

THE 'THIRD SPACE' IN LUIGI CAPUANA'S *GLI AMERICANI DI RÀBBATO*

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Sommario

Il romanzo di Luigi Capuana Gli americani di Ràbbato (1912) suscita interesse per la sua trattazione di ciò che Homi Bhabha definisce il 'Third Space', cioè il luogo di incontro di diverse culture che dà forma ad un'identità ibrida. Il saggio illustra come il romanzo mostri la creazione di soggetti di cultura ibrida sia a New York che a Ràbbato in Sicilia, attraverso le vicissitudini della famiglia Lamanna. A New York, dove i rabbatani emigrano in masse sedotti dalle immagini dell'America – costruita dagli emigrazionisti come 'terra della cuccagna' – i siciliani, acquisiscono, per la prima volta dall'unità d'Italia, un'identità italiana, e, in un secondo tempo, anche una italo-americana. A Ràbbato, invece, il ritorno degli emigrati – cambiati dall'esperienza americana, tanto da fargli acquisire il soprannome di 'americani' – finisce per influire sulla cultura e urbanistica locale, modificandole visibilmente. Il contributo sottolinea come Capuana, attraverso le parole del dottor Liardo, sembri auspicare la creazione di una classe sociale nuova, influenzata dallo spirito del self-made man acquisito dai rabbatani negli Stati Uniti, che possa sostituire la classe dei 'galantuomini fannulloni'. In questa analisi si evidenzia come da Gli americani emerga così un'immagine dell'emigrazione sia come fenomeno ineluttabile per la Sicilia – che il progetto di unità nazionale aveva reso economicamente emarginata e subalterna al Nord – e per i siciliani, già etichettati 'razza maledetta' dal discorso nazionale; e sia anche come fenomeno necessario per trasformare i siciliani in italiani, cioè per portare a termine il progetto nazionale che oltre a 'fare l'Italia' avrebbe dovuto 'fare gli italiani'.

Keywords: Third space, hybrid identity, Sicilian peasants, *galantuomini*, emigration, race.

Luigi Capuana's *Gli americani di Ràbbato* – written in 1906 but published in 1912 – is, according to Giuseppe Barone, “il primo

romanzo sociale sulla 'grande emigrazione' siciliana. Lo scrittore di Mineo adattava i moduli narrativi del verismo ad una chiave di lettura progressista, attenta a cogliere i mutamenti innescati dall'esodo transoceanico nell'economia dell'isola e nella mentalità collettiva dei suoi abitanti" (1987:205). The novel takes its readers from Sicily to New York, where people from Ràbbato acquire, first a Sicilian, and then an Italian identity; thus, transcending the village's boundaries. In the very different urban reality of New York, these people are similarly able to acquire a new Italian-American identity by creating a prosperous Italian-American community (206). At the turn of the century, widespread Sicilian emigration drew the attention of many politicians and intellectuals. For instance, in "L'altro figlio" (1905 ora in 1957), Pirandello laments both the lure that the New World has on Sicilian young men and the hypocrisy of the emigrants: "Ma perché i guaj che trovano laggiù non li dicono nelle loro lettere? Solo il bene dicono, e ogni lettera è per questi ragazzacci ignoranti come la chiocchia: – pio pio pio – se li chiama e porta via tutti quanti" (1957:928). With these words, Pirandello clearly denounces emigration to the United States as a calamity for Sicily, depriving the island of young men.

In contrast, Capuana's work focuses on the emotional and cognitive shift of Italian emigrants, as they moved from the reality of their native Sicily to the completely different world of New York, ultimately resulting in a transformation of personal identities. Two interconnected aspects of the novel are of particular interest. The first aspect is the articulation of a resistance to the race discourse that taunted Italian Southerners both in Italy and in the New World. The second is the emigrants' acquisition of a hybrid identity that allows them to take on a new agency both in their native home and new country. This newfound agency is the force behind propelling a substantial economic improvement in Sicily, and in the lives of its people.

To better describe Sicily's new and hybrid status, I will use Homi Bhabha's concept of 'third space' in my discussion. Bhabha affirms: "All forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity which denies the essentialism of a prior given original or originary culture [...]. Hybridity to me is the 'third space'". He continues by asserting

that hybridity “displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives [...]. The process of hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (1990:211). In other words, the “third space” is the site where non-Western and Western people and their cultures meet, thus creating a state of hybridity that denies any original essentialism. It is within this “third space” that new cultural and political initiatives can arise and be negotiated, giving way to new meaning and representations of reality. Bhabha refers to the “translational transnational” precisely as the process and condition of non-Western people’s migrancy into Western national structures, which they displace and by which they are displaced (1994:173).

In Bhabha’s description, the ‘third space’ is the hybrid site where the ex-colonising First World meets the ex-colonised Third World; thus, the Italian experience of emigration does not entirely fit into this paradigm. However, as Pasquale Verdicchio argues: “[Italian] emigration is part and parcel of the oppressive process of nation building, and as unrecognised post-colonials, Southern Italian immigrants to North America are among those groups that straddle the borders of nationalism, ethnicity, and race in a continuous identity flux” (1997:98). Verdicchio’s quote needs some unpacking and contextualisation. Verdicchio considers emigration the direct result of Italy’s nation-building process. More specifically, it is the result of the Italian state’s oppressive policies toward the South, the part of the country more prone to emigration (Mignone, 1998:202). Italy’s unification was carried out through the subjugation of the South as its people faced policies that were increasingly oppressive toward the southern region. In other words, the South was colonised, as Antonio Gramsci underlined: “La borghesia settentrionale ha soggiogato l’Italia meridionale e le isole, e le ha ridotte a colonie di sfruttamento” (2008:13). However, Southern Italians are “unrecognised post-colonial” because the Italian national discourse has tended to narrate Italy’s unification as a tale of success for all. As post-colonials, Southerners have been forced to cross the border within Italy, Europe, and the world to look for better living conditions, as the Italian state’s policies were often not designed to sustain the southern economy

(Daniele & Malanima, 2011:72). Hence, Verdicchio's conceptualisation of Southern Italians as ontologically post-colonial allows me to successfully apply Bhabha's articulation of the 'third space' in my discussion.

At the time of Italy's unification – according to some indicators – the South's economy was stronger than the North's. For instance, economic output was more developed in the South than in the North – except for Sardinia – due to the prevalence of artisanal production. The percentage of people employed in this industry was much lower in Piedmont and Lombardy than in Calabria and Sicily. Consequently, the South was more urbanised – with double the number of cities than the North (Daniele & Malanima 2011:15-18). However, after Italy's unification (1861), the South's economy began to decline due to a downturn in European agriculture, aggravated by the United States' strong agricultural production, which flooded European markets with fine wheat that was produced and transported at little cost. By the 1880s, in the South, wheat and rye production fell off steadily to reach levels that were four times less than the 1860s boom. In 1898, the number of sheep was less than half that of 1862; between 1887 and 1903, the production of sheep-milk cheese was three or four times less than the 1850s and 1860s and ten times less than the 1830s. In 1899, olive oil production plummeted to an all-century low (Petruszewicz, 1997:22).

Moreover, the introduction of protective tariffs after 1878, to aid Italy's fledgling manufacturing industry, angered many European countries, which retaliated by restricting imports from Italy, especially wine and citrus, largely produced in Sicily (Smith, 1968:473-4). On the island, the sulfur industry declined too, as prices plummeted after 1875 due to the United States' massive, low-cost export of this mineral. In 1893, Sicilian Prime Minister Francesco Crispi bloodily repressed the socialism-inspired political movement of the *fasci siciliani* that had given Sicilian rural masses the hope to ameliorate their lot (Smith, 1968:475-486).

As Anita Virga notices, although Capuana strongly believed in Italy's unification and backed the moderate liberalism of its ruling class, he had reservations on how the unification process was carried out. Capuana lamented both the island's subaltern position *vis-à-vis*

the North of Italy and the consequent racialisation of its people (2017:28). Moreover, in *La Sicilia nei canti popolari e nella novellistica contemporanea* (1894), Capuana denounces both the loss of a Sicilian culture and the inability of the new state to fill that void, “si vedeva l’opera livellatrice dei tempi nuovi; l’opera però che ha distrutto e scancellato e non ha ancora creato niente da sostituire” (1972:144).

Due to Sicily’s position within the Italian State, Capuana, although “[deploring] the departure of many of his fellows” (Pitt, 1986:22), considers emigration both as an unavoidable and positive phenomenon for many Sicilians. Emigration is seen as “una palestra necessaria per formare i giovani italiani, stadio chiave in un’immaginaria traiettoria di maturazione, la cui fase finale è quella del ritorno per contribuire all’economia locale [...]e ricongiungere le famiglie” (Fiore, 2008:267).

Emigration had its human cost and Capuana does not hide this fact. Accordingly, he reports the breaking up of a Ràbbato family, a repatriate’s denouncement of oppressive work conditions in the US, and the presence of the ‘Black Hand’ in the Italian-American community. However, the novel focuses more on young Sicilians’ success stories, thereby resisting and debunking the national discourse which centered on their shortcomings. The writer describes Italian emigration as a tale of success, espousing Francesco Nitti’s political-economic theory that emigration would eventually liberate southern rural masses from their economic and political oppression (1987:207).

Unlike Verga, who denies “Ntoni la piena attuazione del riscatto sociale [...] lasciandolo [...] solo con il suo desiderio moderno di errare lontano dal mondo arcaico, Capuana permette ai suoi personaggi di lanciarsi in questa più grande avventura transoceanica” (Fiore, 2008:268). To better narrate this transoceanic adventure, Capuana makes magistral use of imagery: from the image of migrant swallows – always returning home to bring luck to the Lamannas – to that of the Sicilian fruit-sellers shouting the goodness of their merchandise in downtown New York (Pitt, 1986:23). Images are very significant in the novel, as America’s lure was constructed precisely on their power of persuasion that satisfied the different emotional and psychological needs of southern rural masses (Serra, 2009:17).

Capuana's novel is groundbreaking precisely because it portrays both the psychological manipulations and pressures affecting poor Sicilians and the psychological changes that slowly create a new Sicilian identity on both sides of the ocean. After all, critics agree that Capuana's most personal and original contribution to *verismo* is his profound psychological realism and his mastery in probing and analysing the intricate reality of the human psyche (Davies, 1979:4). Philosophically and aesthetically, he embraces *verismo*, becomes one of its most prominent writers, and like Verga, his aesthetic choice brings him to study and analyse the life of the members of Sicily's most impoverished classes. His *verismo* was intertwined with Hegel's teleological vision and understanding of history (Davies, 1979:6), which would explain his stand on emigration as a necessary experience "per fare gli italiani" (Fiore, 2008:267).

The novel begins with a description of Ràbbato's daily life through the vicissitudes of the Lamannas, the protagonist family. The family members – living together under the same roof – include the grandfather, Santi Lamanna; one of his daughters-in-law, Maricchia, and her three sons, Stefano, Santi, and Menu. Central to the Lamanna family is the house, which has grown with the family from "una sola stanza al piano superiore, con le mura imbiancate a calce e il tetto a travi" to "Il pianterreno [...] [che] aveva la stalla per le due mule da una parte, e una stanza dall'altra che serviva da riposto di arnesi agricoli; e anche da cantina e da dispensa, perché conteneva una botte e un recipiente di terracotta, giarra, per serbarvi l'olio" (Capuana, 1912:17-18). Every spring, the swallows arrive at the Lamannas' house's roof, filling their hearts with joy, and Grandfather Santi attributes both the family's growth, two sons and two daughters – and his improved wealth precisely to the arrival of the swallows.

As migratory birds leave Italy for Africa at the inception of winter and return in the spring, the swallows function as a foreshadowing presence in a novel, centered on Italian emigration. Just like the swallows, Italian emigrants tended to repatriate and even follow a migratory pattern of coming and going from the Americas, which earned them the epithet of "birds of passage" (Caroli, 1973:v). In Ràbbato, the homecoming of the emigrants, nicknamed '*americani*' by the locals, always stirs up curiosity, skepticism, and envy, and it is

not different for Coda-pelata's return. The village people gather around him to listen to his fabulous stories about America. Menu, still a boy of seven and by far the youngest of the Lamannas, is among these people. Enchanted by Coda-pelata's tales of riches he reports to his Grandfather Santi, "Nonno, sapete chi è tornato dall'America? Coda-pelata" (1912:24). His grandfather – who does not know where America is – remains perplexed by his grandson's astonishment, as he continues to tell him about Coda-pelata: "Se lo vedeste, nonno! Coda-pelata non si riconosce. Cacciotto, abito nuovo, cravatta con grossa spilla d'oro, dita piene di anelli, e scarpe di pelle lustra; sembra un galantuomo. Ha portato molti quattrini" (24).

Grandfather Santi's confusion becomes skepticism, as he asks, "Chi glieli ha dati?" Menu's answer is disarming: "Non so. Dice che in America si guadagnano quattrini a palate; non ne ha soltanto chi non ne vuole" (24). America had the power to transform Coda-pelata beyond recognition. He left as a barber: "Tu sei dei Lamanna! Ti ho tagliato i capelli due anni addietro" (25), he asks a stunned Menu – and came back looking like *un galantuomo*. This impressive transformation was possible because of American society's more pronounced class mobility, allowing Coda-pelata to acquire substantial wealth.

Although the search for a job was for many the main reason to leave, emigration also held a very important symbolic value, that of liberation from material needs and economic and social exploitation (Serra, 2009:12). America had come to be portrayed as *la terra della cuccagna*, the land of fortune and abundance. America was viewed as possessing wealth that was readily available to those who were willing to work for it. Above all, in the emigrants' minds and imagination, America was the land of hope and the future: "What is it that saves the man and keeps him from being ground under the hard power of necessity? The New World! Previously there was not escape; but now there is", wrote the pick-and-shovel poet Pascal D'Angelo (17). Santi's mind falls victim to this lure: "Non provava invidia, ma una specie di fascino; sarebbe stato giornate e nottate intere a sentirlo parlare di quei paesi dove bastava stendere il braccio per afferrare manate di quattrini" (Capuana, 1912:40).

The power of persuasion created by these images was keenly exploited by the *emigrazionisti*, men who were financially invested in the business of transporting emigrants to the other side of the ocean (Serra, 2009:16). Coda-pelata and his father are lucratively involved in this business, lending money to the immigrants who are forced to mortgage their properties, and Stefano is very aware of this: “Se *Coda-pelata* si figura di dover ingoiarsi fondo e casa!... Col primo danaro che guadagneremo dobbiamo buttargli in viso i suoi soldi. Avrebbe dovuto comportarsi meglio; dire: Ecco, vi anticipo quel che vi occorre: me lo restituirete là, appena potrete” (Capuana, 1912:73). Usury was one of the many forms of oppression emigrants had to face before arriving at their destination.

Menu's enthusiasm about America's riches is met by his grandfather's skepticism: “E tu gli credi? Allora tutti andrebbero alla Merica per riempirsi le tasche e tornare ricchi a casa” (24-25). Grandfather Santi keeps shaking his head in disbelief: “E gli altri pazzi, che sono partiti per la Merica, perché non sono tornati assieme a lui?” (25). As his grandson points to the geographical vastness of America, thus underlining the impossibility of any physical closeness among the Ràbbato emigrants, Grandfather Santi continues his attacks on Coda-pelata's story: “Chi li ha visti i suoi quattrini?” (26). His grandson then gives him empirical proof: “Spende e spande. Ha portato un orologio d'oro a suo padre, che lo va mostrando a tutti. A un poveretto ha dato due lire in elemosina, e quello credeva che fossero false e non le voleva. Tutti ridevano, nonno” (26-27). When his grandfather argues that the money is surely fake, he asserts, “Buonissime. Gliel'ha scambiate don Franco il droghiere. Allora il poveretto gli disse: ‘Vengo in quei paesi anche io, a chieder l'elemosina colà, se danno due lire invece di un soldo’” (27). However, Coda-pelata reproaches him, “Vi arresterebbero; *colà* non si può mendicare: si lavora e si guadagna” (27, emphasis mine).

In the above passage, two elements are very important to my argument and serve as leitmotifs in the novel. The first element is Grandfather Santi's attitude *vis-à-vis* the reality of America's abundance of work and wealth, so incredibly different from his experience of life in Ràbbato. In his skepticism, he demands tangible proof of Coda-pelata's wealth: “Chi li ha visti i quattrini?” (26). The

other element is encapsulated in the statement “Colà...si lavora e si guadagna” (27), which creates a great contrast with Ràbbato’s social reality, as described by Stefano’s words: “E intanto chi non lavora mangia e chi lavora muore di fame!” (32).

From the very beginning, the novel creates a tension between the reality of *(co)là* – America – and that of *qui* – Ràbbato. Although America is described as the land of abundance, wealth is guaranteed only to those who are willing to work. Unlike in Ràbbato – or Sicily in general – wealth is correlated to work, which means that Codapelata was able to succeed because of his work ethic. Southerners’ ability to improve their lot – when given the opportunity to do so – is here brought to the fore, thus refuting the construction of the South as the land of “sloth and macaroni”, as reported by the statesman Luigi Carlo Farini (Moe, 2002:175).

Consequently, the novel opposes the theories and writings of many criminal anthropologists and *meridionalisti* who voiced their fears and concerns regarding Southerners’ emigration to foreign countries in large numbers. Many of them worried about Italians making a bad impression abroad and what reputation this would bring to the nation. Soon, Southerners’ wretchedness and consequent emigration, often described as a plague and a contagious illness, became an embarrassment to the country (Wong, 2006:127).

For instance, Giustino Fortunato wrote: “Se oltre l’Oceano, i nostri conterranei non sono abbastanza amati, gli è che anche laggiù essi soggiacciono agli stessi mali che soffrono in patria, poi che uno è sempre il ‘problema meridionale’ d’Italia – frutto amaro della miseria e della degenerazione – così negli Stati Uniti come tra noi” (1948:84). In his *In Calabria* (1898), Cesare Lombroso writes, “Per quanto vergognosa è certo però che l’emigrazione fu un balsamo per codeste ruinate provincie; cosicché, ora, i paesi più ricchi, più civili, più allegri e meno sfiduciati sono quelli in cui c’è la massima emigrazione” (Teti, 1993:275). Clearly, for Lombroso, communities move into a higher state of civilisation, wealth, happiness, and hopefulness as its inhabitants are increasingly willing to emigrate; the more emigrants there are, the more civilised, hopeful, happy, and rich southern communities will be.

To defeat the racial prejudices in vogue at that time, Capuana keeps the tension between the two poles across the Atlantic Ocean: *là* and *qui*. After casting the 'American spell' on Stefano and Santi, who decide to follow him to New York against their grandfather's wishes, Coda-pelata pays a visit to Grandfather Santi to convince him to let them go: "Io per esempio, appena arrivato, mi son messo per giovane da un barbiere napoletano. Avevo la mano lesta, leggera; e da quelle parti tutti hanno fretta, e non vogliono star sotto il rasoio più di cinque minuti" (Capuana, 1912:41). As the clients appreciate his skills, Coda-pelata's business base grows: "E tutti, dopo aver provato, volevano esser rasi da me, dal siciliano. Allora, da rabbatano scaltro, il giorno che un cliente [...] dice: 'Perché non aprite un salone voi?' Dico io: 'E i quattrini chi me li dà?'" (42). To Coda-pelata's surprise, his client presents him with a business proposition: "*Qui* un galantuomo avrebbe mai avuta la tentazione di prestarmi cinque soldi? E quello lì, senza pensarci su due volte: 'Ecco trecento dollari!' Quanti sono trecento dollari? Una miseria! Mille e ottocento lire...la mia fortuna era fatta!" (42, emphasis mine). The dialectical tension between *qui* and *là* continues, creating the image of a land (*là*) that embraces and supports business spirit and enterprise as well as upward class-mobility, almost absent in Sicily at that time (*qui*). *Là*, Sicilians have benefitted from America's business climate and have been able to reach an affluence never experienced in their own land. *Là*, a rich man is willing to invest in a Sicilian and his ability, knowing that both would profit. *Là*'s spirit is then contrasted with the meager and stingy spirit of the *qui* of *galantuomini*¹, lacking any interest in developing the island's local economy by financially assisting and sustaining lower-class individuals' business initiatives.

Napoleone Colajanni, in his book *Latini e Anglo-Sassoni (razze inferiori e razze superiori)* (1906), records the financial successes of Italian emigrants. In the chapter "Gli italiani delle colonie" (389-409), Colajanni aims to debunk the race discourse that haunted and taunted Southerners, even as they were emigrating to the Americas. To that

¹ Sicily's social class of notables. Barone defines the *galantuomini* as, "Gabellotti ed usurpatori di demani, avvocati, farmacisti e notai, parvenus del commercio e appaltatori, maestri e impiegati avventizi della burocrazia periferica formavano il corposo segmento intermedio politico da cui dipendevano il controllo delle risorse e i canali della mobilità sociale" (1987:280-1).

end, he reports that the 200,000 Italians living in New York alone owned 10,000 shops to the value of 7 million dollars and 4,000 houses to the value of 20 million dollars. They had 15 million dollars saved in different banks and credit unions and owned more than 10 million dollars in personal goods in the richest parts of the city. He also noted that 636 Italians were registered in the list of house owners in the Borough of Manhattan, which meant that each had a personal worth of about 300 dollars (Teti, 1993:281).

Colajanni's chapter's title, "Gli italiani delle colonie", is highly significant for my discussion, and the word "colonia" needs some contextualisation. The Italian dictionary by Giacomo Devoto and Giancarlo Oli gives the following definition of the word "colonia": "Nel mondo antico e medioevale, comunità costruita per l'occupazione e lo sfruttamento di un territorio oltremare, generalmente fornita di una più o meno evidente autonomia rispetto al luogo di origine" (1971). After Italy's colonial failures, Italian politicians, embarrassed by their country's weak performance in Ethiopia, came to question why Italy – with some six million Italians living abroad – did not have the largest colonies (Wong, 2006:119). Consequently, many politicians, like Nitti, urged the government to keep close ties with the emigrants who, through sharing of the same culture and language, would create Italian cultural colonies abroad. As the economist and senator Girolamo Boccardo contended, "Se per colonie s'intende, non il possesso nè il dominio di straniere terre, ma solo lo stanziamento di numerose schiere di concittadini in lontane contrade, l'Italia già ne vanta parecchie sulla Plata, nel Perù, nella Bolivia, al Brasile, ed altrove" (1874:646). Thus, emigration was thought to be an effective tool of non-military colonisation, through which Italy could extend its cultural and political influence beyond its national borders (Wong, 2006:139). To this end, the Italian government, aided by its consulates, defended and directed the study of the Italian national language abroad. This effort was a means to strengthen solidarity among immigrants as well as to create a national consciousness among Italians who were living overseas (Wong, 2006:121).

Within this conceptualisation of Italian emigration as a form of cultural colonisation, Coda-pelata's description of the abundance and

availability of American land is very telling: “E la campagna? Si va, si va con le ferrovie, e non si vede altro che praterie, qualche casa colonica, e praterie che attendono le braccia per coltivarle... Mandrie di buoi, centinaia, migliaia di buoi, mandrie di cavalli, centinaia, migliaia di cavalli che pasturano in libertà.” Coda-pelata continues, “Vi dicono: ‘*Volete dei terreni? Prendeteli*; li pagherete poi; intanto coltivate! Dissodarli costa fatica. Sicuro! In quattro e quattr’otto si rizza una casa, di legno; c’è sempre tempo a fabbricarla in muratura... Ma il padrone siete voi” (Capuana, 1912:45, emphasis mine). The image of America’s land waiting to be taken and raped evokes sixteenth-century European colonial discourse that represented the continent as a naked woman seductively half-lying on a hammock, waiting for Amerigo Vespucci’s coming (Gallagher, 1997). This erotic image of America, which persisted well into the nineteenth century “as the first contact of European Self and American Other is indicative that America was produced for Europe as a passive vulnerable female waiting for her lover/conqueror” (Gallagher, 1997). Coda-pelata’s words create the same image of conquer for the diasporic Italians.

By ‘diasporic Italians’, I mean the dissemination of Italians into the world to create what Pnina Werbner describes as “a permanent condition of ethnic and communal living” (Baldassar & Gabaccia, 2010:5). These communities came together, transcending regionalism and the North-South divide and created a new Italian-American identity. This was no small feat taking into consideration that for centuries Italians lived very separate lives, partially due to Italy’s history, landscape, and its endemic lack of roads. Despite undeniable discrimination and hardships, Italian communities in the Americas eventually thrived, as demonstrated by Colajanni’s data. In these communities – or colonies – Italians learned to translate their culture into an American context, thus negotiating the meaning and limits of their own Italian-ness in what Verdicchio defines as “continuous identity flux” (1997:98).

Capuana gives a colourful description of the identity flux of the Sicilians living in New York’s Little Italy. As Santi, Coda-pelata, Zi’ Carta, Menu, and Don Pietro Ruffino, the tailor, are trying to reach a *trattoria* to celebrate Menu’s new job at the bank, Don Pietro Ruffino

guides them through Little Italy's streets. With his words, Little Italy becomes the perfect image of Bhabha's 'third space': "Si avviarono per via Mulberry. 'Come si vede che qui siamo nella 'piccola Italia!'" 'Guardate', disse il sarto con una mossa sprezzante, additando tutti quei panni stesi alle finestre e alle terrazze, 'Non par di esser più a Nova York'". The tailor continues in his explication of Little Italy: "Un palermitano!... Un messinese!... Due della provincia di Catania! Li riconosceva alla parlata. 'Trattoria Sicilia!' egli lesse nella tabella" (Capuana, 1912:298). In Little Italy, Ràbbato people live together with people from other parts of Sicily, probably for the very first time in their lives. In this 'third space', they can merge their many and different provincial realities into one Sicily – hence, the name of the *trattoria*, 'Sicilia', which includes all of them. This last scene at the "Trattoria Sicilia" perfectly captures Vito Teti's observation that only in the Americas, "gli emigranti provenienti [...] dalle 'mille Italie' avrebbero lentamente inventato e costruito una loro nuova identità di italo-americani, avrebbero cominciato a sentirsi 'uniti', nonostante le 'separazioni' e le 'divisioni' antiche che riproducevano e le nuove che si creavano nel Nuovo Mondo" (Teti, 1993:55).

At the same time, these emigrants learn to perform in accordance with their American identity, which – as the hegemonic one – is the one they must all come to terms with. Accordingly, the tailor feels disgusted by the Italians' custom of hanging their clothes on their windows and terraces to dry. Clearly, he perceives this custom as one that constrains their community to a liminal space, not being fully able to enjoy their American status: "Non par di essere a Nova York" (Capuana, 1912:298). Moreover, the tailor's words display what W.E.B. Du Bois defined as "double consciousness," described as "a peculiar sensation, [...] a sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in an amused contempt and pity" (1994:2). By passing a negative comment on a traditional Italian practice, the tailor demonstrates his assumption of the American "eyes" and "tape" by which he holds his own compatriots in contempt and pity.

The people of Ràbbato not only acquire a Sicilian awareness, but they also acquire a national consciousness, as Zi' Carta's personal story testifies: "Appena arrivato a New York, aveva scelto il suo

mestiere: si era messo a rivendere aranci e limoni per le vie, urlandoli proprio alla rabbatana, fermandosi in certi punti dove lo sbirro, come egli diceva parlando dei policeman, non gli avrebbe dato fastidio” (Capuana, 1912:225-6). His acting “alla rabbatana” made him incomprehensible but also likeable to the local people, “abbandonandosi ad allegre variazioni di banditore che, appunto perché non erano capite, facevano smascellare dalle risa i ragazzi, gli operai e le bambinaie dei quali era formata la sua clientela” (226). Soon Zi’ Carta’s business grows, “comprai una carrettina usata, e la ritinsi da me con quattro soldi di terra rossa. Vi mettevo su la cesta; si trattava di spingerla davanti [...]. Potevo spendere per l’affitto di una bottega? La mia bottega era la carrettina; la portavo dove volevo” (226). In the streets of New York, Zi’ Carta shouts, “Aranci! Aranci di Palermo! [...] E di che sono? D’oro? E che mangiate? Miele?” (228). His efforts and frugality pay off: “Pane e cacio, pane e cipolla e acqua fresca; due volte la settimana un bel piatto di maccheroni, che cucinavo da me. E così potei metter su bottega [...] Me la imbiancai con queste mani, la ripulii; in alto i ritratti del nostro re e della nostra regina” (228). Zi’ Carta’s financial exploits are tangible. His business acumen and initiative, as well as his work ethic, allow him to expand his wealth and economic enterprise. As Zi’ Carta sells oranges from Sicily and shouts in a Sicilian dialect, he inserts himself into New York’s street vendor market in a unique way, thus creating a new cultural practice.

Zi’ Carta’s hybrid living ultimately gives him a new agency, allowing him, as Nitti hypothesised, to debunk the racial prejudices held against his people. Furthermore, in his new, cleaned and repainted little shop, he hangs up “i ritratti del nostro re e della nostra regina” (228). The use of the possessive adjective “nostro” denotes a desire, will and awareness of being part of the nation. The Sicilian-ness of Zi’ Carta’s oranges and shouting, as well as the Italian-ness of the sovereigns’ portraits, criss-cross Little Italy’s American urban landscape. Pellegrino D’Acierno stresses the importance for emigrants to consent to being Italian, even while constructing their new American identity (1999:xxxiii). When back in Ràbbato, Menu hears Dr. Liardo calling him *americano*, he proudly declares, “Voglio

essere siciliano, italiano, non americano bastardo!” (Capuana, 1912:346).

Little Italy's Italians are not the only ones to acquire a hybrid identity and style of living, though. As Teti points out, emigration ultimately changed also those who remained behind – their living spaces, and their cultural practices (2011:22). The stress and sorrow of waiting for news and letters from those who left is the first change encountered in any village experiencing emigration (11). After three long months, Menu brings home Stefano's and Santi's first letter, causing immense joy and excitement in the house. However, the letter also creates a sense of apprehension in his grandfather, who anxiously asks him, “Sentiamo [...] Saprai leggerla” (Capuana, 1912:112). Grandfather Santi's anxiety is rooted in his realisation that the communication between the two separated parts of his family is in the hands of his eight-year old grandson, now the only literate member of the family. This first letter is followed by a year of silence, during which the grieving Maricchia, not fully understanding America's geographical immensity, goes to the house of any returned *americano*, asking the same question: “Avete veduto i miei figli?” (120).

As Teti argues, in time the sense of nostalgia for the wholeness of fractured families is transformed from a paralysing and delirious obsession to hopes, memories, and narration that create a new identity (Teti, 2011:17). Writing about identity, Hall defines identity as “not an essence, but a *positioning*” (2011:226), meaning that our identity is constantly produced by how we relate to our own personal histories. Maricchia's and Grandfather Santi's positioning, in relation to emigration, changes as Santi is able to send money home, which is used to pay off both the debt for his and Stefano's trip to New York, and to buy land. Thus, when Menu, after graduating from fifth grade, decides to join his older brothers, Maricchia and Grandfather Santi accept his plan and let him depart with another Ràbbato family.

As Grandfather Santi struggles to come to terms with his family's new reality of separation, he cannot help noticing how the *americani* in Ràbbato are so different from the peasants that they were before emigrating. When a new group of *americani* return, Grandfather Santi, “sentiva una crescente compiacenza di vederli quasi trasformati da quei rozzi contadini che erano andati via. Quasi tutti avevano

nell'aspetto un che di spigliato, di fiero, per l'orgoglio di esser tornati a Ràbbato con molti quattrini guadagnati lavorando” (Capuana, 1912:183). Their manners are changed too: “Vestivano pulitamente, parlavano più spediti del solito – avevano tante cose da dire! – e badavano ai loro interessi con una certa furberia, da gente punto disposta a farsi mettere in mezzo” (Capuana, 1912:183-4). Here again, the great transformation happens through better-paid jobs, as Dr. Liardo comments to Grandfather Santi, “Se i contadini fossero pagati meglio, non andrebbero via” (212). With more financial stability and a new-found awareness of their worth, the *americani* perform their activities with an assertiveness that ensures their voices are heard, even in places that traditionally had kept them silent. As Giuseppe Barone reports, the *americani*'s new mentality and agency, highly influenced by the American ‘open society’, which was based on social and economic upward-mobility and the myth of the ‘self-made man’ – generated a new dynamism and willingness to venture into private businesses that often boosted the local economy through innovation (1987:213).

The peasants' transformation works on two distinct levels. On the first level, it has a pedagogical significance: the creation of Italian citizens – like in Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio* and Edmondo De Amicis's *Cuore* (Virga, 2017:46). On the second level, it becomes a way to resist Sicilians' racialisation, prevalent at the time. For instance, Dr. Liardo's words, “La miseria ci rende sporchi; è il nostro maggior difetto [...] Sapete come ci chiamano in America? Sporchi italiani! E specialmente per noi siciliani, pei calabresi e per gli abruzzesi hanno proprio ragione. Là però i nostri contadini si trasformano” (Capuana, 1912:211), seem to be directed toward Giuseppe Sergi's statement, that of all the emigrants to America “gli italiani [...] vivono sudiciamente e ammassati in fetidi quartieri della città senza tentare uno sforzo per sollevarsi dalla miseria” (Colajanni, 1906:387). Even though Sergi writes about “gli Italiani”, Southern Italians are his clear referent, as they migrated to America *en masse* (Teti, 1993:273-274). Dr. Liardo's words are premised on Colajanni's essay, *Per la razza maledetta: osservazioni*, where he links Southerners' social problems to poverty and not to race, as criminal anthropologists asserted (1898:10).

With the debunking of the race discourse, comes also Capuana's criticism of Sicilian society's status quo through Dr. Liardo's words: "Chi sta in disagio ora sono i galantuomini che continuano a fare i fannulloni. Tra dieci anni i veri galantuomini saranno gli 'americani'" (Capuana, 1912:211). The doctor's words indicate not only "un processo di borghesizzazione dei subalterni", as Virga observed (2017:46), but also a social decadence of the hegemonic class, the *galantuomini*. Dr. Liardo's words auspicate the creation of a new social status quo in Sicily, where 'i galantuomini fannulloni' would be replaced by 'gli americani', a hybrid people, inhabiting Ràbbato's 'third space'.

As the local economy improves, Ràbbato's urban plan undergoes deep transformations, and Dr. Liardo points them out to Grandfather Santi: "A poco a poco il paese si trasforma. Qui c'erano due sudicie casupole terrane, ricordate? E vi sorge una casetta a due piani, con balconi. Non vogliono saperne di finestre gli 'americani'. Guardate: là, in quell'altra casa, le hanno già mutate in balconi: è una mania" (Capuana, 1912:208). As well as having private houses, Ràbbato is improved and enhanced by the construction of shops: "Qui Bacareddu mette su un piccolo caffè [...]. Là, la moglie e la figlia di Centonze hanno aperto una bella merceria" (213-14). American money is transforming Ràbbato and its economy. The nature of this new business points to an altered social reality. One is a café that, as a recreational place, underlines that Ràbbato people now have a little more money and time to spend in leisurely pastimes. The other is a fabric shop selling merchandise from America: "Il marito della Centonze va e viene dall'America e rifornisce ogni volta il negozio. Don Franco ha voglia d'insinuare che si tratta di vecchi fondi di bottega. E quand'anche? Qui sono bella novità e fanno comodo a tutti" (214). Centonze's trade further evidences the criss-crossing between the two continents and thus the constant flux of hybrid living on both sides of the Atlantic.

After commenting on the village's and the church's ameliorations, the Ràbbato pastor adds, "La carità dei fedeli supplisce alla tirchieria del Governo. I quattrini vengono da lontano, dall'America. Ma ne occorrono ancora, la spesa è grande" (210). The pastor's words highlight that Ràbbato's economy has been improving thanks to the

remittance money coming from the Americas and the money that the *americani* have invested locally. To those two sources, we must add a third one: exports of Sicilian foods to the Americas, which increased dramatically to satisfy the dietary needs of its citizens living there (Barone, 1987:215). These changes contrast with the government's minimal involvement in the economic development of the region. The contrast is even more dramatic and significant when considering that, in those years, southern emigrants' remittances amounted to more than half of Italy's balance of payments. With these extra revenues, the government was able to buy the raw materials necessary to sustain its industrial growth in Italy's northwestern region. The remittances also allowed the government to pay off its public debt – incurred during its disastrous colonial adventures – at an unexpectedly fast rate and to build reserves to stabilise the value of the *lira* in the international financial market (Castronovo, 1996:115).

Capuana's criticism of the Italian government *vis-à-vis* his island economic condition is present also at the very beginning of the novel, where the author harshly criticises the new taxes imposed on the South to pay off Italy's debt incurred in the independence wars (Mangione & Morreale, 1993:73), "Nonno Lamanna si rassegnava alla volontà di Dio, anche per le nuove tasse che era costretto a pagare [...]. Le tasse le mettono i ministri, il sindaco e consiglieri, per comodo loro, e le paga soltanto la povera gente" (Capuana, 1912:22). However, Capuana's condemnation of the Italian government's policies toward his island is always counterbalanced by his patriotic will of creating Italian and bourgeois citizens out of Sicilian peasants (Virga, 2017:46), and Menu's words, "Voglio essere siciliano, italiano" (1912:113) testify to that. However, Menu comes to that realisation after his American experience; thus, emigration might be read as part and parcel of Sicilians' national awareness and identity, as anticipated by some intellectuals like Nitti and confirmed by Teresa Fiore's words, as reported in the present article.

Conclusion

Capuana's work is groundbreaking as it exposes and resists the race discourse of his time, which defined Italian Southerners as inferior

and doomed to fail. Ràbbato emigrants, living and working in New York, are forced to inhabit the 'third space', where a new hybrid identity is formed, on the premise of a new mentality inspired by American social mobility and the myth of the 'self-made man'. This new mentality and agency – as well as money earned by the *americani* – becomes the engine propelling Sicilian emigrants to build wealthy communities on both sides of the Atlantic. In the novel, the protagonists' stories are propelled by a tension between *qui* – Sicily – and *là* – America. *Qui* is constructed as a land of poverty, oppression and abuse by the hands of "i galantuomini [...] fannulloni" (211) and "[la] tirchieria del Governo" (210) that imposed taxes "[che] paga soltanto la povera gente!" (22). In contrast, *là* is constructed as the land of opportunity for those who are willing to work hard, like Santi and Menu, whose only aspiration remains that of returning to Sicily as newly-formed Italian citizens.

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