of peasants as “noble savages” and to replace these myths with concrete history of the subaltern.

38. On selective tradition, see William Roseberry’s (1989:26–27) discussion of Raymond Williams.

39. Massimo Paci (1975) hypothesized that many mezzadri passed from agriculturists to self-employed artisans by keeping one foot on the land, so to speak, and drawing on the family as a source of labor, a practice rooted in the sharecropping experience. Ciuffoletti and Contini (1994:269–271) discuss Paci’s research and that of others that suggests the older generation tended to stay on the land and the younger generation to pursue nonagricultural work. See also Becattini 1986.

40. Philip Corrigan (1990:271) notes that social forms were “pervasively keyed” by a dominant form of masculinity: white, heterosexual, and male.

41. See Krause 2005b on how the culture of responsibility weighs heavily on Italian parents, particularly mothers, even of only one or two children.

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