

## CHILDREN WRITING MIGRATION. VIEWS FROM A SOUTHERN ITALIAN MOUNTAIN VILLAGE

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One day a tourist came and asked me to describe my town. So I said to him that it was called Tramonti, that it is a very simple town but located very nicely between the mountains [*tra i monti*]. Here in Tramonti there is a lot of nature and the air is clean, but there are not so many people here since they all went away – to the north.

The community of Tramonti being described by 11-year-old Vittorio is located in the Southern Italian Campania region in the mountains of the Amalfitan peninsula only a few kilometres from the Costiera Amalfitana. With its breathtaking cliffs and attractions (Amalfi, Ravello, Positano etc.), this coastal region has been considered one of the “oldest and most famous tourist areas” in Italy and is called on annually by innumerable tourists from around the world (Richter 1998: 7).

Very few of these tourists stray in to the 13 small *frazione* (hamlets) of Tramonti.<sup>1</sup> Instead, this mountain town is “connected to the world,” as its residents say, in another way, namely through its migrants. Or, as some pupils from the local secondary school revealed to me, “who goes on a holiday to Tramonti? Well, the emigrants from the north do!”

The periodical absence or presence of a significant part of the population does in fact influence life in the town significantly. When I first came trudging through the snow of the seemingly deserted town in the winter of 1996 working in a joint project of the universities of Bremen and Rome on “Children’s spaces in a tourist region,” I was met with a friendly yet puzzled shaking of heads when asking questions about the community’s children.<sup>2</sup> There were other, more urgent problems, it seemed, principal among them the problem of emigration. There was only little industry, people told me, agriculture was deteriorating and thus no longer provided enough jobs. Most people from Tra-

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1 Tramonti today is made up of 13 so-called *frazione* (larger hamlets), each with its own institutions including a church and a kindergarten. Around 50 smaller, formerly “independent” hamlets – often constituting only one or two households – have been incorporated into these *frazione*.

2 The research project at the University of Bremen took place in the winter of 1996 under the leadership of Maya Nadig and Dieter Richter in cooperation with the Università La Sapienza (Rome) and the Centro Universitario Per I Beni Culturali (Ravello). The results of the study were presented in the exhibit “Una geografia dell’infanzia” in Ravello and Bremen.

monti would emigrate sooner or later. This, they said, would be the major problem.<sup>3</sup> The number of residents has in fact shrunk by half to about 3900 since 1950 (CDT 1991). The unemployment rate in Tramonti averaged 32 per cent in the 1990s, youth unemployment was around 60 per cent.<sup>4</sup>

I would therefore, predicted one of my first informants, not find children in Tramonti anyway. Despite these gloomy prospects I managed to meet several children in the following weeks. Their knowledge about the local migration history was remarkable, as 13 year-old Marianna demonstrated:

At the beginning of the [20<sup>th</sup>] century, so many people emigrated from Tramonti to foreign places like North America, South America, Canada, Brazil and Argentina. These people left and they had to leave their fields, their family and their homeland behind. In the 1950s a lot of people emigrated to European countries like Germany, France, Switzerland and England. In the past 20 or 30 years many young people have left Tramonti for Northern Italy where they specialized in Pizza.

The children of Tramonti grow up in a social environment that extends well beyond local geographical limits and social relationships. Tramonti's migrants are an ideal example of migrant networks as described in the sociological and anthropological literature of the last decade.<sup>5</sup> Many of the network structures described there can be found in Tramonti. The migration pattern of the Tramontini, for example, reflects one of "impermanent movement", i.e. instead of true emigration, we are dealing with a circular movement between sending and receiving society.<sup>6</sup> The contours of the emerging "transnational social space" of children and their families can be traced geographically from Tramonti via the Italian North into Switzerland, Germany and America.<sup>7</sup>

3 The local economy in Tramonti is thus tied closely to the activities of their emigrants in the "north"; without their remittances and inter-family support structures (which also prepares the way for temporary emigration to the north by additional relatives), the situation of many families would be, according to local opinion, completely hopeless.

4 Beguinot 1994.

5 Ackermann 1997; Glick Schiller 1997; Kearney 1995, 1996; Morokvasic & Rudolph 1994; Pries 1997.

6 Salt 1987: 243.

7 Pries 1997. In Ludger Pries' understanding the term "transnational social space" means the everyday life-worlds that develop in the context of international migration processes. They are "spatially diffused" but at the same time "constitute more than a merely transitory social space, which serves as an important referential structure for social positions and for the structuring of people's everyday life, biographical (employment) projects and identities [...]" (Preis 1996: 23). This includes the affected children, one has to add. And all this is true for Tramonti. These impulses from migrations studies and transnational anthropology (Appadurai 1998) have found little echo in childhood studies so far. An exception is Dorle Dracklé (1996). In "Jung und wild" [Young and wild], she suggests to take into consideration the "interrelatedness of national with transnational processes" in future "studies of childhood and youth" (39).

Beside its geographical extension, this transnational children's space also includes an imaginary dimension, which by means of employing the term *il nord* is equipped with meanings including both fears and desires. "When I grow up, I want to go to the north," says 13-year-old Fortunato, "because there is lots of work and you can improve your life and you can have fun both at work and in your free time." Andrea, also 13, has a more concrete vision: "I've decided to one day go to work in my uncle's pizzeria in the north!"

Many children seemingly have no greater desire than to follow their brothers, uncles or cousins as pizza bakers to the north. To them, migration apparently bears a far more positive meaning than the general complaints heard in the town would suggest.

How then do the children deal with these contradicting implications of migration? What can their perceptions and interpretations reveal about Tramonti and its migrants? These are the focal questions I will be dealing with and I will do so by describing and analyzing a collection of over 200 short essays written by the children – interpreting them in connection to my observations, interviews and conversations.<sup>8</sup> By letting the children speak for themselves I am trying to meet the demands of a new anthropology of childhood which looks at children as active producers of culture rather than at childhood as an intermediary phase before adulthood.<sup>9</sup> Following Florence Weiss (1995) statements made by children themselves are the focus of my work on children.<sup>10</sup> The essays from which I will quote in the following are: "My favourite place to play" (I), "My house" (II), "My family" (III), "My most exciting adventure with my friends" (VII), "Describe your village" (VIII), "What do you want to do when you grow up" (X), "How do you spend your summer?" (XI), and "Once upon a time in Tramonti" (XII).

8 The latter topic is the only one suggested by the local authorities and the school, whereas all others I suggested myself. The Roman numerals indicate from which essay the citations were taken.

9 Cf. van de Loo & Reinhart 1993: 9; Hardmann 1993: 60; Weiss 1995; Dracklé 1996.

10 Authors of classical ethnographic childhood studies such as Margaret Mead (1970) have for some time now been accused of considering childhood as a phase, whose major value is to be overcome on the way to adulthood (Weiss 1995). Contemporary social scientific studies on childhood on the other hand are remarkable in their pessimistic predictions. Debates about modernization (e.g. du Bois Reymond 1994), commercialization (Glogauer 1993), the disappearance of childhood (Postman 1982) and critical discussions about isolation (Zeiber & Zeiber 1994), institutionalization and domestication of children's life-worlds (Zinnecker 1990; du Bois Raymond 1994) have been predominant in the past two decades.



## Tramonti in narration

Migration, we can gather from the essays, offers an economic perspective, but is nevertheless a highly controversial issue. Migration as children's plan for the future is not just held in little esteem by adults in Tramonti but is regarded critically by children as well. Especially when the latter are asked "officially" to portray their town history they are unanimous in their negative evaluation of this "difficult phenomenon" (Iolanda, 13, XII).

"Emigration has greatly affected our Tramonti," writes Iolanda; it has become "a town populated largely by old people" laments 11-year-old Marco (XII). The children all experience over-ageing, depopulation and the disappearance of traditional fields of work and patterns of life as negative effects of migration, perceptions concurrent with official descriptions. Tizianan, 11, wrote: "A long time ago there were many peasants here. Today there are only a few left and they are old and not young [...] and many fields are no longer being tilled – all because of migration!" (XII).

The frequency of such phrases indicates that these arguments against migration are included in the school curriculum. In fact, before my first stay in Tramonti, an essay contest on local history titled "Once upon a time in Tramonti" was initiated in local schools by the county (1995/96). Bonaventura<sup>11</sup> reveals the point of the contest in his essay: "The children are to be made aware of the problem of emigration."

The fairy-tale-like title – "Once upon a time..." – implies a fairy-tale-like past, revealing the officials' intentions to encourage children to identify with the locality.<sup>12</sup> In dealing with the village's past, a local affinity was to be created in the present, thus combatting further migration. The local tourist organization *prolocco* supports such endeavours. It wants to invigorate local traditions to promote tourism and thus achieve independence from remittances sent by migrants.

Despite their positive image of the north the children meet these demands in their essays, describing highly imaginatively a (long lost) mythic period of flourishing prosperity: "The families were numerous and there was no lack of work force in the many booming sectors. Small industries, different trades and professions developed. Innumerable cows stood in the cowshed and each family earned enough to survive by selling the milk they produced" (Romina, 13, XII).

12-year-old Sylvia also traces the origin of the name *monti lattari* (Milk Mountains) – indicating the surrounding mountains – to this mythical period in which huge herds grazed on the slopes around Tramonti and "diligence" and "industriousness" were "the fundamental characteristics of the people of Tramonti" (XII). Similarly, Annalisa, 12, writes: "They were industrious peo-

11 Some children did not give their age, but all children were between 11 and 14 when writing the essays.

12 This interpretation was confirmed by several of the officials when I asked them about the intentions of the contest.

ple, bound to their traditions full of religious values [...] a mountain people that valued brotherhood and love. And the main thing that has prevented progress in the village is emigration!" (XII).

The children create paradise-like pasts in their stories. "In times long gone by one could meet people here with pure hearts free of the manifold problems that plague humanity today" (Matteo, 14, XII).

Considering this diction, it is unnecessary to even attempt to find any sense of historical reality. Instead I want to look at the ways in which the stories are told. Narrated past is – according to Stuart Hall (1994: 201ff.) – one element in the process by which communities, common culture and identity are conceptually connected. Transferred to "my field" a "narrated Tramonti" is laid down in the histories presented which ascribes meanings, symbols, events and myths to the town – points of reference for a common identity.<sup>13</sup>

The task of writing a narrative account of Tramonti, is – to use the notions of late-modern cultural theory – an appeal to construct local identity discursively. The historical models constructed by the children – the "historical Tramonti" – is as much a product of their experiences and imaginations as their image of "the north" of which we have already heard. Both are a product of experiencing and tackling migration.

Not only past prosperity but also its loss (through migration) is a central motif in these local historical discourses. Marianna writes that the old trades and agriculture have "disappeared more or less completely" and are "practically non-existent today" as a result of migration (XII).<sup>14</sup> But how do we interpret the following statement, made by 14-year-old Giuseppe? "Emigration is to blame for," he begins, and continues listing the common images of loss. He then concludes his statement with the words "the fact that I will buy myself a nice car!" (XII).

## Binary discourses

The children clearly assess migration ambivalently and switch between condemnation and idealization. Two discourses and two different knowledge profiles exist side by side.

13 Hall describes the narration of nations in his essay. This narration creates a link between locales and landscapes and the events, symbols and myths, which represent shared worries and triumphs and provide specific locations with meanings, that become fixed in people's memories as the common points of reference for a common identity (Hall 1994: 202).

14 The children follow the arguments of the Tramontini Franciscan friar Salvatore Fierro. He is considered the official local historian and his numerous publications, titled, for example, "Tradizioni che scompaiono" (Disappearing traditions, 1989) can be found in nearly every living room, church and store in Tramonti.

“Emigration is to blame for everything” (Tiziana, 11, XII).

“[It is] a difficult phenomenon that has struck our Tramonti!” (Jolanda, 13, XII).

“[...] the entire country must thus stand up to fight it, [...] this exasperating phenomenon!” (Bonaventura, XXI).

*L'emigrazione* is in their narratives a diffuse, threatening figment that has befallen the community like a natural catastrophe or – the narratives being produced in Italy after all – like a grand political conspiracy.

The “responsibility” of which everyone speaks, (responsibility for loss, poverty, over-ageing etc.) is not attributed to the migrating individuals, to the relatives whom the children feel attached to and from whose remittances their families profit, but to a catastrophic, yet abstract and unrelated process of *emigration*. Individual people rarely appear in the children’s narratives. Instead, yet another motif is employed when dealing with the responsibility of migration as a condemnable process: “It is above all the young people that leave the village” writes Pascuale (XII). And Francesca, Fiorina, Gina, Maria and Sonia say that “to stop migration we need to make the youth understand that when they, who are the soul and future of the village, leave, when the youth of this village, which is ours, but also theirs, continue to leave, then it will never change” (XII).

The authors of this petition to the “youth” – between 11 and 14 years of age – seemingly do not consider themselves part of this group of young people. The village is “ours, but also theirs,” they petition (a little moralizing, as if spoken by authoritative adults) the anonymous – the other – group of youth. They themselves (“we”) are not part of those considered endangering Tramonti through migration.

Whenever migration is critically discussed in public it is related to an anonymous group of “migrants.” When youth debate in abstract terms about youth’s lack of responsibility, they reproduce the official lesson learned at school – and illustrate the results as a disaster with all their imaginative skill. But it is not the relatives in the north, of whom the children speak. They appear in the narratives only when dealing with positive aspects of migration – which is then no longer labelled as *emigrazione* either. After Giuseppe, 14, described the loss of the past glory of Tramonti (*tutto per la colpa de’l emigrazione* – “emigration as at fault for everything”), he concludes that he himself has planned his career as a pizza baker in the north, “[...] since I can earn a lot of money there and with this money I will buy myself a nice car!” (XII).

Children engage in two discourses simultaneously. The official discourse represents the institutionalized doctrine which was established by local authorities and which is taught at school. It emphasizes the negative results of migration and aims at strengthening the local economy and local identity. The informal – and less official – discourse deals with the subjects of migration, with relatives and friends, personal relationships, but also with dependencies, needs and desires.



These two discourses are each founded on different knowledge; and biography studies has argued<sup>15</sup> that knowledge of past events is in fact “changeable.” In our example a “counter knowledge,” which is closer to actual performance and more subject-centred can be found opposite official knowledge. Fragments of this “counter knowledge” can be detected even in *C’era una volta Tramonti* (“Once upon a time in Tramonti”), where joining the official discourse is called for. Marianna explains: “Life in Tramonti was in fact very difficult since one had to work all day to earn the minimum necessary to survive. This life of privation forced the population into emigration (XII).” And even today, life in Tramonti is not easy and offers little pleasure. “Many Tramontini who live in the north want to go back to Tramonti,” says Filomena, “but what are they to do in a town with nothing?” (XII).

From the point of view of the children, emigration in the sense of “leaving/abandoning” is bad, but most children agree that the migrants returning for summer vacation bring – in addition to their financial resources – good things to Tramonti as well. “I live in Corsano, a small hamlet of Tramonti and I have many friends who return from the north in the summer; we have a lot of fun on the marketplace, we play and ride together on our bicycles and buy ice cream. In the evening I wash, eat and then I go to some party with my parents,” reports 13-year-old Patrizia (XI). 11-year-old Benito writes: “Tramonti is really nice in the summer, the saint’s days festivals take place then because the people who emigrated to the north organize them when returning for the summer” (XI), and Angelo, 11, writes: Then “the tourists come from the north and from foreign countries, Germany and Venezuela and populate *il Pendolo* [his hamlet] again. Usually we are only 50 people, but in the summer we are more than 100” (XI).

The otherwise deserted squares and bars swarm with people and often the *APE*, the three-wheeled carts of the grandparent generation, are parked beside the Ferraris of their children from the north. These weeks spent together are nonetheless not just intended to demonstrate the achieved wealth of the migrants. Gioacchino, 12, puts it this way: “In the summer, Tramonti is revolutionized” (XI).<sup>16</sup>

These stories are not about “migrants,” even though it is them whom the children are talking about. For some, they are “tourists,” for others “friends” from the north who “repopulate” the town and make it more pleasant, organizing parties and livening up Tramonti, as Stefani, 12, says. She then goes out with relatives from far away “almost every evening. Summer in Tramonti is very lively because the village is repopulated with relatives from far away. I

15 Cf. Alheit 1989: 139ff.

16 Gioacchino argues: “In the summer, Tramonti is revolutionized because the tourists and especially those from the north organize many parties and football tournaments for us children and for their parents. When my friend Anthonio comes, we horse around together in the village square; then we go to the sea and horse around even more.”

have fun because my aunt and my cousins usually come to visit; we play together, go to the sea and go out almost every night” (XI).

Young women and girls in particular greet these effects of the migration process, which the official canon might tend to look down upon. While the latter tends to oppose the disappearance of traditions as a result of migration, the girls welcome the fact that some “traditional” norms are seen less rigidly by their relatives from the north. 14-year-old Paola explains: “The boys have many more opportunities to have fun than the girls. I have a friend, who, when she asks if she can come along for a walk, has to take her brother along because her parents have a completely antiquated mentality” (XI). Her friend Umberta, 14, writes:

There are still parents here with completely antiquated mentalities, who do not want to let you go out, out of fear that when a boy sees you on the street, he won’t be able to go past without asking you to marry him. Then there are parents, who let you go out, but only to mass and you have to return directly after it has finished and in case you are five minutes late, you’ll be in trouble. The people need to understand that the world has changed! (XI).

Many girls are very decisive in their demands for more personal liberties and changes in the infamous *mentalità antica*.<sup>17</sup> Contacts with the “tourists” from the north offer many of them the opportunity to share the (female) migrants’ more elaborate freedom of movement and action, however limited the time may be. 13-year-old Annunziata explains how daily life changes when relatives visit:

Normally I have to stay at home every day [...] do chores into the evening and not go out. It is not so bad in the summer. Then my brothers come from the north and I can stay with them. I have a lot of fun because they are so nice and so funny. In the evenings I stay with them until midnight and then I go home. The summer is a nice time of year because you meet many people and get to know them and I like it very much to be together with new people (XI).

These freedoms are all normally forbidden. Gioacchino’s description of a “revolutionized” Tramonti is confirmed by Chiara, 14: “Every summer is a sweet memory for me because I enjoyed more freedom” (XI). These liberties are nevertheless only permitted in the company of people who live outside the town but are inside the family. The family is the most important social structure in Tramonti and also functions as a surveillance group; when Annunziata is out with her cousins, she remains within the sphere of family control. Perceptions of femininity as something that needs to be guarded, and of men

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17 One of the boys of the same age also commented on traditional gender roles, although he himself, as a *ragazzo*, was little affected by their negative aspects. His comments are thus of a different nature: “Women, especially in the south are still tied to the household because of ancient traditions and are thus less free than elsewhere. Men, on the other hand, have firm control over women” (IX).



obliged to assume this responsibility also exist in the north, but they seem to be more open to change.

Young women, in any case, expect to gain more liberties with migration. In many cases they have completed school or professional training but are not able to find work in Tramonti. Patrizia, 23, studied law and would like to work in the north. However, she does not want to leave her parent's household unmarried and her decision to leave would only be accepted by her family, if it were organized within customary parameters. For women this means marriage with someone from the north, preferably a Tramontino.

She is ambivalent in her assumption of the situation. She disagrees with getting married only to meet the conditions for female migration, even more so as the role of wife and mother would leave her with just as little time to practice as a lawyer in the north as in Tramonti. Ideally, she would like to get married with a man from the north out of love, then emigrate to live with him and thus be able to work in her own profession as well.

The opportunities migration offers young men and women from Tramonti have already been heavily "traditionalized". Young men work as pizza bakers in the *ristoranti* of their relatives; young women largely remain in the sphere of reproduction. Thus, migration is not a decision for or against traditional gender roles. On the contrary, these roles determine the modalities of migration. Nevertheless, migration to the north allows young women in particular to challenge and modify traditional gender more so than in Tramonti. Reforming the "antiquated mentality" seems easier with relocation, which is, of course, only considered to be temporary.<sup>18</sup>

The claim that migration destroys tradition, as made in the official discourse in Tramonti, is thus not correct. Traditions are in fact reproduced in the process of migration which is largely controlled by traditionally powerful informal institutions, namely the families. These make use of traditional gender role patterns and rituals (such as marriage) in steering migratory processes. And to some extent thinking about one's own migration has become a local tradition in itself. To not want to migrate as a child (for the right reasons) could then at some stage be considered a violation of (family) tradition. And once the decision to migrate has been made, a traditional path is to be followed (migrating to the north, to an uncle, to work in a pizzeria, through marriage etc.).

18 Southern Italy is considered a classical Mediterranean region in social sciences, cultural – and children's studies. It's understood as a very "traditional" culture, social structures marked by clientelism and religiosity. Cf. the debate about Italian *familsimo*, which, oscillating between disapproval (as in Banfield 1958, where it is labelled a "moral basis of a backward society") and idealization (cf. Schitteck 1979; Baake & Fracasso 1992) has dominated the academic discourse on Italy and childhood in Italy.

## Migration as tradition

Migration has for a long time been the dominant tradition in Tramonti. The children know this as well, and they are involved intensively in its reproduction. Beside the “story of Tramonti,” there’s also a “story of migration,” although this is not told under the topic *C’era una volta Tramonti*. It appears when they are asked to describe their town to a tourist. It also appears in the (other) essays since they knew, these were not going to be marked by their teachers or sent to the county administration. Here the central motif is not one of loss as in the story of Tramonti but one of the “*arte della pizza*” (the art of the pizza) (Margareta, 14, XI).

“So many have left,” writes Massime, 11, “and today they all have a pizzeria” (VIII). Today the “pizza bakers of Tramonti are famous all around the world and have restaurants in all the big cities of the north” (Giosué, 11, VIII). In these stories specific names and individuals are mentioned around whom the children design the founding myth of “the tradition of important pizza bakers from Tramonti” (Maria Pia, 13, XII).

“In 1951 Giordano Luigi from [the hamlet of] Campinola founded the first pizzeria in Northern Italy which was also the first pizzeria owned by someone from Tramonti. By 1954 he had a whole chain of restaurants, which he entrusted to his poor relatives from Tramonti, who understood that this was an easy way to earn money!” (Filomena, XI). Others “say the first emigrant was Amatruda Aniello from Cesarano who was called Cinquanta because he left in 1950 [...] yet others claim, it was Fierro Giovanni from Pietre. So everyone from Tramonti worked in this new business, even if it required enormous sacrifice and a lot of responsibility” (Francesco, VIII).

Even if the emigration of these famous ancestors depopulated Tramonti, so the argument, they did manage to make the region world famous. Il Cinquanta and his contemporaries introduced the world to the symbol of local culture, the pizza.

The motif of the pizza has been institutionalized in the course of time in the Corporazione Pizzaioli di Tramonti, the union of pizza bakers from Tramonti with statutes, formal membership and, above all, pizza recipes policies. The emblem of the organization carries the motto “The Pizza in tradition – Tramonti all over the world.” The local specialty has grown to become an icon of local tradition. The members of the union belong to a transnational community, which on the one hand draws on the common origin of its members from a single town but on the other hand only becomes a community as a result of its collective absence from the latter. Of the 271 founding members (who all have their own restaurant), only five live and work in Tramonti. The union is one of the social institutions that organizes and structures the transnational social space of migration.<sup>19</sup> Whether making pizza had always been a specific Tramonti tradition or only became one as a result of the emigration of

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19 Cf. Pries 1997.

many Tramontini – whether it was actually migration which led to the invention of this local tradition that is<sup>20</sup> – remains open. No doubt, however, that establishing the *Corporazione Pizzaioli di Tramonti* made the profession of the pizza baker acquire local cultural contours and made it a point of reference for local tradition.



*Illustration: Emblem of the “Corporazione Pizzaioli di Tramonti”*

A whole series of further symbols, stories and institutions exist, which represent the positive aspects of Tramonti’s history of migration and which the children of Tramonti relate to with pride. Walking through the hamlet of Cesariano in 1997, I met a group of primary school children in the street. With excited gestures they led me to the big attraction in the hamlet, the ruins of a house destroyed in the big earthquake in 1982, whose walls stood defiant of the traffic on the through road. I admired these, somewhat puzzled, until the children showed me a shining plaque fixed to the wall. It was, it seems, a symbolic site of the origins of migration. The plaque revealed that Mario Cuomo’s mother was born in this house. Mario Cuomo, probably the most famous migrant from Tramonti, was once governor of New York State and is today an honorary citizen of Tramonti. His name is seldom left unmentioned in a conversation about *l’emigrazione*.

A magazine for the community of Tramontini around the world was founded in 1988, the TPE or *Tramonti per Emigrati, il magazine degli Italiani*

20 Hobsbawn & Ranger 1983.



*nel mondo [tutte le regioni]* (Tramonti for emigrants, the magazine of Italians around the world [all regions]).<sup>21</sup>

I will now return once more to the two unequal spheres of knowledge the children express in the two discourses I have designated official and informal. Does their parallelism involve an immanent potential for conflict?

## Identities

“I would also like to go north and make pizza,” wrote 12-year-old Umberto, “so that I learn something and, anyway, to do something. But I can’t leave my home and I don’t want to either, because I have gardens here, I am alone with my mother and I have to cultivate our gardens. I don’t ever want to leave the Costiera Amalfitana” (X).

Are Umberto’s conflicting emotions and considerations common among the children of Tramonti? Or, to use the dramatic terms of Italian rhetoric, does the experience of migration leave children with an *identità strappata*, a disturbed identity?

Migration scholars have indeed debated vehemently about the negative effects of migration on the identity of children.<sup>22</sup> “Bicultural socialization” would run the risk of children being torn between two cultures (Schrader 1979), making the process of integration and assimilation into the host country more difficult, possibly leading them to develop “marginal personalities” and severe psychological illness as young adults (Branik 1982: 23). Such pessimistic assumptions have been challenged repeatedly.<sup>23</sup>

“Segmented” (Pries 1997) or “hybrid” identities (Bhabha 1990), which unify contrary segments have long since been understood as not being a priori conflictual. Stuart Hall (1994: 180ff.) understands the postmodern subject as a collection of “several, sometimes contradictory or unresolved” or “fragmented” identities. Tomaso Morone describes, for example, how Italian children in Germany develop their own differentiated status consciousness as migrant children, which helps them to position themselves socially and culturally.<sup>24</sup>

Despite Umberto’s melancholy rhetoric, I share the opinion that the fractured knowledge the children have of Tramonti and their own history does not necessarily lead to problems. In over 200 essays, Umberto’s was the only one which explicitly mentioned a conflict.

Identity, writes Iain Chambers (1996: 32) is a “fiction,” a “particular story that makes sense.” In Tramonti, identity is only in danger – to pick up one

21 Applying Pries’ model of transnational social space (1997), the TPE could be classified a part of the material infrastructure of the Tramontini migrant network.

22 Cf. Schrader 1979; Branik 1982; Wilpert 1980; Morone 1996; Portera 1996.

23 I.e. Wilpert 1980; Morone 1996; Portera 1991, 1995, 1996.

24 Morone 1996: 53.

question asked initially – when it is allowed to follow a single model or a single narrative only. The stories told by the children of Tramonti grow out of an experience which encompasses more than one centre, and more than one system of knowledge. They develop in the process of encounter, in a space which despite being shared by closely interrelated family members reveals gaps and room for manoeuvre. In these gaps other stories, languages, and identities can be experienced.

The experience of this social space between Tramonti and the north enables the children to find their way and localize themselves in a heterogeneous world which comprises of both the local culture, i.e. the localized traditions of Tramonti and a delocalized environment which exists in the context of migration and its specific traditions, transregional migrant economics and which connects them to the ways of global culture. Or, as Christina, daughter of one of many Italian restaurant owners in Germany said to me: “Identity? Home? Well, I don’t have either – no, wait, actually both, there the north, Germany and here Italy, that is my home!”

## Conclusion

The children of Tramonti “write” migration. In their essays they create their own versions of local history, which clearly includes moments of ambivalence. However, in no way can these narratives be reduced to the conflict potential concealed in them. More than inner conflict these stories reveal how creatively the children of Tramonti deal with their heterogeneous environment.

They manage to weave together two apparently contrary discourses. On the one hand they energetically reproduce the official discourse depicting migration as a critical issue, as the cause of many misfortunes. With a great deal of imagination, mythical local histories and motifs of loss are created and solutions sought and suggested (e.g. the reproduction of tradition for the benefits of tourism). *L’emigrazione* is viewed as a threatening fiend raging in Tramonti like a natural catastrophe, independent of individual actors.

On the level of personal relations an informal discourse dominates. It is about subjects and their needs and desires, their successes, relationships, role models and friends. A lucrative life in the cosmopolitan north is confronted with a difficult life in the old and beautiful, but somewhat boring Tramonti.

But this does not remain a simple unanchored contrast. Emigration may have “severely damaged our old Tramonti” but now it is the migrants who “beautify” the town, “enliven” and even “revolutionize” it where it is dominated by antiquated rules. Migration connects the remote town in the mountains (*tra i monti*) with the wider world. The migrants, who come from every family in Tramonti and who have officially been given the role of having destroyed the town thus become as good and as important as those, who remain in the town and acquire, if not equal, at least close to equal status positions.

I consider this the specific contribution of the children to the development of a balanced system of social relationships within their personal environment.<sup>25</sup> The local ties of those who remain in the town and their knowledge and feelings about traditional cultural resources are seen as “cultural capital” equivalent to the “economic capital” of the migrants from the north.

The traditions of the *patrimonio culturale* (cultural heritage) and migration processes are not automatically mutually exclusive. Traditional gender roles for example, are both reproduced as well as transformed by migration. The issue is not one of two completely separate worlds – a traditional Tramonti on the one hand and a modern or global world of migration on the other. Both “worlds” are closely and inseparably intertwined in the subjects and their experiences. It is above all an issue of two economic strategies – migration, which has long become a tradition in Tramonti – versus the late-modern idea of making “tradition” itself an economic location factor by reviving or, if necessary, inventing traditions. This strategy followed by the county with the support of the schools, is closely related to the marketing tactics of the global tourism industry.<sup>26</sup>

Many children demonstrate in their essays that they see through the broader intentions of the project, i.e. the revival of traditions and their economic potentials. Several participants in the contest mention marketing strategies right away, their essays sounding like contributions to a publicity campaign. Federico, 14, articulately connects local identity and tourism. The “good-humoured” and “happy” mentality of the Tramontini – a result of the breathtaking natural environment – should be seen as a true incentive for tourism he claims.

The air that one breathes here and the smell of the spring flowers flatters the spirit like good news. Everyone is happy and this happiness is passed on to the people who visit this picturesque town every year. Tramonti is blessed with so many beautiful things, the mountains, the agriculture, and the famous pizza bakers in the north and finally the hospitality, which reveals the pleasant nature and the charm of the Tramontini all over the world (XII).

Frederico demonstrates that the pizza, the symbol of the migrants bears a quality that makes it highly attractive in the context of tourist promotion. The

25 Pries (1997) describes the balanced “third system or social positioning” of transnational social spaces. However, literature on Southern Italy has to date often been surprisingly simplistic in its analysis. Speculations about the jealousy and resentment felt by villagers who do not profit from the migration of their neighbours figure prominently. Behrmann & Abate (1984: 57) consider migration the most radical instrument of social differentiation. From time to time generally “internalised attitudes [...] of resentment and jealousy,” e.g. of Sicilian migrants are debated (cf. Zimmermann 1982: 129). Faith in the system of social security through migration and the example of migrating relatives seems to be more important in Tramonti, among children especially.

26 On late-modern tourism strategies see Cohen 1995; Errington & Gewertz 1989; Nash 1996.



migration of the *pizzaioli di Tramontini* simply needs to be added as an official narrative of success to the list of local traditions in Tramonti.

It has long been so for the children. Tramonti could market itself as a traditional mountain town and as a centre of a global migrant network, as the capital of pizza bakers from around the world, a stone's throw away from the breathtaking Amalfi coast. "If we try," says 12-year-old Simone, "Tramonti could soon become a little Switzerland" (XII).

Despite the danger of provoking a somewhat too enthusiastic conclusion, I close this essay with Simone's prediction. It demonstrates how in their narratives of their town and migrants the children of Tramonti prove to be highly creative, imaginative and critical (co)designers of their world.

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