

**Between Italy and Argentina:
Circular Accents in Contemporary Migration Literature**

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Romance Languages and Literatures: Italian)
in the University of Michigan
2016

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Per Guido,
my mom, e mio padre

Acknowledgements

First of all, I want to thank all of the friends, colleagues, and mentors who have helped me laugh, learn, and grow as a teacher and a scholar. In particular, I want to acknowledge everyone in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures and everyone I have worked with at the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, the Sweetland Center for Writing, the Department of English, and the Department of Classical Studies. Thank you Grandma, Peggy, Guido, Jim, and Vincenzo for attending my oral defense.

The initial idea for this dissertation came out of a final paper I wrote in Alejandro Herrero-Olaizola's class *Globalización, Consumo y Producción Cultural en América Latina*. Muchísimas gracias to Matías Beverinotti for introducing me to Antonio Dal Masetto's writing during that semester. Then a trip to Buenos Aires in 2012 gave me the chance to access numerous primary and secondary texts, put me in contact with local writers and scholars, and helped me experience firsthand the enormous influence Italian culture has had on Argentina's capital city. The staff at the Istituto Italiano di Cultura di Buenos Aires, the Asociación Dante Alighieri, the Centro de Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos (CEMLA), and the Biblioteca Nacional were friendly and welcoming. A particular thank you to Adriana Mancini, Professor at the University of Buenos Aires, who introduced me to the many small libraries of the University of Buenos Aires' Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, gave me a list of bookstores where I could find primary

texts, and gave me access to her own personal library. While in Argentina, I also interviewed Italian-Argentine authors Roberto Raschella and the late Antonio Dal Masetto, as well as conducted an e-mail interview with Mempo Giardinelli. Hearing about their lives and their reasons for writing on Italian immigration to Argentina and return visits to Italy gave me additional insight into their works and to the field of Italian-Argentine migration literature in Argentina.

On a similar trip to Italy in 2013, I was able to speak with Dr. Ilaria Magnani about Antonio Dal Masetto's writing, meet with Dr. Martino Marazzi and look at many of the books and articles in his office, and visit the Centro Internazionale Letterature Migranti at the University of Udine, where I had a meeting with the center's founder, Dr. Silvana Serafin, and was gifted copies of many of the center's publications. I also had a lovely day at Orta San Giulio, where writer Laura Pariani invited me into her home, and where she and her partner Nicola Fantini spoke of their visits to Argentina and of the time they hosted their friend Antonio Dal Masetto in Italy.

I have had a number of mentors outside of the University of Michigan. Foremost among them is my Grandma, Professor Emeritus Pat Belanoff, who read draft chapters and articles and always had thoughtful questions that helped me clarify a point or push my argument further. Professor Ana Cara has been a friend and mentor since she helped me write my honors thesis at Oberlin College, and I can always count on her to answer a question or look over my writing. Over the past two years, Assistant Professor Stiliana Milkova has graciously read a draft article and invited me to give a guest lecture about Italo-Argentine Clementina Sandra Ammendola's writing for her class at Oberlin College. Thank you Grandma, Ana, and Stiliana, for making my writing better and for

always being available to share your own experiences with me. Thank you also to the reviewers and editors at *The Italianist* and *California Italian Studies* who helped me frame my research for a broader audience.

Thank you to my committee, who have helped me write this interdisciplinary dissertation on a little-studied topic. Paulina, our conversations as well as the many sources, and your own research, that you shared with me helped me better articulate the history of concepts of race and ethnicity and how Italian immigrants and my primary texts add to this ongoing discourse in Argentina. Vincenzo, your quick feedback and our conversations helped me consider my primary texts from new viewpoints and to spend more time reflecting on concepts like citizenship, community, and space. Kate, you suggested useful secondary texts and pushed me to add another layer of analysis, which made my argument more nuanced and significant. Giorgio, you have helped me shape this dissertation from when I first approached you with a vague interest in Italy and Argentina, always ready with concrete advice and supportive of my research decisions. I especially appreciate your focus on the big-picture argument. You have made me a better researcher and a better writer.

Finally, a big thank you to my parents, whose own binational Italian-American lives have shown me how languages and cultures can interact with one another over the years. Thank you for always encouraging me to learn, travel, and pursue my interests. Guido, you have been there for the highs and lows of this dissertation process, and your unwavering support and positive energy fill me with joy every day. As we work to find our own balance between two countries, I'm excited to see where our lives will take us together.

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Abstract

Migration has shaped both Italy and Argentina's histories since the mid-nineteenth century, and current migratory flows are transforming the ethnic, linguistic, and cultural composition of both countries. Contemporary novels are one product of a renewed interest in remembering the history of past migrations in order to better understand the present situation and anticipate what the future holds. Through a binational approach, my dissertation analyzes works of Italian and Argentine literature published from the 1980s to the present that explore how Italian-Argentines have negotiated between multiple languages and cultures for over a century. The critical literature on this production is thin, but what does exist does not provide a means of systematically examining these texts or of drawing connections between novels published in Italy and ones published in Argentina. I introduce the expression "circular accent" to describe the literary technique of creating a circularity between past and present, Italy and Argentina, through accenting these countries' histories. In the same way that a translation serves as both a bridge between languages and marks the differences between languages, a circular accent can delineate the borders between categories while also blurring those very borders. Contemporary authors make use of this technique to reveal their characters' struggles to negotiate multiple languages and cultures and, more broadly, to show the crucial role that migration has played throughout these countries' histories and the impact this has had on discourses of national identity and belonging.

My work establishes contemporary Italian Argentine migration literature as a genre, united by the presence of circular accents, an exploration of the long history of migration between Italy and Argentina, and the prominence of one or more Italian-Argentine characters. In chapter 1, I focus on race and ethnicity at the turn of the twentieth century, in chapter 2 on role of translation in the early to mid-twentieth century, in the third chapter on the function of memory in the aftermath of the Argentine Dirty War, and in the fourth chapter on Italian-Argentine identity from the 1990s to today. By highlighting the hybridity and multiculturalism present in both countries since the nineteenth century, these narratives suggest that categories such as Italian, Argentine, and white, will continue to become more inclusive to account for the inhabitants of these countries. Ultimately, they show that the latest migration by Italian-Argentines and others is just the latest development in a continuously transforming network of global migratory flows.

Introduction

Italian-Argentines: A Binational Approach

On March 13, 2013, many Argentines reacted with joy and pride to the election of the first Argentine pope, Jorge Mario Bergoglio, who would take the name Francis. His Argentine identity was again highlighted the following year, when he chose to renew his Argentine passport rather than relying solely on his Vatican citizenship.¹ A more limited group also reacted to Pope Francis' election: the community of Argentines whose ancestors, like the pope's, emigrated from the Piedmont region in Northern Italy.² Furthermore, Pope Francis' distant relatives from his father's hometown of Portacomaro, and elsewhere in Northwestern Italy, expressed their excitement at having a familial connection to the new pope.³ Pope Francis' election highlights the longstanding and still existing deep connection between these two countries.

¹ For articles on this event see: "En el Vaticano, el papa Francisco tramitó el pasaporte y el DNI argentino" in *La Nación*, published on February 17, 2014 (<http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1664875-en-el-vaticano-el-papa-francisco-tramito-el-pasaporte-y-el-dni-argentino>) and "Un nuovo passaporto argentino per Papa Francesco" in *Rai News* on February 18, 2014 (<http://www.rainews.it/dl/rainews/articoli/ContentItem-d63bf1cb-121b-4d0c-bbe0-2ef692523e3f.html>).

² For instance, the president of the Asociación Familia Piamontesa said: "Recibimos la noticia con gran alegría y orgullo piamontés" in the newspaper article "El Papa argentino les gusta a los italianos de aquí y de la península" in the Argentine newspaper *Diario popular*, published on May 6, 2013 (<http://www.diariopopular.com.ar/notas/155587-el-papa-argentino-les-gusta-los-italianos-aqui-y-la-peninsula>).

³ For an interview with a distant relative of the pope, see: <http://video.repubblica.it/dossier/il-nuovo-papa/il-parente--quando-il-papa-e-venuto-a-trovarci-ha-voluto-una-zolla-di-terra/122271/120756>.

Particularly in Italy, journalists often reference the Pope's Italian heritage, which is obviously of interest to an Italian readership. In a recent article he is described as: "The pope who came from the 'end of the world,' but with solid Piedmontese roots."⁴ Phrases like this one juxtapose the novelty of his being the first Latin American pope with his Italian blood and familiarity with Italian culture. In contrast, in Argentina, where it is often assumed that all Argentines are descended from immigrants, his Italian connections are less newsworthy.

Articles in both Italy and Argentina also occasionally mention his accent when he speaks Italian. Published in Argentina the day after his election, one article noted that in his first address to the world, he spoke "with an Argentine accent, but in perfect Italian."⁵ An Italian article published several months later observed: "There he is, speaking with his Latin American accent an Italian very similar to that spoken by our emigrants."⁶ Again, phrases like these serve as reminders that Pope Francis is clearly Argentine/Latin American, and yet, with his linguistic accent and family background, perhaps he is not so different from the average Italian.

Discourses surrounding the Pope – in particular this back-and-forth movement between acknowledging his Argentineness and recognizing his Italian influences – more

⁴ All translations are my own. "il papa venuto dalla 'fine del mondo', ma dalle salde radici piemontesi." From the article "Portacomaro: 'Qui siamo quasi tutti parenti del papa, ma non ci hanno invitato' published in *La Repubblica di Torino* on June 20, 2015 (http://torino.repubblica.it/cronaca/2015/06/20/news/portacomaro_si_sente_trascurata_qui_siamo_quasi_tutti_parenti_del_papa_ma_non_ci_hanno_invitato_-117316568/).

⁵ "con acento argentino, pero en perfecto italiano." Elisabetta Piqué, "Francisco, el papa que llegó desde el fin del mundo," *La Nación*, March 14, 2013 (<http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1563033-las-primeras-palabras-de-bergoglio-como-papa>).

⁶ "Eccolo lì a parlare col suo accento latinoamericano un italiano così simile a quello dei nostri emigranti." Rosalba Teodosio, "Il contrasto della coerenza in Papa Francesco." *T-Mag*, July 10, 2013 (<http://www.t-mag.it/2013/10/07/il-contrasto-della-coerenza-in-papa-francesco/>).

broadly reflect how those with connections to both Italy and Argentina occupy a dynamic gray area. Pope Francis is a recent and highly prominent example of someone whose presence challenges the division between categories such as Italian and Argentine, migrant and native. My dissertation examines those instances in which contemporary literature highlights the long history of migration between Italy and Argentina and this ambiguous status of Italian-Argentines. With the term Italian-Argentine I include all those whose lives have been influenced by both countries. Thus, it encompasses not only Italo-Argentines born and raised in Argentina like Pope Francis but also Italians who immigrate to Argentina as adults and individuals, like Italian authors Laura Pariani and Massimo Carlotto, whose lives have been affected by Argentina even though they have never lived there.

Through a critical and historical analysis, my dissertation analyzes works of Italian and Argentine literature published from the 1980s to the present that explore how Italian-Argentines have negotiated between multiple languages and cultures for over a century. The critical literature on this production is thin, but what does exist does not provide a means of systematically examining these texts or of drawing connections between novels published in Italy and ones published in Argentina.

I introduce the expression “circular accent” to describe the literary technique of simultaneously emphasizing the points of connection – the circularity – between Italy and Argentina and maintaining distinctions – the accent – between these countries’ histories. In other words, these authors bridge categories such as past and present, Italian and Argentine, while adding nuance to discourses surrounding migration. Their novels form

part of a larger conversation currently ongoing in both countries concerning national identity and the role of immigrants.

Contemporary Migration Literature in Italy and Argentina

In *Between Italy and Argentina: Circular Accents in Contemporary Migration Literature*, I examine a subset of contemporary migration literature – narratives published from the 1980s to today in which Italian-Argentines and migration between Italy and Argentina play a large role – and argue for a comparative analysis of these works. However, it is important to recognize the different spaces migration literature occupies in these two countries as well as, more specifically, the status of my primary texts within their respective national literatures and in the fields of Italian and Argentine Studies. Migration literature in Italy can also be considered a minor literature, following Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's definition of the genre.⁷ Furthermore, my primary texts published in Italy are on the margins of both Italian major literature and of migration literature. However in Argentina, a country composed primarily of immigrants and their descendants, migration literature *is* Argentine literature and is not at all minor. Italian immigrants, Italian-Argentines, and Argentines with no Italian heritage publish narratives about Italian migration to Argentina in major publishing houses, and these books are distributed widely and win awards designated for works of Argentine literature.

By studying contemporary migration literature in Argentina and Italy, I limit the scope of my analysis temporally and geographically, while keeping it open to narratives of emigration, immigration, return migration, and other types of movement between these

⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

two countries. This differs from scholars of Italian migration literature Graziella Parati and Jennifer Burns' discussions of, respectively, a literature of transmigration and a transnational literature. Parati's term is overly broad to accurately describe the novels I examine, because while "a literature of transmigration [is] able to disregard irreverently the borders between countries, languages, and local literatures," in my primary texts both Italy and Argentina remain central.⁸ Conversely, Burns' term is overly focused on Italy. When discussing the books she suggests could be classified as "transnational (Italian) literature" she acknowledges: "It is important to question [...] to what extent the literature outlined above genuinely transgresses the borders of the nation, given that it is a literature published in Italy and in the Italian language."⁹ Finally, Italian scholar of Argentine literature Ilaria Magnani's term "Letteratura Migratoria Contemporanea" is similar to my "contemporary migration literature," but she uses this term to refer to novels published from 1980 that narrate stories of immigration to Argentina from any country.¹⁰ By taking a binational approach to analyzing contemporary migration literature, I am part of a recent movement within Italian Studies to look at specific immigrant groups rather than at migration literature as a whole. For instance, Simone Brioni's recently published book concentrates on authors in Italy with Somali origins, while Gaoheng Zhang's recent work draws connections between Italy and China.¹¹

⁸ Graziella Parati, *Migration Italy: The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 90.

⁹ Jennifer Burns, *Migrant Imaginaries: Figures in Italian Migration Literature* (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), 206.

¹⁰ Ilaria Magnani, *Tra memoria e finzione: l'immagine dell'immigrazione transoceanica nella narrativa argentina contemporanea* (Reggio Emilia: Diabasis, 2005), 28.

¹¹ Simone Brioni, *The Somali Within: Language, Race and Belonging in Minor Italian Literature* (Oxford: Legenda, 2015). Gaoheng Zhang most recently organized the conference "Italy and China, Europe and East Asia: Centuries of Dialogue" at the University of Toronto (conference website: <https://italychinaconference.wordpress.com>) and has published on Italy and China,

Contemporary migration literature in both countries is the product of recent changes in migration patterns. From approximately 1860 to 1960, Italy and Argentina's histories were shaped by emigration and immigration respectively, as over three million Italians arrived at the port in Buenos Aires in search of the American Dream. Now, both countries are experiencing a new kind of migration. Since the 1980s, Italy has become an immigrant destination country, as millions arrive from Romania, Albania, African countries, and the Middle East. Similarly, Argentina is accepting large numbers of individuals and families from other South American countries, as well as from Asia. By contrast, both Italians and Argentines are emigrating in small but significant numbers in search of work. Some Italo-Argentines are choosing to use their Italian heritage to acquire citizenship and settle in Italy or another member state of the European Union. The current state of migration is transforming the ethnic, linguistic, and cultural composition of both countries, and contemporary novels are one product of this renewed interest in remembering the history of past migrations in order to better understand the present situation and anticipate what the future holds.

In Italy, migration literature first appeared in the 1990s with migrant writers publishing narratives with the assistance of native Italians who corrected their grammar, thus allowing them to be published by established publishing houses. This first wave of migration literature has been replaced by migrant writers publishing their works without correcting their grammar, and these books are becoming increasingly visible within

including "Contemporary Italian Novels on Chinese Immigration to Italy," *California Italian Studies Journal* 4, no. 2 (2014), available at <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/0jr1m8k3>. In addition, recent panel proposals for the 2017 *NeMLA* convention include one organized by Associate Professor Lidia Radi at the University of Richmond on writers in Italy of Albanian origins and another organized by Lecturer Felice Italo Beneduce at Columbia University on Italian-German connections.

Italian literature. Some of these writers have won prestigious Italian literary awards, most notably the poet Gëzim Hajdari, originally from Albania, who won the prestigious Montale Prize in 1997. The Eks&Tra award for migrant writers and poets, first given in 1995, helped launch the careers of a number of writers. In addition, although major Italian publishing houses have often been reluctant to distribute migrant writing, minor publishing houses and online journals are helping to create an audience for these works.¹²

Scholars tend to agree that migration literature in Italy is a minor literature, which Deleuze and Guattari say exhibits three characteristics: “the deterritorialization of the language, the connection of the individual and the political, the collective arrangement of utterance.”¹³ However, authors of Italian-Argentine migration literature in Italy, whether born in Italy or Argentina, often have an Italian passport and thus hold a privileged position with respect to many other migrant writers. Particularly when published by native Italians, such as Laura Pariani and Massimo Carlotto, these works are accepted within the Italian national literature. In addition, writers including Pariani, Sandra Clementina Ammendola, and Vanni Blengino have given talks and published on migration, and thus have been involved in framing discourses about migration between

¹² For a more extended outline of the history and status of migration literature in Italy, see chapter 2 of Graziella Parati’s, *Migration Italy*, “Minor Literature, Minor Italy,” 54-103.

¹³ Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, 18. Graziella Parati chapter “Minor Literature, Minor Italy” discusses how migrant writers deterritorialize language in order to bring together different languages and cultures and theorize a destination culture for migrants and native Italians. Literary scholar Sonia Sabelli also asserts that Italian migrant literature is a minor literature, and that what Deleuze and Guattari write about “being a stranger inside one’s own language [... is] a strategy of resistance that allows the Italian migrant writers to assume control over their own subjectivity and to interfere in the Italian literary tradition,” “Transnational Identities and the Subversion of the Italian Language in Geneviève Makaping, Christiana de Caldas Brito, and Jarmila Očkayová,” *Dialectical Anthropology* 29, no. 3/4 (2005): 443.

Italy and elsewhere, including Argentina.¹⁴ Thus, while my primary texts can certainly be considered migration literature, and fit the characteristics of minor literature that Deleuze and Guattari outline, as a group they are less minor than works of, for instance, Somali or Chinese-Italian literature.

Unlike in Italy, in Argentina it is difficult to distinguish a genre of migration literature because works that fall into this category are included within the national literature.¹⁵ This view of works by and about Italian-Argentines as being works of Argentine literature can already be seen in the titles of early studies of the genre: *La inmigración en la literatura argentina* (1969), *El inmigrante italiano en la novela argentina del 80* (1974), and *Tonos y motivos italianos en la literatura argentina* (1977).¹⁶ Similarly, the authors of my primary texts that are published in Argentina are generally considered more Argentine than Italian, regardless of where they were born. For instance, Antonio Dal Masetto, who immigrated to Argentina from Northern Italy at the age of twelve, is considered an Argentine writer.¹⁷ Moreover, an Argentine scholar's book, *La identidad italiana en la novela argentina a partir de 1980: discurso e inmigración en textos de Antonio Dal Masetto, Mempo Giardinelli y Héctor Tizón*

¹⁴ Vanni Blengino published numerous academic studies of Italian immigrants in Argentine literature, most notably *La Babele nella "pampa": L'emigrante italiano nell'immaginario argentino* (Reggio Emilia: Diabasis, 2005) and the autobiographical novel, *Ommi! L'America: Ricordi d'Argentina nel baule di un emigrante* (Reggio Emilia: Diabasis, 2007). I will return to Pariani and Ammendola in later chapters.

¹⁵ In an interview Vanni Blengino states that in Argentina "non c'è differenza tra letteratura argentina e italo-argentina." Antonia Anania interviews Vanni Blengino and Claudio Tognonato in the article "Italia-Argentina andata e ritorno" for the site *Caffè Europa* (<http://www.caffeeuropa.it/attualita02/139italiani-tognonato.html>).

¹⁶ Alma N. Marani, *Tonos y motivos italianos en la literatura argentina* (La Plata: Universidad Nacional de la Plata, Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación, 1977); Gladys Onega, *La inmigración en la literatura argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 1969); Luciano Rusich, *El inmigrante italiano en la novela argentina del 80* (Madrid: Playo, 1974).

¹⁷ The inside cover of Dal Masetto's *Cita en el Lago Maggiore* (Buenos Aires: El Ateneo, 2011) states that the novel "está llamada a convertirse en un nuevo clásico de la literatura argentina."

(2004), considers these three authors comparable, even though Dal Masetto was born in Italy, Giardinelli has Italian ancestors, and Tizón has no Italian heritage.

Despite the lack of the term migration literature used within Argentina, I follow a number of scholars who distinguish a corpus of books published in Argentina from the 1980s to today that focus on themes of migration. Argentine scholar Adriana Corda and Italian scholar Susanna Regazzoni draw connections between the emigration of intellectuals from Argentina during the 1970s dictatorship, and subsequently published novels that rewrite Argentine history using the figure of the Italian immigrant.¹⁸ In these books, retelling the history of Italians in Argentina helps Argentines look back at the past and better understand their own national identity. Italian scholar Ilaria Magnani also connects this resurgence of interest in narrating Argentina's immigrant past to the economic crisis of 2001 and the immigration of those from other South American countries.¹⁹

Over the past three decades, an ever-increasing number of scholars have published on migration literature concerned with migration between Italy and Argentina. In Italy, these include Silvana Serafin, Ilaria Magnani, and Camilla Cattarulla, who have helped shed light on the influence of Italian immigration on Argentine literature. There is little comparable work being done in Argentina, with the exception of a few studies that generally examine just one novel. All of these publications focus on Argentine literature and do not take into account similar works published in Italian. Moreover, they generally

¹⁸ Adriana Corda, *La identidad italiana en la novela argentina a partir de 1980: discurso e inmigración en textos de Antonio Dal Masetto, Mempo Giardinelli y Héctor Tizón* (San Miguel de Tucumán, Argentina: Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad Nacional de Tucumán, 2004); Susanna Regazzoni, "Italia Argentina una historia compartida: Syria Poletti inmigrante italiana, escritura argentina," *Dimensões* 26 (2011): 60-75.

¹⁹ Ilaria Magnani, *Tra memoria e finzione*, 13-14.

concentrate on how the narratives depict Italian assimilation into Argentine culture and the adoption of an Argentine identity rather than also considering possible continued identification with Italy and an Italian identity. Thus, these scholars follow a mononational and monolingual approach.

The works of Italian literature that I analyze in my dissertation have not been studied as much as the works of Argentine literature have. In fact, the only author who has been examined at any length is Laura Pariani.²⁰ A notable exception to this is an article by Emilia Perassi that focuses on female Italian writers, such as Laura Pariani and Mariangela Sedda, who write about female Italian immigrants to Argentina.²¹ She then compares these writers to Syria Poletti, Antonio Dal Masetto, and other Italian-Argentines who write in Spanish. Perassi is the only scholar I have found who compares Italian and Argentine authors.

My research builds on the efforts of scholars in Italian and Argentine Studies to examine transnational connections between Italy and Argentina in contemporary literature. My dissertation places works by immigrant and native writers in these two countries in dialogue with one another.

Circular Accents

I use the expression “circular accent” to describe the literary technique of creating a circularity between past and present, Italy and Argentina, through accenting these countries’ histories. Contemporary authors make use of this technique to reveal their

²⁰ For articles on Pariani’s writing, see Giuseppe Mazzocchi, “La spada e la luna di Laura Pariani: una scrittrice italiana e la cultura ispanica,” *Italica* 74, no. 3 (1997): 375-391; Gigliola Sulis, “Dare voce alle vite marginali: plurilinguismo di genere nella narrativa di Laura Pariani,” *The Italianist* 33, no. 3 (Oct. 2013): 405-426.

²¹ Emilia Perassi, “Scrittrici italiane ed emigrazione argentina,” *Oltreoceano* 6 (2012): 97-107.

characters' struggles to negotiate multiple languages and cultures and, more broadly, to show the crucial role that migration has played throughout these countries' histories and the impact this has had on discourses of national identity and belonging.

The expression "circular accent" draws from Graziella Parati's 1996 essay, "Living in Translation, Thinking with an Accent," in which she discusses the concept of an accent: "Far from being only a phonetic phenomenon, speaking with an accent means thinking with an accent. The accent is the sign of a spatial and temporal distance from a cultural and linguistic background that in turn resists obliteration."²² I follow Parati's use of the word accent to examine works of migration literature. Thus, my focus on not only linguistic accents but also cultural ones allows me to include works written entirely in one language, as well as characters who may be native speakers of a language but still remain culturally accented. In addition, I maintain that circularity plays as much of a role as the accent. While an accent highlights the distinctions between Italy and Argentina, Italian and Spanish, circularity instead emphasizes hybridity, contamination, and mixture. Italian-Argentine writer Clementina Sandra Ammendola states, "I write [...] in an Italian contaminated by the circularity between my mother tongue, already influenced by Italian, and the language of arrival."²³ That is, her Italian is contaminated by her native Argentine Spanish, which is itself a variety of Spanish influenced by Italian. This cross-contamination places the focus on the similarities between these languages and on Italy and Argentina's shared history.

²² Graziella Parati, "Living in Translation, Thinking with an Accent," *Romance Languages Annual* 8 (1996): 280.

²³ Due to some Italian-Argentine authors' stylistic use of ellipses, throughout the dissertation I will place brackets around ellipses when I have added them to the text. Clementina Sandra Ammendola, "Return Immigration and Routes to Citizenship," in *Borderlines: Migrazioni e identità nel novecento*, trans. Elizabeth Wren-Owens, eds. Jennifer Burns and Loredana Polezzi (Isernia: C. Iannone, 2003), 399.

One means of viewing circular accents is through the concept of translation, which is an essential component of contemporary migration literature. Translation involves movement from one language and culture to another, and circularity when an original and its translation are placed in dialogue with one another as is the case in my primary texts. In addition, the impossibility of creating a perfect translation means that there is always a difference, or an accent, between the original and its translation. In the same way that a translation serves as both a bridge between languages and marks the differences between languages, a circular accent can delineate the limits between categories while also blurring those same limits.

Throughout the dissertation, I will focus on instances in which works of contemporary literature simultaneously remind us of the historical, cultural, and linguistic connections between Italy and Argentina – highlighting circularity – and question, or nuance, the dominant history of migration between these countries – marking an accent. Circular accents inhabit a gray zone that allow categories such as Italy and Argentina, Italian and Spanish, past and present, to be brought into contact with one another without erasing the differences between them. Returning to the initial example of the Pope, he can be both Argentine and have Italian origins, and can both come from far away and have nearby roots. Through examining circular accents in different time periods and from different perspectives, I demonstrate how contemporary authors create a productive space of analysis, narration, and interest by simultaneously engaging with differences and similarities.

Chapter Outline

My work establishes contemporary Italian Argentine migration literature as a genre, united by the presence of circular accents, an exploration of the long history of migration between Italy and Argentina, and the prominence of one or more Italian-Argentine characters. Thus, each chapter explores circular accents through a different lens and in a different narrative time period, and includes at least one Italian and one Argentine novel.

In chapter 1, I focus on race and ethnicity at the turn of the twentieth century, in chapter two on the role of translation in the early to mid-twentieth century, in the third chapter on the function of memory in the aftermath of the Argentine Dirty War, and in the fourth chapter on Italian-Argentine identity from the 1990s to today. In the conclusion, I reflect on the Italian-Argentine destination culture this literature collectively imagines. This organization allows me to focus on circular accents without having to constantly move between different historical contexts or types of analysis, while also demonstrating how the role of Italian-Argentines in both Italian and Argentine texts is comparable.

I want to emphasize that this organization is not to suggest that, for instance, questions of race and ethnicity are only relevant when looking at early waves of Italian immigration to Argentina, or that an exploration of national identity should be confined to studies of the past few decades. However, looking at race and ethnicity in a period in which Italians were considered racially distinct from other national groups, and at identity today, when multinational identities are becoming more common, provides for a particularly fruitful analysis. This chronological organization also allows me demonstrate

how the history of Italian-Argentine migration is also a history of ever-increasing circularity and acceptance of accents, whether based in race or ethnicity, language, culture, or identity.

In Chapter 1, I look closely at two novels – Italian author Laura Pariani’s *Dio non ama i bambini* (2007) and Argentine author Héctor Tizón’s *Luz de las crueles provincias* (1995) – in which Italian immigrants are depicted as ethnically accented but their children strive to be seen as unaccented Argentines.²⁴ In these works, ethnicity functions as a circular accent, differentiating Italians from other immigrant groups and native Argentines without precluding their eventual assimilation. Through re-ethnicizing the Italian-Argentine characters – that is reminding the reader of this ethnic difference – these authors re-introduce the accent into narratives of Italian immigration without downplaying the circularity between Italians and other communities. Pariani focuses in particular on the multiethnic atmosphere in Buenos Aires, where numerous groups interacted closely with one another, while Tizón tells a less typical migration story of three Italians settling in rural Northern Argentina, where there is minimal European influence. Taken together, these two books show how Italian-Argentines’ ethnic accent quickly disappeared in favor of emphasizing the circularity between Italian-Argentines and others in Argentina. Furthermore, this disappearance of difference explains why Italian-Argentines are considered unaccented in Argentine culture today.

In the second chapter I look at circular accents through the concept of translation, because any translation creates a circularity between languages, but an accent always remains. Syria Poletti’s *Gente conmigo* (1961) and Mariangela Sedda’s *Oltremare* (2004)

²⁴ Laura Pariani, *Dio non ama i bambini* (Turin: Einaudi, 2007); Héctor Tizón, *Luz de las crueles provincias* (Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 1995).

and *Vincendo l'ombra* (2009) highlight how linguistic and cultural translation interact with one another as well as their limits.²⁵ Poletti's narrative, set in 1950s Buenos Aires, focuses on how an incorrect linguistic translation of a document breaks the circularity between Italian and Spanish but can help culturally translate an Italian into an Argentine. Sedda's two-part series instead shows the limits of cultural translation through letters sent between Italy and Argentina from 1913-1943, which are unable to fully describe the lives of the characters. All three novels highlight the role of some Italian-Argentines as cultural and linguistic mediators, who can at least temporarily maintain both an Italian accent in Argentina and the circularity between Italy and Argentina.

In Chapter 3, I turn to a specific subgenre: novels that serve as testimonial both of past migration of Italians to Argentina and of (Italian-)Argentines who became *desaparecidos*. Through linking stories of immigrants to stories of *desaparecidos*, Mempo Giardinelli's *Santo Oficio de la Memoria* (1991) and Massimo Carlotto's *Le irregolari: Buenos Aires Horror Tour* (1998) give primacy to the role of memory, which serves as a circular accent.²⁶ Both books challenge official histories that smooth over differences between individual stories, instead advocating that the details of each person's life history be remembered. In these texts, the Italian-Argentine characters that have connections to multiple countries are best equipped to narrate a collective memory that thus increases the circularity between stories, while maintaining each account's

²⁵ Syria Poletti, *Gente conmigo* (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1972); Mariangela Sedda *Oltremare* (Nuoro: Il Maestrato, 2004) and *Vincendo l'ombra* (Nuoro: Il Maestrato, 2009). *Gente conmigo* is the only pre-1980 book I include within the genre of Italian-Argentine contemporary migration literature. I give an explanation of this decision in Chapter 2.

²⁶ Mempo Giardinelli, *Santo Oficio de la Memoria* (Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2009), original publication while Giardinelli was still in exile (Barcelona: Grupo Editorial Norma, 1991); Massimo Carlotto, *Le irregolari: Buenos Aires Horror Tour* (Rome: Edizioni e/o, 1998).

individuality, or accent. More broadly, these novels demonstrate the importance of remembering the past in order to more fully understand the present situation.

My fourth chapter examines more closely a concept that weaves through each of the previous chapters – Italian-Argentine identity today. Laura Pariani's *Quando Dio Ballava Il Tango* (2002), Clementina Sandra Ammendola's *Lei che sono io – Ella que soy yo* (2005), and Antonio Dal Masetto's *La tierra incomparable* (1994) and *Cita en el Lago Maggiore* (2011), allow for an analysis of a variety of different ways in which Italian-Argentines with connections to at least two countries are able to negotiate their own sense of national identity.²⁷ All of these characters face feeling out of place in both countries and attempt to find their own sense of belonging, whether in one country, or both, or neither. Moreover, while each character's solution is different, they all learn to accept to a degree both their Italian and their Argentine accent, and the circularity between these identities. Their struggle echoes broader discussions of national identity as transnational, multilingual, multicultural, and hybrid, that are occurring in contemporary literature and elsewhere.

As a whole, my analysis of circular accents over time demonstrate that, in the past, both circularity between Italy and Argentina and being accented – whether ethnically, linguistically, or culturally – were generally viewed in a negative light, and this could hinder, or completely prevent assimilation. However, in recent decades, individuals and communities are more likely to embrace their connections to multiple countries and an accented identity.

²⁷ Laura Pariani, *Quando Dio ballava il tango* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2002); Clementina Sandra Ammendola, *Lei che sono io – Ella que soy yo* (Rome: Sinnos, 2005); Antonio Dal Masetto, *La tierra incomparable* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1994) and *Cita en el Lago Maggiore* (Buenos Aires: El Ateneo, 2011). The first book of the trilogy is *Oscuramente fuerte es la vida* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1990).

Through examining the presence of circular accents in contemporary migration literature in Italy and Argentina, my primary texts show how two countries are grappling with histories of migration and national belonging through literature, during a time when migration is again present in the national consciousness. Due to the perceived similarities between Italians and Argentines, past immigration of Italians to Argentina and current immigration of Italian-Argentines to Italy is less visible, or accented, than past and present migrations of non-white immigrants. However, through the use of circular accents, these novels show that the current situation of immigration in both countries is a new development that is, nonetheless, contiguous with the past.

Chapter 1

Turn-of-the-Twentieth Century Ethnic Difference

Historical studies of Italian immigration and assimilation recognize how quickly Italians assimilated in Argentina, as opposed to other countries, such as the United States, Canada, and Australia.¹ In this chapter, I examine two novels – Laura Pariani’s *Dio non ama i bambini* (2007) and Héctor Tizón’s *Luz de las crueles provincias* (1995) – that recount the lives of Italians and their children in Argentina at the turn of the twentieth century in a way that nuances the dominant views regarding histories of migration and assimilation.² I begin by analyzing Pariani’s book, which takes place in Buenos Aires. This allows me to first focus my attention on the capital city, and the heterogeneity Pariani presents there, before broadening my analysis to how Tizón portrays rural Argentina and what both texts assert about Argentina as a whole. In these novels ethnicity functions as a circular accent, marking Italians as different from other

¹ For comparative studies of Italian assimilation in Argentina and the United States see Samuel Baily, *Immigrants in the Lands of Promise: Italians in Buenos Aires and New York City, 1870-1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); Herbert Klein, “The Integration of Italian Immigrants into the United States and Argentina: A Comparative Analysis,” *The American Historical Review* 88, no. 2 (Apr. 1983): 306-329.

² Other works set in this time period include Lucilla Gallavresi, *L'argentino* (Milan: Mursia, 2003); Mempo Giardinelli, *Santo Oficio De La Memoria* (Barcelona: Grupo Editorial Norma, 1991); Laura Pariani, *Quando Dio Ballava Il Tango* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2002). All three are family sagas that span a century, beginning in the 1800s. Gallavresi’s novel tells a story of rich Italian immigrants, who have the means to travel back and forth numerous times between Italy and Argentina. Giardinelli recounts the history of Argentina through the lives of members of the Domeniconelle family and his characters, like Tizón’s, live far from Buenos Aires. I will examine Giardinelli’s novel in the context of Argentina’s Dirty War and *desaparecidos* in Chapter 3, and Pariani’s text when discussing issues of identity in Chapter 4.

communities without precluding their eventual assimilation. These works call attention to the ethnic diversity present in this period in both Italy and Argentina, as well as to the role of Italian (and more broadly European) migration in defining the borders of an Argentine or Italian identity.³

The first novel, Italian author Laura Pariani's *Dio non ama i bambini* (2007) takes place in December of 1908 and from November to December 1912 in barrio San Cristóbal in Buenos Aires, an area inhabited primarily by immigrants from Italy and other European countries. It narrates the actions of Ognissanti Goletti (11-15 years old), referred to as "Orecchia" (Ear), a murderer who enjoys torturing and killing animals and young children, especially girls. The text is divided into numerous short chapters and includes over thirty different narrators, many of them poor second generation immigrants, and is interspersed with newspaper articles, songs, letters, and other documents. The novel ends with a band of children discovering that Orecchia is the murderer, catching him, and handing him over to the police. It is loosely based on real events of the period and the murders carried out by the young Cayetano Santos Godino, known as "El Petiso Orejudo."⁴ The other book I analyze, Héctor Tizón's *Luz de las crueles provincias* (1995) tells the story of a young Italian couple, Giovanni and Rossana, and their son, Juan from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century. The narrative follows their departure from Italy, their arrival and short stay in Buenos Aires, and their permanent settlement in rural Northwestern Argentina.

³ Parts of this chapter, in particular the analysis of Pariani's novel, have been modified and are forthcoming in an article: "Re-ethnicizing Italians and Argentines: Laura Pariani's *Dio non ama i bambini*," *The Italianist* 37, no. 1 (Feb. 2017).

⁴ For an exhaustive biography of Cayetano, including newspaper articles and photographs, see <http://www.petisorejudo.com.ar>. See also Leonel Contreras, *La leyenda del petiso orejudo (Cayetano Santos Godino)* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Ediciones Turísticas de Mario Banchik, 2003).

First, I demonstrate how notions of race and ethnicity have changed over time in order to support the myth of both Italy and Argentina as homogenous, white, and European. Then, I propose the term “re-ethnicization,” a stylistic strategy that contemporary authors employ to highlight the ethnic diversity in Argentina at the turn of the twentieth century. In other words, these narratives do not create diversity where previously there was none. Instead, by firmly centering the focus on the multiethnic origins of Argentine culture, they combat a tendency to conceal or ignore this difference. Next, I examine how Pariani narrates the multiethnic urban environment of Buenos Aires and suggests that Argentine identity remains heterogeneous today, then turn my attention to how Tizón demonstrates the ethnic diversity present even in rural Northwestern Argentina and narrates “transculturation,” or cross-cultural exchange, in progress between the Italian immigrants and the supposedly homogenous community in which they settle. In both works, being ethnically accented is viewed in a negative light, which leads to the children of Italian immigrants ignoring their circularity with Italy and downplaying their Italian accent in order to be seen as Argentine. Throughout, I focus on how contemporary authors are rewriting histories of migration to challenge processes of homogenization. They compel their readers to see the past in a new light by revealing the heterogeneity that existed over a century ago and suggesting it still remains in both Argentina and Italy today.

Race, Ethnicity, and Re-ethnicizing Italians

By re-ethnicizing Italian immigrants, Pariani and Tizón offer a version of history that contrasts with the dominant narrative of fast Italian assimilation and the notion of a

homogenous national identity. The strategy of re-ethnicization demonstrates that Italian and Argentine identity were characterized by ethnic diversity at the turn of the twentieth century. However, the term “ethnicity” did not exist during this time period. Instead, allegations of difference were considered to be based on race. Thus, it is important to historicize the terms race and ethnicity before I define what I mean by re-ethnicization.

In the time period I examine, many believed that Southern and Northern Italians were two racially distinct groups, and thus that there was no circularity between them. Professor of criminal anthropology Cesare Lombroso proposed a hierarchy of races, which placed white Northern Europeans – including Northern Italians – at the top, followed by slightly less white Southern Europeans – including Southern Italians – and then all other groups.⁵ Italians wanted to minimize this accent that marked them as inferior, which led to a simultaneous attempt to whiten the entire Italian population while also marginalizing Southern Italians in order to whiten Northern Italians.⁶ Italian mass emigration in this period further complicated conceptions of race due to the contact between often poor Italian emigrants and the local populations of Argentina, the United States, and other countries, which weakened the myth of Italians as just as white and European as Northern Europe.

Scholars, in particular David R. Roediger and Matthew Frye Jacobson, outline how notions of race and ethnicity have changed over the decades, focusing their attention

⁵ See Cesare Lombroso, *L'uomo delinquente: in rapporto all'antropologia, alla giurisprudenza ed alle discipline carcerarie* (Torino: Fratelli Bocca Editori, 1896), first published in 1876. An English translation, by Mary Gibson and Nicole H. Rafter, is also available: *Criminal Man* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

⁶ Aliza S. Wong, *Race and the Nation in Liberal Italy, 1861-1911: Meridionalism, Empire, and Diaspora* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 49.

on the United States.⁷ Initially, race was defined as a combination of biological, cultural, and linguistic difference. However, from the 1920s to the 1940s, “Strictly biological understandings of race as the key to the diversity of humanity gave way to cultural and environmental explanations.”⁸ In other words, race became primarily a biological designation, while ethnicity indicated cultural and linguistic difference. This change allowed for the inclusion of Italians and other European immigrants within the white race – highlighting circularity among these communities – while still distancing them from “non-ethnic” whites of Northern European descent – maintaining an accent.

However, while the dichotomy “white” and “non-white”/“black” frames discussions of race in the United States, Argentina has always viewed itself as a white European nation. A number of recent historical studies bring to light the increasing inclusivity of the category of white in Argentina, which has helped maintain this myth. Galen Joseph’s look at whiteness in Argentina today maintains that *porteños* – Argentine residents of Buenos Aires – conceive of their national and racial identity as: “if we are white, Argentina is white, or if Argentina is not white, we are not Argentine.”⁹ Moreover, anthropologist Alejandro Frigerio, who studies the “disappearance” of Afro-Argentines, argues: “for Argentina, the black man is the most extreme image of otherness [...] the closest Other [...] Due to this proximity [...] we have been exorcising him from our

⁷ David R. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: the Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs*, (New York: Basic Books, 2005); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants And the Alchemy of Race*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

⁸ Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 99.

⁹ Galen Joseph, “Taking race seriously: Whiteness in Argentina's national and transnational imaginary,” *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 7, no. 3 (2000): 335.

blood [...] and from our history.”¹⁰ This view permanently accents anyone considered black, while others, including those of Italian heritage, can potentially become Argentine. It also ignores the indigenous, black, and other non-white or non-European influences on Argentine history.

The “disappearance” of racial diversity in Argentina is paralleled by a similar erasure, or concealment, of ethnic difference. Social anthropologist Rita Laura Segato explains this process of homogenization, whereby “*all of the ethnically marked people were called or pressured to distance themselves from their categories of origin in order to, only then, be able to comfortably exercise their [Argentine] citizenship [...]* a kind of absorption conditioned by the abandonment of all signs of origin.”¹¹ Moreover, Anthropologist Mónica Quijada states that in Argentina, “It is difficult to find a case in which the homogenizing drive has had such success in the consolidation of a collective

¹⁰ “para la Argentina, el negro es la imagen más fuerte de alteridad [...] el Otro más cercano [...] Por esta cercanía [...] hemos estado exorcizándolo de nuestra sangre [...] y de nuestra historia.” Alejandro Frigerio, “‘Negros’ y ‘Blancos’ en Buenos Aires: Repensando nuestras categorías raciales,” *Patrimonio Cultural* 16 (2006): 96. For an additional historical study of Afro-Argentines, see: George R. Andrews, *The Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires, 1800-1900* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980). There are also numerous studies of the process of whitening of Italian immigrants and their descendants in the United States. For instance, Roediger and Jacobson mention Italian immigration within their larger discussion of whiteness and immigrants to the United States, in their already cited works. Visual historian Giorgio Bertellini discusses the ambiguous whiteness of Italians from the late 1800s to the early 1900s, providing an overview of the related scholarship in his book *Italy in Early American Cinema: Race, Landscape, and the Picturesque* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 165-71. American Studies historian Thomas Guglielmo focuses on Italian immigrants’ racial status in the book, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). Guglielmo distinguishes between “ethnic race” and “color race,” considering the former applicable to Italians. However, both Roediger and Bertellini contest Guglielmo’s claim that Italians were undoubtedly white (Roediger, 13; Bertellini, 169).

¹¹ “*todas las personas étnicamente marcadas fueron convocadas o presionadas a desplazarse de sus categorías de origen para, sólo entonces, poder ejercer confortablemente la ciudadanía [...]* un tipo de absorción condicionada al abandono de toda marca de origen.” Italics in original. Rita L. Segato, *La nación y sus otros: raza, etnicidad y diversidad religiosa en tiempos de políticas de la identidad* (Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2007), 266-7.

perception of a supposedly uniform nation, in cultural, ethnic, and racial terms.”¹² Thus, even an ethnic accent has historically been seen as negative in Argentina.

To re-state, at the turn of the twentieth century Italians, particularly Southern Italians, were considered racially different from and inferior to Northern Europeans. However, over the decades all Italians came viewed as ethnically, not racially, different, and then even this accent disappeared. Today, being of Italian heritage has no bearing on whether or not an individual is Argentine.

Given this historical context, I define re-ethnicization as a strategy of highlighting ethnic difference, in order to remind contemporary readers of these processes of whitening and homogenization.¹³ By re-ethnicizing their Italian characters and highlighting moments of tension, frustration, and confusion, Pariani and Tizón call into question the dominant narrative of Italians’ fast assimilation in Argentina at the turn of the twentieth century. Moreover, focusing on ethnic rather than racial difference allows these authors to push back against the view of Argentine, or Italian, identity as homogenous with little risk of alienating a reader accustomed to seeing these countries as white and European.

¹² “Es difícil encontrar un caso en que la pulsión homogeneizadora haya tenido tanto éxito en la consolidación de una percepción colectiva de nación pretendidamente uniforme en términos culturales, étnicos y raciales.” Ibid., 10.

¹³ The term “re-ethnicization” appears in a handful of publications, largely connected to studies of immigrant assimilation and ideas of citizenship and belonging. These works do not focus, as I do, on re-ethnicization as a strategy used in the field of literature. I provide here a brief outline of the two principal works that use this term, but do not draw from these scholars in my analysis. Sociologist Christina Joppke discusses the opposition between de-ethnicization – which facilitates the process of obtaining citizenship – and re-ethnicization – which encourages immigrants to retain links to their home country – in the context of contemporary European history (“Citizenship between De and Re-Ethnicization,” in *European Journal of Sociology*, 44.3 (1999): 429-458). Similarly, Professor of Asian Studies, Edwin Pak-Wah Leung, examines how residents of Hong Kong re-connect with their Chinese ethnic identity in “Transition from De-ethnicization to Re-ethnicization: The Re-emergence of Chinese Ethnic Identity and the Birth of a New Culture in Hong Kong Prior to 1997,” in *Hong Kong in Transition* (Hong Kong: One Country Two Systems Economic Research Institute, 1992), 594-603.

One term that shares similarities to the notion of re-ethnicizing is “recolouring,” coined by Graziella Parati to discuss the work of contemporary migrant novelists and writers in Italy.¹⁴ Parati has used recolouring as a counterpoint to whitening and defines it as, “the process of uncovering deliberate efforts to whiten Italian culture and create a European (Northern and white) identity [...] ‘Recolouring’ becomes a strategic process that uncovers the multicultural identity of Italy.”¹⁵ Discussing contemporary migrant authors, Parati states, “I would name the strategic process employed by these authors the *recolouring of a culture*. To recolour the Italian national identity in this context means to respond, by talking back, to an ideologically motivated attempt to homogenize Italian identity and defend it from the “Other.”¹⁶ The notion of recolouring places the focus on skin color as an index of conceptions of racial difference. Parati writes, “Recolouring is inevitably an inadequate term, but it is useful in identifying Italian culture and locating Italian identity as the crossroads of the Mediterranean.”¹⁷ However, the vast majority of the immigrant characters that I examine are not considered racially distinct from the native community. In addition, in these works identity is located transatlantically, between Italy and Argentina, rather than in the Mediterranean.

Anthropologist Claudia Briones differentiates between what she calls practices of “racialization” and “ethnicization,” which further supports my focus on ethnicity, rather than race, in the context Italian-Argentine migration literature. The former serves to “analytically circumscribe those social forms of marking otherness that conceptually deny the possibility of osmosis through social boundaries” while the latter is rooted in

¹⁴ Parati tends to employ British spelling in her writing.

¹⁵ Graziella Parati, *Migration Italy*, 12.

¹⁶ Italics in original, *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.

cultural differences and is able to “anticipate or promote the possibility of passage or osmosis between social categories.”¹⁸ Pariani and Tizón’s texts present characters who are ethnically accented but, as we will see, they or their children may become unaccented Argentines.

This approach of downplaying race and racism and focusing, instead, on ethnicity is also present in other contemporary texts in Argentina. Historian Paulina Alberto examines how Argentine novels published in the twenty-first century contend with matters of race and history, proposing that these works “have sought to force an alternative vision of a diverse or even *mestizo* Argentina into the national spotlight” in opposition to the dominant myth of a white Argentina, a technique I maintain is comparable to recolouring and re-ethnicizing.¹⁹ She states: “Through appealing stories of mestizaje and disappearing blackness, they allow white Argentine readers to feel ethnically inflected without having to fully contend with contemporary issues of race and racism or the continued privileging of whiteness.”²⁰ My primary texts do not emphasize instances of racial difference based on skin color, and especially not when referring to Italian immigrants or Italian-Argentines. Instead, they present an “ethnically inflected” Italian or Argentine identity.²¹

¹⁸ “circunscribir analíticamente aquellas formas sociales de marcación de alteridad que niegan conceptualmente la posibilidad de ósmosis a través de las fronteras sociales.” “preveen o promueven la posibilidad general de pase u ósmosis entre categorizaciones sociales.” Claudia Briones, “Mestizaje y blanqueamiento como coordinadas de aboriginalidad y nación en Argentina,” *Runa* XXIII (2002): 66.

¹⁹ Paulina Alberto, “Racial Storytelling: Whites, Blacks, Indians, and the Revised Historical Imaginary in Recent Argentine Historical Fiction,” in Paulina Alberto and Eduardo Elena (eds.), *Rethinking Race in Modern Argentina: Shades of the Nation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

²¹ Many of the works Alberto examines take place in the nineteenth century and she notes that, in author Florencia Bonelli and Miguel Rosenzvit’s novels, “the twentieth century is missing [...]

When placed in dialogue with one another, these two novels show that Italian immigration and assimilation in Argentina was not simple, and did not follow one pattern. Pariani's narrative provides an example of assimilation in an urban context full of immigrants from many countries. Interactions among immigrant groups and between immigrants and native Argentines are frequent, which leads to a blending of cultures and languages. As a result of her literary re-ethnicization, everyone – natives and immigrants – becomes accented. The protagonists of Tizón's text, instead, settle in rural Northern Argentina, where they are confronted with an apparently homogenous dominant Argentine culture and ethnicity. In order to adapt, they feel the need to erase any hints of an accent. In this case, the Italian accent is suppressed as much as possible, but hints of it still remain. Both narratives re-ethnicize Italian immigrants in Argentina in order to demonstrate both how this past diversity has been largely forgotten and that Argentine and Italian national identities remain multiethnic today.

A Multiethnic Buenos Aires: Laura Pariani's *Dio non ama i bambini* (2007)

Pariani's novel takes place entirely in Buenos Aires, which was the center of immigrant activity. Of the over three million Italians who immigrated to Argentina from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1980s, more than two million of them did so between 1880 and 1930.²² By 1914, Italian-born immigrants made up 12.5% of Argentina's population. While many Italians settled outside of Argentina's capital, one-third of them

reinforcing the idea of late-nineteenth-century black 'disappearance'" (31). In contrast, Pariani and Tizón's novels do draw explicit connections to the present, perhaps because they propose an ethnicizing discourse, largely ignoring issues of race.

²² María Cristina Cacopardo and José Luis Moreno, "Características regionales, demográficas y ocupacionales de la inmigración italiana en la Argentina (1880-1930)," in *La inmigración italiana en la Argentina*, eds. Fernando Devoto and Gianfausto Rosoli (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2000), 66.

remained in Buenos Aires, where they were over 20% of the population of the city from 1869-1909.²³ In 1914, about half of the residents of Buenos Aires were foreign born, including 20% born in Italy. In addition, about two-thirds of those born in Argentina were the children of primarily Italian and Spanish immigrants.²⁴ This is the environment Pariani's book describes.

Immigrants with little income who settled in the city generally found housing in a *conventillo*, a large building divided into many rooms, each one occupied by a family or roommates. *Conventillos* are a fundamental aspect of Buenos Aires, as "40 percent of the population that resided in Buenos Aires lived in *conventillos* in 1887."²⁵ These buildings are also particularly important when studying immigration because "Indeed, the *conventillo* was the living space of the majority of the poor immigrants who arrived at the ports in the Southern Cone at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century."²⁶

The vast majority of the characters in Pariani's novel live in *conventillos*, as do the protagonists of Tizón's text during their brief stay in Buenos Aires. Their living situation largely determines who they interact with and their level of integration into

²³ Samuel L. Baily, "Italian Immigrants in Buenos Aires and New York," *The American Historical Review* 88, no. 2 (Apr. 1983): 301-2.

²⁴ Samuel L. Baily, "Marriage Patterns and Immigrant Assimilation in Buenos Aires, 1882-1923," *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, 60, no. 1 (Feb. 1980): 45. Much of Samuel Baily's work concentrates on Italian migration and assimilation at the turn of the twentieth century, with a focus on Buenos Aires and comparisons between this city and New York. I cite some of his other publications later in this chapter.

²⁵ Hernán Otero and Adela Pellegrino. "Sharing the City: Residence Patterns and Immigrant Integration in Buenos Aires and Montevideo," in *Mass Migration to Modern Latin America*. Eds. Samuel Baily and Eduardo José Míguez (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 2003), 102.

²⁶ "Efectivamente, era el conventillo el lugar de vivienda de la mayoría de los inmigrantes pobres que llegaban a los puertos del Cono Sur a fines del siglo XIX y comienzos del XX." María Inés de Torres. "Cuerpos de inmigrantes, piel de ciudad: ciudadanía y espacio urbano en el Río de la Plata," *Guaragua* 7, no. 16 (Summer, 2003): 40.

Argentine culture. An analysis of the space of the *conventillo* shows what life in Buenos Aires was like for poor Italians at the turn of the twentieth century and how they interacted with other Italians, other immigrant groups, and Argentines. As Pariani's writing demonstrates, people of different ethnicities lived in Buenos Aires and even Italian immigrants did not necessarily exhibit a shared sense of community. Moreover, the children of these immigrants wanted to be unaccented Argentines, not ethnically accented. Her novel highlights the heterogeneity in ethnicity and language present in the relatively economically homogenous space of the *conventillo*, which complicates the generally accepted popular narrative of assimilation and blurs the supposedly sharp division between Buenos Aires and elsewhere.

In Pariani's book, *conventillo* life is characterized by different immigrant groups living in close quarters with one another, and an absence of un-accented Argentine residents. One of Pariani's characters describes the *conventillo* in which she lives and some of the disadvantages of living there:

Le abitazioni sono quindici sia nel primo che nel secondo patio, dieci nel terzo. Tutte uguali, composte da un'unica stanza con un finestrino stretto e una porta ... Per cucinare o lavare nell'ultimo patio ci sono tre lavatoi e otto griglie sotto le quali si possono accendere dei piccoli fuochi. Una vita in cui niente può restar nascosto ... come se nel conventillo *Epifanía* le pareti delle abitazioni fossero di vetro. Tutto si vede attraverso. Tutti sanno tutto di tutti, e quel che non si sa s'immagina o s'inventa: dissapori coniugali, tradimenti, incesti, botte... Ché tra i poveri ci sono pochissime storie felici. E, quando esistono, terminano in un amen.²⁷

Thus, those who lived in *conventillos* were forced to share space and interact with the other residents, which could be an advantage or a disadvantage depending on the situation. When fifteen-year-old Ginetta Goletti, unmarried and in the early stages of

²⁷ Laura Pariani, *Dio non ama i bambini*, 30.

pregnancy, screams and falls to the floor bleeding, the other residents immediately come to her aid.²⁸ Historian María Ximena Urbina C., in a study of *conventillos* in Valparaíso, Chile, notes “the sense of community and the solidarity” among *conventillo* residents.²⁹ In addition, historians Hernán Otero and Adela Pellegrino highlight the ethnic harmony present in *conventillos*, stating, “Clearly segregated along social lines [...] but without clear and strong evidence of ethnic segregation, the *conventillos* encouraged a kind of ‘melting pot’ at the bottom of the social pyramid.”³⁰ As we will see, the separation between poor immigrant residents of *conventillos* and native Argentines, or more economically stable communities, makes it difficult for Pariani’s characters to understand how to become assimilated Argentines or to achieve economic and physical security.

Conventillos are also places of tension between individuals and communities, which further highlights the heterogeneity of these spaces. Cesarona, a resident, recounts when an angry couple approach Lucia Goletti, Ognissanti’s mother. When Cesarona approaches Lucia, offering help, she says that Lucia “mi ha serrato in faccia l’uscio della cucina perché non ascoltassi, ma tanto si sentiva lo stesso bene.”³¹ María Inés De Torres mentions the “conflicts and tensions” present in *conventillos*, arguing that “these conflicts were not mere confrontations between immigrants and ‘natives,’ but complex processes complicated by disputes between classes, ethnic groups, and even gender, between immigrants and creoles [...] between the State and the private sector.”³² Pariani’s novel

²⁸ Ibid., 202.

²⁹ “el sentido comunitario y la solidaridad.” María Ximena Urbina Carrasco, “Los conventillos de Valparaíso, 1880-1920: Percepción de barrios y viviendas marginales,” *Revista de Urbanismo* no. 5 (2002): 13. María Inés de Torres, “Cuerpos de inmigrantes, piel de ciudad,” 40.

³⁰ Otero and Pellegrino, “Sharing the City,” 102.

³¹ Laura Pariani, *Dio non ama i bambini*, 122.

³² “conflictos y tensiones,” “estos conflictos no fueron meros enfrentamientos entre inmigrantes y ‘nacionales’, sino complejos procesos atravesados por disputas de clases, de etnia e incluso de

concentrates primarily on ethnic diversity, but questions of identity, class, and gender add additional layers to the interactions between her characters. Her narrative suggests that no community is homogenous.

Conventillos housed immigrants of many different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, but not all immigrant groups were considered equal. In one passage, a Southern Italian immigrant explains: “ci sono bambini lombardi nel conventillo; e piemontesi, napolitani, gallegos, andalusi. Niente giudei, che son brutta gente [...] niente giudei nel conventillo *Epifanía*. Come pure niente siciliani. Ché il mondo intero lo sa bene che i siciliani son tutti affiliati alla Mano Nera.”³³ The narrator describes a hierarchy that places Spaniards, Northern Italians, and some Southern Italians on the same level, but considers Sicilians and Jews inferior. This view shares some similarities with popular opinion of the time period that considered Northern Italians superior to Southern Italians and Spaniards. However, it also highlights the instability of these views by subdividing Italian and Spanish identity by region and placing Northern Italians on the same level as some Southern Italians and Spaniards. In addition, the declaration by the character that there are no Jewish or Sicilian *conventillo* residents is simply untrue. The reader is later introduced to several Jewish characters as well as a young boy known as Sicilia, who live in the *conventillos* and are friends with Italians, Spaniards, and others.

Pariani’s narrative presents, and then calls into question, a strict hierarchy of immigrant groups while also emphasizing the diversity in Buenos Aires during the period of mass immigration. This is one of many examples of an ethnicizing discourse that signals ethnic difference without precluding future assimilation. In addition, the above

género, entre inmigrantes y criollos [...] entre Estado y sector privado.” de Torres, “Cuerpos de inmigrantes, piel de ciudad: ciudadanía y espacio urbano en el Río de la Plata,” 51.

³³ Pariani, *Dio non ama i bambini*, 81-2.

quote suggests the mixing of languages that must have occurred in *conventillos*, as immigrants speaking different languages and dialects communicated with one another. All of Pariani's writing is characterized by a hybrid language that combines standard Italian, Spanish, Italian dialects, and Argentine Spanish. Her books are published in Italy and read by a primarily Italian audience, and thus standard Italian is the dominant language of the text. However, she does not italicize or otherwise make conspicuous words and phrases that are not standard Italian. Returning to the quote, *conventillo* and *gallegos* are in Spanish and *napolitani* is combination of the Spanish *napolitanos* and the Italian *napoletani*. The use of Spanish words highlights that even monolingual Italian immigrants (the vast majority who spoke dialect, not standard Italian) must have been confronted daily with Spanish.

This hybrid language accents Italian culture by introducing Italian readers to words and phrases they might not understand, and no footnote or glossary is provided to make the unknown text more familiar. In a 1996 interview, Pariani provides reasons for her use of multiple languages, stating that the Spanish "attempts to [...] reveal that linguistic disorientation typical of someone who has two cultures [...] On the other hand, at times the Spanish is used, like a jolt, to force the reader to pause and then proceed at a slower speed."³⁴ As the reader struggles to negotiate a text he might not understand completely, he may feel some affinity to the characters who must mediate between two or more cultures and languages. In addition, this language recalls *cocoliche*, the hybrid

³⁴ "cerca di [...] mettere in luce quello spaesamento linguistico tipico di una persona che ha due culture [...] D'altra parte, a volte lo spagnolo viene usato per costringere il lettore, quasi come un sobbalzo, a fermarsi e, quindi, ad intraprendere una lettura più rallentata." Giuseppe Mazzocchi quotes this interview in his article, "La spada e la luna di Laura Pariani: una scrittrice italiana e la cultura ispanica," *Italica* 74, no. 3 (1997): 380-1.

Italian and Spanish spoken by many Italian immigrants and that also influenced the development of Argentine Spanish.³⁵

Pariani's decision to incorporate multiple languages and dialects in her writing may make the reader uncomfortable, but the vast majority of the text remains accessible, even to a reader who does not know any Spanish.³⁶ This similarity between the Italian and Spanish languages is comparable, in some ways, to that between Italians and Argentines. In both cases, these similarities become even clearer when compared with markedly different categories, such as a non-romance language or a non-white community. Thus, being Italian, and speaking Italian, in Argentina is a marker of difference, but not to the extent that being, for instance, black or speaking a non-European language would be. Just as it is "safer" to speak of ethnic rather than racial difference, it is easier to include only romance languages than to introduce other languages. This is true of Pariani's use of Italian dialect as well, which is different but still comprehensible to a reader of Italian.

Italian immigrants who arrived and then remained in Buenos Aires became part of a multiethnic, multicultural, and multilingual environment. They needed to learn to communicate and get along with other immigrants as well as with native Argentines. Pariani's novel reminds her readers that, a century ago, Argentina was not yet a *crisol de razas*, or melting pot, but was a confusing amalgam of people from different regions,

³⁵ For more on Italo-Argentines and *cocoliche*, see for example Ana Cara, "Cocoliche: The Art of Assimilation and Dissimulation among Italians and Argentines," *Latin American Research Review* 22, no. 3 (1987): 37-67.

³⁶ As Gigliola Sulis notes about Pariani's writing: "la scrittrice erige tra il lettore e il mondo narrato una barriera, per quanto sormontabile, con maggiore o minore difficoltà, grazie alla radice latina che accomuna italiano, dialetto e spagnolo." Gigliola Sulis, "Dare voce alle vite marginali: plurilinguismo di genere nella narrativa di Laura Pariani," *The Italianist*, 33, no. 3 (Oct. 2013): 413.

speaking different languages. This narrative shows Argentina at the very beginning of a process of homogenization that slowly incorporated “piemontesi, napolitani, gallegos” and others into Argentine culture and an Argentine identity.

Pariani re-ethnicizes her immigrant characters, demonstrating that they are too culturally and ethnically accented to consider themselves Argentine and focusing her attention on the diversity and heterogeneity of the *conventillo* residents at the turn of the twentieth century. Many of these characters live in a state of economic precariousness and fear for their safety and, in particular, the safety of their children. However, those children may be able to achieve economic and social mobility as well as be considered Argentine. I will now show a number of moments from this novel that provide examples of second generation immigrants trying to understand the boundaries of national identity and, as a result, whether or not they are Argentine. These scenes demonstrate that, while the limits of Argentine identity are unclear and undefined, they are in the process of expanding to include individuals of certain ethnicities, including Italians. In other words, in an example of what Briones calls practices of ethnicization, ethnic diversity does not preclude being Argentine and people of different ethnicities and linguistic backgrounds can claim an Argentine identity.³⁷

Pariani demonstrates the complex interplay between ethnic and national identity with characters who do not want to be “ethnicized” or “ethnically inflected.” In one scene, five-year-old Peppino Goletti complains to his older sister, Rosa, about his mistreatment at school. She provides a possible explanation for this: “Capita così, credo

³⁷ "Mestizaje y blanqueamiento," 66.

perché sei figlio di italiani, di povera gente.”³⁸ However, he refuses to accept this, asking, “Ma perché non sono un bambino argentino, Rosa? [...] non ho mica chiesto io a Dio di farmi nascere italiano [...] se Lui può tutto, perché non ci ha fatti tutti argentini?”³⁹ She just shrugs in response. Peppino’s reaction demonstrates the uncertainty surrounding Argentine identity. He does not understand why he is Italian and not Argentine, and his sister has no explanation for him.

Peppino presents a view of society that sees any mark of foreignness as negative. He proposes a complete erasure of the accent and for everyone to be Argentine. This view is similar to what sociologist Milton Gordon calls Anglo-conformity. Gordon outlines three theories of assimilation in his study of immigration in the United States: Anglo-conformity, the melting pot, and cultural pluralism. The first posits that immigrants lose all sense of other ethnic or cultural identity and conform completely to the dominant culture. The melting pot suggests a blending of immigrant and dominant cultures to form a new culture shared by all residents. Cultural pluralism, instead, states that each immigrant group retains its own sense of cultural identity but “within the context of American citizenship and political and economic integration into American society.”⁴⁰

Peppino’s wish that everyone be Argentine shows support for what can be called Argentine-conformity. However, in the context of the narrative, this is an unrealistic goal. Peppino and others are often discriminated against for their origins, even if they consider themselves Argentine; and they, in turn, discriminate against other immigrants, such as

³⁸ Pariani, *Dio non ama i bambini*, 120.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁴⁰ Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 85.

(returning to an earlier quote) Jews and Sicilians. In addition, since Peppino does not consider himself Argentine, Argentine-conformity is clearly not occurring. This passage suggests that identity-formation and assimilation are not the simple processes that Peppino wants them to be.

Another passage provides an example of a second generation immigrant who attains a level of social and economic stability and completely rejects an Italian identity, asserting an Argentine one. Herminio Pascale is the son of a Galician woman, but has an Italian last name due to his mother subsequently marrying “un bassitalia,” a Southern Italian.⁴¹ Herminio’s job as a deputy police chief demonstrates that the children of immigrants can achieve social mobility and help make the lives of all residents safer. However, Herminio is uncomfortable with his close association with Italians. He remembers the embarrassment he felt turning in his signed report cards, worried his instructors would make fun of his stepfather’s signature, “da cui si poteva facilmente arguire che il capofamiglia era semianalfabeta.”⁴² The shame of having a Southern Italian, uneducated, father figure, with whom he shares a last name, has resulted in Herminio disliking all Italians. He distances himself as much as possible from them, not wanting to be mistaken for one. According to him, “Tutto quello che c’è di brutto nella vita, [...] lo attribuisce agli italiani [...] Epperchiò non vuole essere confuso con loro: lui è argentino, carajo.”⁴³ Thus, Peppino wants to be Argentine but knows others consider him to be Italian. Herminio, instead, vehemently rejects an Italian identity. Interestingly, he does not claim a Spanish identity, either. Instead, with the forceful use of the expletive “carajo,” he states that he is Argentine.

⁴¹ Pariani, *Dio non ama i bambini*, 103.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 104.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 103.

Herminio, like Peppino, seems to desire Argentine-conformity and an identity that is not ethnically inflected, at least for himself. His prejudice towards Italians, though, demonstrates his belief that Italians are different from him and should not be considered Argentine. In addition, in spite of his explicit declaration that he is Argentine, and superior to Italians, Herminio does have an accented identity in the eyes of others. This calls into the question the degree to which identity can be self-determined, and suggests it may, instead, be primarily dependent on others' views. Peppino wants to be Argentine but knows others see him as Italian, so he sees himself as Italian as well. Herminio, instead, is considered Italian even though he has no Italian blood, and considers himself Argentine. Through characters like Peppino and Herminio, Pariani re-ethnicizes immigrants and their children during this time period while simultaneously showing the disadvantages of being considered different. In addition, these characters' desire to be Argentine rather than hold onto their ethnic heritage show the beginnings of the processes of assimilation and whitening that lead to this diversity "disappearing" over time.

Pariani's text does not provide a straightforward definition of Argentine, or Italian, identity. In addition, it is clear that there can be a disconnect between how a person identifies and how others view them, which affirms the fact that identity is unstable. Her characters never reach a point at which their self-identification and how others identify them are entirely aligned. Rather, she presents many characters who, in the midst of struggling to survive, occasionally wonder what category they belong to and why.

One more passage provides the most drawn out instance in Pariani's book of characters attempting to understand the interaction among national, religious, and ethnic

or racial identity. Here, again, the characters simultaneously reveal the diversity present in Argentina and demonstrate how this diversity became subsequently hidden or ignored. In this scene, the murderer Ognissanti, recently released from a correctional, approaches a group of children and makes fun of them for their inclusion of a Polish boy, Adamo, in their band. He says, “Vedo che nella vostra banda ci avete fatto entrare pure i polacchi. Sapeste cosa facevamo ai giudei al correzionale ...”⁴⁴ The leader of the band, Maurilio, defends Adamo, saying, “nella mia banda lascio entrare chi voglio io.”⁴⁵ Maurilio refuses to exclude someone simply because of their origins, or the identity of their parents. Instead, he wants to decide for himself who he will spend time with. After Ognissanti leaves, Maurilio’s younger sister, Rogelia, asks

<<E perché prima l’Ognissanti ha chiamato l’Adamo ‘judío’? Lui è polacco... Uno è del paese da cui viene suo padre, o no?>>
<<Che ne so, - sbotta Cacho, - sarà come per i negros>>.
<<Che negros?>>
<<Come, che negros? Los negros. Possono nascere dove che sia, ma restano negros>>.⁴⁶

This passage raises a number of interesting points, again highlighting the tension between a clearly present diversity and the characters’ desire for ethnic conformity. First of all, there is a back-and-forth movement between national and religious identity, as Ognissanti first refers to Adamo as Polish and then as Jewish. This uncertainty over terminology is mirrored by a linguistic doubling, when Rogelia uses the Spanish word “judío.” Thus, Adamo is referred to using three different words in two languages.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 161.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 161.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 163-4.

Rogelia attempts to understand what makes a person Polish or Jewish, and so proposes that identity is passed down from parent to child. This view conforms with Peppino's earlier quote, but is a simplistic view that does not take into account other factors, such as immigration, or the possibility that Adamo could be both Polish and Jewish, or Polish and Argentine, or all three. It also makes blood the singular determinant of identity, which would prevent any of the members of this band from being Argentine, as they are all children of immigrants.

Rogelia does not have a concrete grasp of identity, and her view precludes a multinational or hybrid identity. Cacho's interjection only complicates the situation by adding race to the mix. He considers Adamo's identity comparable to being black. According to him, being black has nothing to do with birthplace and is, instead, an intrinsic attribute. This is perhaps the only instance of racialization in the book as, according to Cacho, being black is a permanent marker of difference that, unlike ethnicity, will supposedly never disappear.

In addition, as with a number of previously mentioned terms, the use of the Spanish word "negros" distinguishes it from the surrounding text and marks an accent. Putting aside the fact that racial identity is just as culturally determined as national or religious identity, Cacho's statement, like Rogelia's, separates identity from cultural context. However, the confusion in terminology, the inclusion of Spanish, and the inability to agree on a satisfactory explanation for how identity is formed, all serve to undermine the children's attempt at developing simplistic explanations. In addition, these moments of reflection are brief, as the characters are soon reminded of more pressing concerns.

Adults are just as unsure as children of what makes a person belong to one category or another and the confusion between “ebreo/judío” and “polacco” is the clearest example of this. Adamo never states whether or not he is Jewish, but another character is assigned an identity, Jewish, that definitely does not describe him. Jacobo Jaworski is an officer of Polish heritage and narrates: “alla Comisaría molti apostrofano sbrigativamente Jacobo con il soprannome di Judío, anche se lui l’ha spiegato e ripetuto cento volte: non è ebreo per niente, ma soltanto polacco, e perdi piú cattolico; però vagliela a fare capire.”⁴⁷ It is unclear if being Polish is considered better or worse than being Jewish. However Jacobo does not seem to face any other form of discrimination, and the fact that he is a police officer, like Herminio, demonstrates that he is integrated to an extent in Argentine culture and has economic stability. Therefore, while being Polish or Jewish does not appear to have an effect on Jacobo’s integration or acceptance, it is still a marker of difference that he tries to, first, correct by claiming a Polish identity, and then diminish, by saying he is Catholic – a religious identity presumably shared by many in the community.

In the earlier dialogue, Adamo remains silent while Rogelia and Cacho discuss his identity. However, he is the narrator in a subsequent chapter, during which he attempts to find a convincing way of declaring his identity to others. This passage provides an additional example of an attempt to integrate by concealing ethnic difference:

quando capitava che qualcuno gli chiedesse di che nazionalità fosse, Adamo all’inizio rispondeva polacca, ma c’era sempre qualcuno che ribatteva: <<Bugiardo, tu sei judío>>. Adesso ha imparato a rispondere: <<Di Buenos Aires>>, con voce squillante e sicura, guardando fisso gli altri.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Ibid., 27.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 172. An earlier quote is a further example of the confusion between Jewish and Polish as well as of adults’ inability to satisfactorily explain what it means to belong to a group: “Adamo

Adamo sidesteps the confusion between Polish and Jewish by confidently saying that he is from Buenos Aires. In other words, he attempts to erase his accented Polish/Jewish identity by claiming an Argentine one. His situation aligns most closely with Herminio's. Both characters have one identity – Polish or Spanish – are assigned another identity by others – Jewish or Italian – and self-identify as Argentine.

Pariani re-ethnicizes her characters by narrating multiple instances in which distinctions are made on the basis of ethnic (or, in some cases, religious) difference. Throughout, the novel establishes a number of incompatible discourses – the characters' conflicting opinions and the narrated reality. The characters appear unable to conceive of a multinational or hybrid identity, believing that someone can be Italian, or Spanish, or Polish, or Jewish, or Argentine, but no combination of these categories. However, the narrative also presents a number of differing attitudes towards Italians and immigrants in general, demonstrating the fluid nature of categories of nationality, religion, ethnicity, and race. Immigrants and their children, from many different countries, live and work in close contact with one another. This environment suggests a complex intermingling of cultures, following the melting pot theory, the theory of cultural pluralism, or transculturation, the latter which I will elaborate on when analyzing Tizón's novel.

Despite the uncertainty within the narrative concerning Argentina's future, in Pariani's text all conceptions of identity circulate around a vaguely defined but clearly

aveva otto anni quando per la prima volta ha capito che il mondo è complicato: È successo a scuola [...] in cortile dei compagni l'hanno chiamato: <<Judío!>> La sera aveva chiesto a suo padre: <<Pà, che significa essere judío?>> e suo padre [...] aveva detto qualcosa come: <<Il mondo va cosí>> [...] E siccome Adamo insisteva, pà aveva aggiunto che in Polonia [...] molti odiavano i judíos e li ammazzavano. <<Ma perché?>> aveva chiesto di nuovo Adamo. <<Perché sí. Perché erano judíos. Solo per questo.>>” (171).

present concept of Argentine identity, which is thought to be superior to an ethnically accented identity. The characters' concerns are with whether or not they are Argentine, and why this is the case. Moreover, Herminio and Jacobo demonstrate the possibility of socio-economic stability and increased physical safety that the *conventillo* residents currently lack. However, the fact that there is no character who is unambiguously and solely Argentine means that there is no concrete example of what it means to be Argentine and suggests that everyone in Buenos Aires has an accented identity.

Pariani narrates ethnic difference *in the past* – thus introducing an accent into current conceptions of Argentine and Italian identity – but without focusing on racial difference. Unlike the social scientists who study how the concept of race has changed over the decades, contemporary authors like Pariani more broadly demonstrate that the turn of the century was a period in which the borders between categories and between communities were slippery and unstable; “Argentine” and “Italian” were as difficult to define as “Jewish,” “white,” or “black,” and each category was itself heterogeneous.

By re-ethnicizing Italians and other European immigrants, Pariani also re-ethnicizes their descendants– all Argentines today. In addition, she reminds Italians of their own history. This novel does not explicitly compare the events of the narrative to the present-day situation in Italy with immigrants, but is easy to find parallels between views of Italians over a century ago and discourses surrounding immigration into Italy today. Some of her other works clearly make these connections.⁴⁹ This one, instead, presents what life was like for poor Italians in Argentina at the turn of the twentieth century and, largely through conversations between the characters, indicates how this

⁴⁹ Pariani's *Il Piatto Dell'angelo* (Florence: Giunti, 2013) and *Quando Dio Ballava Il Tango* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2002) draw explicit connections between past and present. I will analyze the latter in Chapter 3.

ethnic diversity “disappeared” over time as the descendants of these immigrants integrated completely into Argentine culture.

Transculturation in Rural Argentina: Héctor Tizón’s *Luz de las crueles provincias* (1995)

Tizón re-ethnicizes his Italian immigrant characters like Pariani, but he adds another dimension to his narrative– the divide between rural Northwestern Argentina and urban Buenos Aires. This narrative presents rural Argentine culture as the product of generations of cross-cultural exchanges, and demonstrate that Italians had an impact on Argentine culture everywhere, not just in Buenos Aires. Moreover, through re-ethnicizing Giovanni and Rossana’s son Juan, Tizón reminds his Argentine readers that having an ethnic accent and connections to another country in this time period was a negative marker of difference that could impede assimilation into Argentine culture and, especially, acceptance into the upper class.

While Italy is separated into North and South, Argentina is divided into Buenos Aires and the rest of the country. This division is already clearly defined by the first thinkers and politicians in Argentina. Domingo Sarmiento, an intellectual and President of the Argentine Republic from 1868-1874, lays out the many binaries present in Argentina in the work *Facundo, o Civilización y Barbarie en las Pampas Argentinas* (1845), focusing in particular on that between civilization – represented by Buenos Aires – and barbarism – present in the rest of the country. From the nineteenth to the first half of the twentieth century, many of the Argentine elite believed immigration would tame the wild Pampas and build a strong, civilized nation, a view expressed in the often cited

quote by politician and intellectual Juan Bautista Alberdi, “To govern is to populate.”⁵⁰

Tizón blurs the boundaries between urban and rural Argentina by showing the circularity between them, while still maintaining an accent.

Rural Argentina often occupies a marginal space, as Tizón points out in an interview: “All the focus is on Buenos Aires, including culture, and the interior is being increasingly abandoned.”⁵¹ His writing focuses on borders and boundaries as well as on tensions between different spaces and cultures: “The opposition between North and South, between the provinces and Buenos Aires, is a fundamental axis of conflict in the organization of the [Tizón’s] novels and short stories.”⁵² This divide has an effect on literature, as narratives published in and about Buenos Aires generally have a larger circulation and more influence than other texts.⁵³ The same is true of historical studies of immigration and assimilation, as the wealth of studies on Buenos Aires in particular is not matched by comparable studies of rural assimilation, although there are a few that I will draw from in my analysis. Tizón’s novel serves as a counterpoint to books like Pariani’s, providing a different view of Italian immigration and influence on Argentine culture.

⁵⁰ “Gobernar es poblar.” Juan Bautista Alberdi, *Bases y puntos de partida para la organización política de la República de Argentina* (Valparaíso, Chile, 1852), 15.

⁵¹ “Todo se concentra en Buenos Aires, inclusive la cultura, y el interior está cada vez más abandonado.” Ronda Dahl Buchanan, “Entrevistas: Héctor Tizón,” 42.

⁵² “La oposición entre Norte y Sur, entre la provincia y Buenos Aires es un eje de conflicto fundamental en la estructuración de las novelas y relatos.” Leonor Fleming, “Centros y periferias una voz en la frontera: Héctor Tizón,” *Encuentros y desencuentros* no. 15-16 (Canary Islands: Actas del cuarto congreso internacional del C.E.L.C.I.R.P., 1992): 180.

⁵³ Manzoni states: “In the histories of Argentine literature a large part of what is written in the provinces appears in the dull chapter on regional literature, making it difficult to include it with what is, by inertia, considered the national canon.” “En las historias de la literatura argentina una gran parte de lo que se escribe en provincias ingresa en el desgano capítulo de la literatura regional, lo que vuelve siempre dificultoso la integración a lo que por inercia se considera el canon nacional.” Celina Manzoni, “Migración y frontera en la escritura de Héctor Tizón,” *Hispamérica* 26, no. 78 (Dec., 1997): 29.

The novel leaves the time period of the narrative and Giovanni and Rossana's origins vague, which leads to their life story becoming representative of the larger story of Argentine history. It begins with a familiar narrative of migration: a young couple, Rossana and Giovanni, are married in Italy but then emigrate to Buenos Aires for economic reasons. However, they soon leave Buenos Aires and adapt to a different environment. From the descriptions of technological developments and society in the book, it is clear that the events take place around the turn of the century, but the exact years are never provided.⁵⁴ Moreover, the couple's hometown is unnamed, making it unclear even whether they are Northern or Southern Italian. In fact, for the Northwestern Argentine residents, Italy is such a faraway and unknown place, this divide means nothing to them. One resident, hearing that Giovanni is from Italy, remarks, "En mi vida he oído nada igual."⁵⁵ The large immigrant community in Buenos Aires allows different ethnic groups to maintain some distinctions from one another, by country of origin and even different regions within a country, which we can clearly see in Pariani's novel. The absence of an immigrant community in the Northwest means that Giovanni and Rossana are considered different, but the exact nature of that difference is unimportant and, with Juan, all but disappears.

⁵⁴ Adriana Corda comments on the fact that Tizón never precisely names where or when the narrative takes place: "'cruel provinces': [is a] metonymy that alludes more to a region than to a province." "'cruelas provincias': [es una] metonimia que alude a una región más que a una provincia," *La identidad italiana en la novela argentina a partir de 1980: Discurso e inmigración en textos de Antonio Dal Masetto, Mempo Giardinelli y Héctor Tizón* (San Miguel de Tucumán - Argentina: Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad Nacional de Tucumán, 2004), 142. "the time reference of the narrated action: the beginning of the twentieth century, although it could be the end of the nineteenth." "el referente temporal de la acción narrada: principios del siglo XX aunque también puede ser fines del XIX," (Ibid., 149).

⁵⁵ Tizón, *Luz de las cruellas provincias*, 177.

Giovanni and Rossana's new home at first seems to be populated entirely by native Argentines, which conforms to how past scholars and politicians have viewed Northwestern Argentina. When Giovanni asks a new colleague where he was born, the man replies, "Todos hemos nacido aquí,"⁵⁶ adding, "Muchos se van y nadie viene... sólo usted."⁵⁷ While processes of homogenization and whitening in Buenos Aires resulted in Italians and their descendants being assimilated into white Argentine culture, processes of creolization in rural Northwestern Argentina similarly allowed for those residents to fit in with the myth of a white Argentina: "The same cultural policies that downplayed the indigenous origin of the Calchaquí culture [in Northwestern Argentina] emphasized its Spanish elements."⁵⁸ Thus, Juan is born and grows up in an environment in which residents are proud of their regional identity, and consider themselves different from the rest of Argentina, but where the upper class, at least, does not claim an indigenous accent.

In rural Argentina, the main characters interact almost exclusively with other native Argentines. These interactions, and in particular Rossana's subsequent marriage to the *propietario*, are signs of Rossana and Juan's integration into Argentine culture. Numerous studies demonstrate the importance of marriage patterns as a sign of immigrant integration into society. In Samuel Baily's examination of marriage patterns in Buenos Aires in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, he concludes that assimilation took "place more rapidly and completely in Buenos Aires and other urban

⁵⁶ Ibid., 69.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 70.

⁵⁸ Oscar Chamosa, "Indigenous or Criollo: The Myth of White Argentina in Tucumán's Calchaquí Valley," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 88, no. 1 (2008): 74. In this article, Chamosa traces how, over the course of the twentieth century, residents of Calchaquí Valley were initially considered indigenous, then *criollos* of indigenous ancestry, and then *criollos* of largely Spanish descent. In other words, the term "*criollo*" broadened, along with the category white, to include the vast majority of Calchaquí Valley residents, in order to agree with the myth of a white Argentina.

areas than it had in the rural areas.”⁵⁹ However, Eduardo José Míguez’s study of marriage patterns in Tandil, a town over two hundred miles Southeast of Buenos Aires, disproves Baily’s statement. Míguez find that, at least in the case of Tandil, “integration was actually faster than in the large urban centers.”⁶⁰ Tizón’s book corresponds with Míguez’s research, as Rossana’s marriage to the *propietario*, provides an example of exogamy (marriage outside of a social or ethnic group) that facilitates Juan’s integration and acceptance as Argentine. With his mother’s marriage, Juan grows up with a rich Argentine father figure, rather than a poor Italian one, and is able to achieve everything his father Giovanni could not.

Giovanni dies soon after Juan’s birth and the boy grows up with no memory of him, so the influence of Italian language and culture solely exists in the form of Rossana. However, she has little interest in transmitting her home culture to her son. In fact, as she admits to the *propietario*, “Me gustaría ya ser simplemente de aquí. [...] De esta tierra, como todos.”⁶¹ As a young man, Juan is embarrassed by her, and especially by her accent. As an older man he remembers: “me he avergonzado de ellos, no tanto de mi padre, a quien no he conocido y sólo debo el hecho de nacer, sino de mi madre, de su acento al hablar, de sus palabras, de cómo era ella misma.”⁶² Her linguistic accent is a clear marker of difference and the most visible sign of her inability to become fully Argentine. Juan, however, is fully accepted as Argentine, helped in part by his mother’s marriage to the *propietario*. In fact, Juan becomes a judge and inherits his stepfather’s land, becoming a

⁵⁹ Samuel Baily, “Marriage Patterns and Immigrant Assimilation in Buenos Aires,” 47.

⁶⁰ Eduardo José Míguez, “Marriage, Household, and Integration in Mass Migration to Argentina: The Case of Tandil,” in *Mass Migration to Modern Latin America*, eds. Samuel Baily and Eduardo José Míguez (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 2003), 189.

⁶¹ Tizón, *Luz de las crueles provincias*, 102.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 191.

well-respected and important member of society. He does not have an outwardly ethnically inflected identity.

Juan's name is one example of both circularity with Argentina and an Italian accent. When Giovanni first arrives in Northern Argentina, he tours the *propietario's* land with a colleague, Juan. Juan asks Giovanni his name, and when Giovanni responds, says, "Somos tocayos, entonces."⁶³ When Giovanni chooses to name his son Juan, the *propietario* remarks, "¿Juan? Hay muchos."⁶⁴ In choosing this name, Giovanni translates his own name into Spanish. In addition, he chooses a common Spanish name with no hint of an accent. The accent only remains for those who know his father's name. Thus, the son's connection to his father is preserved but hidden, and is translated into an Argentine context. Juan's name becomes even more Argentine when Rossana marries the *propietario* and he adds his new stepfather's last name to his own.⁶⁵ We are not given this last name, but the *propietario* is a well-known and established member of the community, and Juan taking his last name is a sign of him becoming a full member of that community.

While Pariani's text suggests that individuals' strong desire for conformity played a large role in the concealment of ethnic difference, Tizón argues that transculturation leads to the myth of a homogenous Argentine culture. In other words, Argentina today is the result of transculturation – a process of cultural exchange that can occur when different cultural or ethnic communities come into contact with one another. The dominant view of Argentina as inhabited by an undifferentiated population of white

⁶³ Ibid., 69.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 100.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 122.

Europeans overlooks this history of intermingling between many cultures and ethnic communities.

Anthropologist Fernando Ortiz coined the term transculturation in 1940 as a reaction to studies of acculturation. Anthropologist David Frye explains that acculturation was initially used in the 1930s by anthropologists in the United States, “to describe the process of cultural change observed in so-called primitive societies under the onslaught of colonial rule.”⁶⁶ Ortiz, whose research was conducted in Cuba, proposes that transculturation better explains what occurred in Cuba. He writes, “We chose the term transculturation to express the widely varied phenomena originating in Cuba due to the complex transmutations of the cultures present here [...] The true history of Cuba is the history of its intricate transculturations.”⁶⁷ In Frye’s words, “Transculturation [...] emphasized the process of passing from one culture to another.”⁶⁸

In 1982, Latin American literary scholar Ángel Rama argues that Ortiz’s term is applicable to Latin America as a whole. He writes that transculturation,

this conception of the transforming process [...] translates a Latin American perspective [...] It can be confirmed in two ways: in the present – already transcultured – culture exist a set of idiosyncratic values that can be found if you search remote dates in history; simultaneously, there is a creative energy that, with ease, acts both on its particular legacy and on events from the outside.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ David Frye, “Introduction,” in *Writing across Cultures: Narrative Transculturation in Latin America*, Ángel Rama and David L. Frye, eds. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), xv.

⁶⁷ “Hemos escogido el vocablo transculturación para expresar los variadísimos fenómenos que se originan en Cuba por las complejísimas transmutaciones de culturas que aquí se verifican [...] La verdadera historia de Cuba es la historia de sus intrincadísimas transculturaciones.” Fernando Ortiz, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1983), 86.

⁶⁸ Frye, “Introduction,” xv.

⁶⁹ “esta concepción del proceso transformador [...] traduce un perspectivismo latinoamericano [...] Nace de una doble comprobación: registra en su cultura presente -ya transculturada- un conjunto de valores idiosincráticos que puede reencontrar si se remonta hasta fechas remotas dentro de su historia; corrobora simultáneamente en su seno la existencia de una energía creadora que con desenvoltura actúa tanto sobre su herencia particular como sobre las incidencias

Latin American culture is clearly a hybrid of indigenous, European, African, and other cultures, not just the process of one (European) culture completely replacing other cultures. Rama employs the term to discuss Latin American literature, focusing on how authors narrate this hybrid multicultural environment that defines Latin American identity.

Tizón declares himself a proponent of hybridity and transculturation, affirming in an article that “We Argentines are hybrid, or *mestizo*, or transcultural. And in this lies our wealth.”⁷⁰ Much of his writing narrates a process of transculturation, with a particular focus on rural Northern Argentina. *Luz de las crueles provincias* in particular shows transculturation on two levels: within rural Argentine culture and in Argentina as a whole. This text proposes that all of Argentine identity is hybrid, even in the rural Northwest, which is generally depicted as largely unaffected by European migration or diverse cultural influences: “The incorporation of the European immigrant to the provincial space is a novelty in Tizon’s narrative.”⁷¹ The novel introduces an Italian accent to rural Argentine culture, and a rural Argentine accent to Argentine national identity.

Tizón re-ethnicizes all of the characters by showing that they are a product of transculturation. However, we are primarily presented with the point of view of the *propietario*, who is a descendant of European immigrants and gives little thought to the pre-existing indigenous populations in the region. In fact, he mentions indigenous

provenientes del exterior.” Ángel Rama, “Los procesos de transculturación en la narrativa latinoamericana,” *Revista de literatura hispanoamericana* (1974): 16-17.

⁷⁰ “Los argentinos somos híbridos o mestizos o transculturados. Y en eso reside nuestra riqueza.” Héctor Tizón, “Transculturación o aculturación,” *Alternativa latinoamericana*. no. 9: 21.

⁷¹ “La incorporación del inmigrante europeo al espacio provinciano es una novedad en la narrativa de Tizón.” Manzoni, “Migración y frontera en la escritura de Héctor Tizón,” 33.

communities only a handful of times, when telling Juan about his ancestors. For instance: “se dedicaron a coleccionar plantas y minerales y a engrandecer las tierras que ocuparon los que antes estaban aquí, a los indios y los animales”⁷² or, a more negative view: “Pues, hasta allí llega esta finca. Antes no valía nada, mis abuelos y mi padre les quitaron estas tierras a los indios, que fueron valientes pero tontos, porque creían en las palabras.”⁷³ The *propietario* clearly considers himself superior to indigenous peoples, and by speaking of them in the past tense, suggests that they no longer exist. In another moment, he says that all residents of the region had immigrant ancestors, again ignoring previous residents. In his first meeting with Giovanni and Rossana, Giovanni explains, “Bueno, soy un recién llegado y necesito trabajar, vivir,” to which the landowner replies, “Todos lo somos. Todos hemos venido alguna vez.”⁷⁴ Thus, he considers Giovanni and Rossana to be only the most recent arrivals in an already hybrid (European) community.

While the view of Northwestern Argentina as inhabited solely by those with immigrant ancestors appears to be shared by the members of upper class society, the narration shows a constant presence of lower class residents, who may have closer indigenous ties. We are given only brief glimpses of these characters, generally through their interactions with the main characters, but the description of both the housekeeper Mamajuana and the unnamed midwife as “*oscura*” seems to refer to their skin color and, thus, indicates that they have some indigenous blood.⁷⁵ For the purposes of my argument, this indifference towards, or obliviousness to, the indigenous presence is an important

⁷² Tizón, *Luz de las crueles provincias*, 102.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁷⁵ Mamajuana is described as “La mujer gorda y oscura” (*Ibid.*, 67) and the midwife as a “mujer flaca y oscura” (*Ibid.*, 98). Interestingly, Juan is described as “gordo y oscuro” (*Ibid.*, 99) but as a toddler “ya no era oscuro como al nacer” (*Ibid.*, 100). This literal whitening of his skin color parallels his path from poor Italian baby to rich Argentine adult.

example of how transculturation can operate differently depending on a person's socio-economic class. It also suggests that embracing an indigenous accent might preclude someone from being a member of the upper class, which is comparable to how being Italian could interfere with assimilating into the community.

There are other moments in the book that show that not everyone can be an accepted member of the community, and thus Italian immigrants like Rossana and Giovanni are less accented than other groups. For instance, one of the workers tells Giovanni that "turcos" are not allowed on the property: "Ya habrá visto usted, tenemos perros adiestrados para perseguir a los turcos, los conocen, los perros, por la sombra de la tupida barba mal afeitada y por el olor."⁷⁶ Gypsies are also stereotyped when approached by one of the *propietario's* cousins, who says to them: "He oído decir que ustedes venden sus mujeres y yo quiero dos, esa gorda y esta otra, que aunque bastante mugrientes están mal."⁷⁷ These negative views of "turcos" and "gitanos" are certainly related to questions of race, socio-economic class, and privilege, in particular in the latter case where the cousin assumes he has the right to not only purchase two women but to take them immediately and pay for them later. In fact, when a white Presbyterian pastor arrives from Kentucky with his wife and daughter, residents accept the strangeness of a religious man having a family because, "los extranjeros suelen tener sus rarezas."⁷⁸

Language is another way in which Tizón challenges views of Argentine homogeneity, narrates transculturation, and emphasizes the tension between urban and rural Argentine identities and cultures. Tizón does not, like Pariani, mix Italian and Spanish. Instead, he introduces a linguistic accent in his writing by including aspects of

⁷⁶ Ibid., 71.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 155.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 109.

rural Argentine speech, which is different from the language of Buenos Aires that generally appears in canonical works of Argentine literature. Sandra Lorenzano states of his writing:

The search for a language different from the hegemonic one, for a language that can account for the separation between this hegemonic language and his own, from a marginal zone, with a strong indigenous presence, but above all the attempt to translate this tension in the literature, connects Tizón with narrators of transculturation.⁷⁹

In an interview, Tizón discusses his decision to write in the language he grew up with and not that spoken in Buenos Aires: “Then, what I wrote did not resemble who people talked at all [...] When [...] I learned to transcribe the essence of this speech, I forgot my preoccupations about Spanish [...] Finding the essence of the hybridity was like finding my own identity.”⁸⁰ Literary scholar Beatriz Sarlo describes his writing as “written in a language that is not the Spanish of Río de la Plata [...] a certain indecision in the use of the *vos* form, in the use of the past tense.”⁸¹ This accented writing both increases rural Argentina’s accent by differentiating it from writing in Buenos Aires and diminishes the accent by incorporating it into Argentine national literature.

⁷⁹ La búsqueda de una lengua diferente a la hegemónica, de una lengua que diera cuenta del desgarramiento entre ésta y la propia, de una zona periférica, con fuerte presencia indígena, pero sobre todo el intento de trasladar esta tensión a la literatura, liga a Tizón con los narradores de la transculturación. Sandra Lorenzano, “Heridas de la historia (memoria y escritura en Héctor Tizón).” in *Norte y sur: La narrativa Rioplatense desde México*, ed. Rose Corral (México: Colegio de México, 2000), 249.

⁸⁰ “Entonces lo que yo escribía no se parecía para nada al habla de la gente [...] Cuando [...] aprendí a transcribir la esencia de ese habla, me olvidé de mis complejos del español [...] Encontrar la esencia de esa hibridación fue tanto como encontrar mi propia identidad.” Ronda Dahl Buchanan, “Entrevistas: Héctor Tizón,” 37-8.

⁸¹ “escrito en una lengua que no es el castellano del Río de la Plata ... un cierta indecisión en el voseo, en los usos del pretérito.” Beatriz Sarlo, “Héctor Tizón, Juan Carlos, Martini, Alan Pauls, *Experiencia y lenguaje. I.*” *Punto de Vista* 18, no. 51 (Apr. 1995): 1.

Juan's story suggests that rising from poverty and assimilating into upper class society means hiding or forgetting your accent. Giovanni sets his son's socio-economic rise in motion when he sells his most prized possession – a book – in order to pay for the one-way train ticket to Northwestern Argentina. In the final pages of the narrative, the reader learns from Juan that the book contained the history of his father's family, and was thus a physical representation of his Italian accent:

Mi padre, cuando había perdido toda esperanza, fue y vendió ese libro, porque era antiguo, ya que perteneció al padre de su abuelo y al padre del padre de su abuelo. Era la historia remota de su familia y cuando lo vendió comenzó a pertenecer a este país. Ahora esa historia ya está vendida, perdida y olvidada.⁸²

This book represents Italy and the past, and selling it signifies Giovanni's decision to cut ties with Italy in order to create a better future for his son. Literary scholar Celina Manzoni comments on the book: "no one will ever know the story it contained, neither the memory of the past, nor the memory of the origin,"⁸³ and Adriana Corda considers it an example of "lost memory."⁸⁴ Without the presence of his father or of the book, it is easy for Juan to grow up with little knowledge of his Italian heritage, or interest in learning about it.

Juan's story is an example of how assimilation can lead to a loss of difference, as he loses the majority of his Italian heritage in the process of becoming Argentine. As an elderly man, he reflects on the embarrassment he felt at his Italian heritage and realizes he still does have an Italian accent:

⁸² Ibid., 200.

⁸³ "nadie sabrá nunca cuál era la historia que contenía, ni la memoria del pasado, ni el recuerdo del origen." Celina Manzoni, "Migración y frontera en la escritura de Héctor Tizón," *Hispanica* 26, no. 78 (Dec. 2000): 34.

⁸⁴ "la memoria perdida." Adriana Corda, *La identidad italiana*, 158.

La peor de las ingratitudes o del desamor es avergonzarse de sus propios padres. Pero ya no puedo remediarlo. En muchos momentos, hasta la mera existencia del viejo baúl con el que llegaron me avergonzaba, así como la historia esa, que nunca quise que se mencionara, la del libro que mi padre vendió al llegar y que sirvió para hacer el largo viaje hasta aquí. Pensaba que todo eso iría a borrarse, a desaparecer con el tiempo, pero el tiempo no borra nada, añade y uno, cuando envejece, comienza a ver, con la inquietante y temible claridad de la infancia, lo que creíamos olvidado o sepultado para siempre.⁸⁵

In the end, despite Giovanni literally selling his family history, Rossana's desire to be Argentine, and Juan's own rejection of his Italian heritage for the majority of his life, an accent remains. Juan has socio-economic success, but at the cost of losing his family history. Thus, while Pariani's novel does not provide an example of an un-accented Argentine, in Tizon's novel Juan's stepfather serves as a model of Argentineness that Juan strives to emulate. Yet, Tizón shows that even supposedly un-accented Argentines like Juan and his stepfather are accented if you look hard enough. However, in both books, having less of an accent correlates with having a higher social status and economic security.

Along with demonstrating the influence of Italian immigration on life in rural Argentina, Tizón's novel explores the tension between rural and urban Argentina. He alternates between highlighting differences between the two and minimizing those same differences. For instance, Tizón increases the circularity between rural Northern Argentina and Buenos Aires by revealing an Italian accent in the former region. Northern Argentines are accented just like *porteños* are, which affirms the dominant idea that most Argentines are of Italian descent. However, he also hints at an indigenous influence in rural Argentina, which supports the view of this region as less European. In both cases,

⁸⁵ Tizón, *Luz de las crueles provincias*, 191.

Argentine identity is not at all uniform and constantly changes as individuals come into contact with one another and with different languages, cultures, and ethnicities. By re-ethnicizing the protagonists of the narrative, Tizón re-ethnicizes an area of rural Argentine generally viewed as ethnically homogenous while also showing how this ethnic diversity has been largely forgotten.

Limited Circularity, Persistent Accent

By re-ethnicizing Italian immigrants, and more broadly Argentines as a whole, Pariani and Tizón reveal the ethnic heterogeneity and processes of transculturation present in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Argentina. Their novels indicate a lack of any meaningful circularity between Italy and Argentina in this time period, as most Italian immigrants broke off all contact with their country of origin and focused on creating lives for themselves in their new home. In fact, circularity with Italy and taking pride being ethnically different can be a disadvantage to those craving to assimilate and achieve a level of economic stability. However, despite the absence of a transatlantic circularity, an Italian accent remains. Pariani and Tizón portray a hybrid and unstable Argentine identity, accented by Italian and other cultures, and also (Pariani in particular) highlight the heterogeneity of Italian culture and identity.

Furthermore, these works suggest the potential for a new form of circularity between Italy and Argentina in the present day. The very existence of a literature in both countries that narrates the history of Italian immigration to Argentina provides proof that these countries have a shared history. While Pariani and Tizón's characters are unable to

maintain any meaningful level of circularity with Italy, the authors maintain that their stories deserve to be told and this history should be remembered.

Pariani and Tizón's narratives only hint at the potential consequences of an accented national identity, or a contemporary society that acknowledges its own ethnic multiplicity. The works I discuss next – Syria Poletti's *Gente conmigo* and Mariangela Sedda's *Oltremare* and *Vincendo l'ombra* – take this argument a step further, demonstrating the increased accent that results from a text-based circularity in a more recent time period. These novels, set during Fascism in Italy and then Peronism in Argentina, highlight the role of politics and the State in deciding the boundaries of national identity. In this context, the role of the cultural translator in translating documents and maintaining transatlantic correspondence between immigrants and their families is crucial.

Chapter 2

Translating Documents and Letters

During the first half of the twentieth century, two World Wars and political upheaval in both Italy and Argentina often made it difficult for people and information to cross national borders.¹ Many were unable to emigrate for medical reasons, while the threat of censorship placed limits on what could be discussed in written correspondence. This chapter focuses on three novels by two authors – Syria Poletti’s *Gente conmigo* (1961) and Mariangela Sedda’s *Oltremare* (2004) and *Vincendo l’ombra* (2009) – that explore how linguistic and cultural translation can facilitate migration across borders and allow communication to continue between Italy and Argentina.² I analyze how Poletti’s translator protagonist’s linguistic translations of documents helps culturally translate her immigrant clients, assisting their integration into Argentine culture. I then turn to the role of letters as cultural translation in Sedda’s novels, which allow two sisters to remain present in one another’s lives. These novels indicate the power of translation to bridge

¹ For a broad overview of the history of Italian migration to Argentina, including this time period, see Fernando Devoto, *Historia de los italianos en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2006), also available in Italian: *Storia degli italiani in Argentina*, trans. Federica Bertagna (Rome: Donzelli, 2007).

² There is some confusion regarding the original publication date of *Gente conmigo*. My edition of the book states that it was first published in 1962, but on the back cover mentions that it was distinguished in the Concurso Internacional de Novela in 1961. Federica Rocco outlines the inconclusive research on this in “Produzione letteraria argentina tra gli anni ‘40 e gli anni ‘90,” in *Ancora Syria Poletti. Friuli e Argentina due Realtà a Confronto* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2005), 14.

borders and distances, but also its limitations, suggesting that a transatlantic connection based solely in writing cannot be maintained indefinitely.³

Born in Pieve di Cadore in 1922 and raised in Sacile, in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Syria Poletti immigrated to Buenos Aires in 1939, learned Spanish, and published novels, short stories, and children's books in her adopted language.⁴ *Gente Conmigo* is her first novel, and represents an initial exploration of the themes that would reappear in much of her writing: Italian emigration, marginalization, physical deformity, and what she calls the *oficio*, or vocation, of writing. This text is published decades prior to my other primary texts, and therefore arises out of a different cultural context. However, I am one of several scholars who consider Poletti's writing to be certainly comparable with that of later authors.⁵ As Italian literary scholar Susanna Regazzoni writes of Poletti: "The author demonstrates a sensibility towards nineteenth- and twentieth-century transoceanic migration, which would not become widespread in Argentinian narrative until later."⁶

Gente conmigo takes place in the 1950s and narrates the story of Nora, a young Italian woman from a small town in Friuli-Venezia Giulia. Nora emigrates to Buenos Aires and becomes a translator, primarily assisting poor Italian immigrants with the

³ Parts of this chapter, in particular the analysis of Poletti's novel, have been modified and are forthcoming in an article: "Performative Translations in Syria Poletti's *Gente conmigo*," *California Italian Studies* 6.

⁴ Her other novel is *Extraño oficio* (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1971). Other published works include short story collections *Línea de fuego* (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1964) and *Historias en rojo* (Buenos Aires: Calatayud, 1969) as well as children's book *Las hadas hacen dedo* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones de Arte Gaglianone, 1990).

⁵ See Iliaria Magnani, *Tra memoria e finzione: l'immagine dell'immigrazione transoceanica nella narrativa argentina contemporanea* (Reggio Emilia: Diabasis, 2005); Susanna Regazzoni, "Italia Argentina una historia compartida: Syria Poletti inmigrante italiana, escritura argentina," *Dimensões* 26 (2011): 60-75; Federica Rocco, "Produzione letteraria argentina," 13-28.

⁶ "La autora demuestra una sensibilidad hacia la migración transoceánica de los siglos XIX y XX, que sólo más tarde se difundirá en la narrativa argentina." Susanna Regazzoni, "Italia Argentina una historia compartida," 67.

necessary paperwork to bring family members to Argentina. She soon meets and falls desperately in love with Renato, a fellow Italian who belongs to the upper class, and begins translating documents and signing off on translations for his friends. The novel's structure alternates between the present – when Nora is waiting to be put on trial as a result of the translations signed for Renato – and a recounting of past events, through Nora's diary, reflections, and conversations with others.

Mariangela Sedda is a Sardinian author whose novels, short stories, poems, and plays often focus on the lives of Sardinians as a means of recounting important moments in Sardinian history.⁷ Her writing is characterized by the use of the Sardinian language, whether introduced into the Italian text, as in the books I will examine, or as a bilingual Italian-Sardinian text.⁸ *Oltremare* and *Vincendo l'ombra* are a two-part series following the lives of two sisters: Grazia, who immigrates to Argentina, and Antonia, who remains in Italy.⁹ They are primarily written in the form of letters between the sisters from 1913-1943, thus spanning both World Wars, a 1930 military coup in Argentina, and Fascism in Italy.

I examine Poletti and Sedda's writing through the lens of translation, including the broad concept of cultural translation, which serves as an example of a circular accent.

The act of translation creates a bridge between two or more languages and cultures and,

⁷ Sedda's play *L'esilio dei re* (Cagliari: Condaghes, 2000) tells the story of when king of Sardinia Carlo Emanuele Ferdinando Maria di Savoia was forced out of his lands in Piedmont and spent time in Sardinia. The play *Scavi: Storie di miniera* (2004) consists of numerous short scenes that collectively recount the lives of Sardinian miners from the 1930s to the 1950s.

⁸ Sedda's bilingual texts include the poetry collection, *Sos pizzinnos po sa poesia* (Cagliari: La Riflessione, 2009) and the novel *Dame e Cavalieri. Cavalleros e Damas* (Ravenna: Sensoinverso Edizioni, 2014).

⁹ These texts were adapted into the theatrical performance, *Dal vapore ti scrivo* (2009). For more information, see: http://www.notomusicafestival.com/notomusicafestival.com/content_detail.asp?IDScheda=129&IDsezione=4&Categoria=31&principale=0.

as no translation is identical to its original, an accent always remains. Likewise, the Italian-Argentine characters living in Argentina who populate these books cannot simply become Argentine. Their attempts to disguise, or minimize, aspects of their identity show that having an accented identity in this time period still may hinder their assimilation, and that circularity between Italy and Argentina remains limited. Drawing from studies of the ethics of translation and social interactions as performance, I analyze how Poletti's protagonist negotiates the gray space between languages in her work translating documents to help clients immigrate to and then settle in Argentina. Then, utilizing studies on epistolary literature and self-censorship in immigrant letter writing, I examine the letters in Sedda's novels as examples of cultural translation that demonstrate this form of communications' advantages and its limitations. This chapter is less historically grounded than the previous one, because the concept of translation is not historically bound in the same way as terms such as ethnicity and race. However, I will discuss the interactions between politics and migration when they impact the mobility of immigrants and information.

Linguistic and Cultural Translation

The authors I examine in this chapter focus on the tension between translation and untranslatability, highlighting the limits of translation and how translation can function as a circular accent. In addition, these texts move beyond linguistic translation, considering translation in a metaphoric sense as well. The characters in these works must navigate between multiple cultures and identities, and many are unable or unwilling to translate themselves completely to integrate into another culture.

Initially, translation was viewed as the act of substituting words in the original language with words in a target language that communicated the same meaning. However, since the late 1900s, scholars of translation have increasingly come to view translation as consisting of more than just language, but also culture. In 1990, Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere stressed what they called “The ‘Cultural Turn’ in Translation Studies” to describe this change in the field: “Since languages express cultures, translators should be bicultural, not bilingual,” and “translation as an activity is always doubly contextualized, since the text has a place in two cultures.”¹⁰

My interest in translation is as a literary scholar, not a translator, and thus my focus is on cultural, rather than solely linguistic, translation. Homi Bhabha writes that translation is characterized by “borderline negotiations” and is a “space of translation of cultural difference *at the interstices*.”¹¹ Bhabha also connects translation and migration, writing that the “liminality of migrant experience is no less a transitional phenomenon than a translational one.”¹²

The cultural turn in Translation Studies and the rise of the expression cultural translation in Cultural Studies were two independent phenomena that, however, soon became linked. In a chapter entitled “The Translational Turn in Cultural Studies,” Susan Bassnett discusses this developing interest and also outlines the commonalities between these two fields, concluding that “The study of translation, like the study of culture, needs a plurality of voices. And, similarly, the study of culture always involves an examination

¹⁰ Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere, *Translation, History, and Culture* (New York : Pinter Publishers, 1990), 11.

¹¹ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 319, 321.

¹² *Ibid.*, 321.

of the processes of encoding and decoding that comprise translation.”¹³

Studies of translation in a more metaphorical sense have proliferated since the 1990s, and some translation scholars have lamented that the concept of translation has become largely disconnected from its original meaning. For instance, scholar of translation Harish Trivedi suggests that “it may be time for all good men and true, and of course women, who have ever practised literary translation, or even read translation with any awareness of it being translation, to unite and take out a patent on the word ‘translation,’ if it is not already too late to do so.”¹⁴ Others, such as Robert J.C. Young, literary critic and scholar of translation, signal that the study of translation, including in a metaphorical sense, has been carried out in a variety of fields for centuries and, perhaps the focus should be placed, instead, on cultural translation: “complaints should be probably directed at the invention, and widespread use, of this particular term [cultural translation], rather than the extension of the use of the term ‘translation’ as such into other domains.”¹⁵

The broad applicability of the concept of “translation,” especially when examining translation between cultures, attests to the usefulness of this term to studies of migration literature. However, it also highlights the fact that there is no commonly-agreed-upon definition of cultural translation.¹⁶ I will focus my attention on how the

¹³ Susan Bassnett, “The Translational Turn in Cultural Studies,” in *Constructing cultures: Essays on Literary Translation* (Bristol, PA: Multilingual Matters, 1998), 138-9.

¹⁴ Harish Trivedi, “Translating Culture vs. Cultural Translation,” in *In Translation: Reflections, Refractions, Transformations*, eds. Paul St-Pierre, and P C. Kar. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub, 2007), 285.

¹⁵ Young’s text is one of several responses that make up “Translation Studies Forum: Cultural translation,” *Translation Studies* 3, no. 3 (2010): 359.

¹⁶ Harish Trivedi writes, “Such abuse or, in theoretical euphemism, such catachrestic use, of the term translation is, as it happens, mirrored and magnified through a semantic explosion or dilution in popular, non-theoretical usage as well” (“Translating Culture vs. Cultural Translation,”

written language facilitates or hinders the characters' ability to culturally translate themselves into a new linguistic and cultural context. In other words, I look at how the written language is able (or not) to mediate between Italian and Spanish, Italy and Argentina, as well as how this linguistic negotiation affects the cultural identities of the characters.

Performative Translations in Syria Poletti's *Gente conmigo* (1961)

Poletti's writing was not widely known in Italy during her lifetime, a fact she attributed to her decision to largely abandon the Italian language in order to improve her Spanish and establish herself as an Argentine author. She writes of this choice:

“Changing languages was like changing souls. I think it was the most difficult; the most painful and, perhaps, the most beautiful.”¹⁷ In private correspondence, she lamented what she considered a rejection in Italy of her work.¹⁸ However, despite the language barrier, some Italians did read Poletti's work during her lifetime and the interest in her writing within the field of Italian Studies has only grown since her death in 1991.¹⁹

285). An editorial note introducing an article on cultural translation further highlights the ambiguity of the expression: “‘Cultural translation’ is a term currently much used in a range of disciplines – both inside and, perhaps especially, outside translation studies itself – and in very different ways. Many of these approaches seem to promise valuable insights into cultural practices of transfer, yet the precise use of the term ‘cultural translation’ remains controversial.” (*Translation Studies* 2, no.2 (2009): 196).

¹⁷ “Cambiar de idioma fue como cambiar de alma. Creo que fue lo más difícil; lo más doloroso y, quizá, lo más hermoso.” Syria Poletti, *...Y llegarán Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Vinciguerra, 1989), 65.

¹⁸ Chiara Gallo examines a number of Poletti's private letters in “L'inedito epistolario di Syria Poletti,” in *Contributo friulano alla letteratura argentina*, Ed. Silvana Serafin (Rome: Bulzoni, 2004), 71-93. Silvana Serafin also discusses Poletti's regret, as well as the limited recognition Poletti's writing has received in Italy in “Syria Poletti: biografia di una passione,” in *Immigrazione friulana in Argentina: Syria Poletti Racconta...*, ed. Silvana Serafin (Rome: Bulzoni, 2004), 9-24.

¹⁹ Chief among the scholars whose work helped integrate Poletti's writing into the field of Italian Studies is Silvana Serafin, who over the past decade has published numerous articles and edited

Poletti is one of my most studied primary authors, particularly within Italian Studies. However, the scholars who analyze her writing do not focus their attention on translation. Instead, literary criticism related to Poletti's use of language tends to either analyze her mastery of the Spanish language or to comment on her use of colloquial speech, particularly her use of dialogue.²⁰ More broadly, numerous articles examine the powerful role writing plays in her work, as a means of uncovering the truth as well as a bridge between past and present, and between Italy and Argentina.²¹ Poletti herself affirms: "Writing and living are the same."²² Serafin comes closest to the lens through which I will examine Poletti's novel when she writes: "Implicit is the ideology [in Poletti's writing] that interprets literature as action."²³ Similarly, I focus on translation as action in *Gente conmigo*. I draw loosely from the concept of "performative utterance" as

volumes as well as founded the Centro Internazionale Letterature Migranti (CILM) at the University of Udine and its associated journal, *Oltreoceano*, all which have helped integrate Poletti's writing into the field of Italian Studies. I cite Serafin's articles and edited volumes throughout this chapter. For information on CILM: <http://oltreoceano.uniud.it/it> and for information on the journal *Oltreoceano*: <http://oltreoceano.uniud.it/it/publicazioni/riviste/rivista-oltreoceano>.

²⁰ Sagrario del Río Zamudio, "Syria Poletti y su lengua en *Gente conmigo*," in *Ancora Syria Poletti: Friuli e Argentina due Realtà a Confronto*, ed. Silvana Serafin (Rome: Bulzoni, 2005), 63-81; Sagrario del Río Zamudio, "Syria Poletti y su lengua en *Extraño oficio*," in *Immigrazione friulana in Argentina: Syria Poletti Racconta...*, ed. Silvana Serafin (Rome: Bulzoni, 2004), 25-34; Mara Donat, "El género policíaco en Syria Poletti: un estilo y un lenguaje propios," in *Ancora Syria Poletti: Friuli e Argentina due Realtà a Confronto*, ed. Silvana Serafin (Rome: Bulzoni, 2005), 55; Renata Londero, "Alla ricerca del contatto: la mimesi dell'oralità nei racconti di Syria Poletti," in *Ancora Syria Poletti: Friuli e Argentina due Realtà a Confronto*, ed. Silvana Serafin (Rome: Bulzoni, 2005), 83-98.

²¹ Renata Londero, "Alla ricerca del contatto," 84; Susanna Regazzoni, "Italia Argentina una historia compartida," 72; Susanna Regazzoni, "Escribir y vivir es lo mismo: experiencia esistenziale/motivo letterario in Syria Poletti," in *Immigrazione friulana in Argentina: Syria Poletti Racconta...*, ed. Silvana Serafin (Rome: Bulzoni, 2004), 63-74; Federica Rocco, "La donna argentina e la scrittura," *Oltreoceano* 2 (2008): 137-144; Silvana Serafin, "Extraño oficio: Il potere salvifico dell'arte," in *Ancora Syria Poletti. Friuli e Argentina due Realtà a Confronto* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2005), 29-46; Silvana Serafin, "Syria Poletti: la scrittura della marginalità," *Oltreoceano* 2 (2008): 148.

²² "Escribir y vivir es lo mismo." Syria Poletti, *...Y llegarán Buenos Aires*, 71.

²³ "Implicita è l'ideologia [nella scrittura di Poletti] che interpreta la letteratura come azione." Silvana Serafin, "Syria Poletti: biografia di una passione," 22.

theorized by philosopher of language John L. Austin, who explained the various ways in which “the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action.”²⁴ My analysis of Poletti’s novel concentrates on how Nora’s translations perform actions or “do things,” that is, they serve to help her clients assimilate into Argentine society.

I maintain that Nora consistently prioritizes cultural translations over linguistic ones, by breaking the conventions of the latter in order to facilitate the former. I engage with scholar of translation and intercultural communication Anthony Pym’s writing on ethics in translation and sociologist Erving Goffman’s work on social interactions as performance as I examine Nora’s interactions with four clients who request translations from her, as well as her own experiences as an immigrant. These interactions highlight identity as performative, and her translations are likewise performative, helping her clients immigrate to Argentina and adopt a, perhaps hybrid, Argentine identity. This narrative also suggests that these translations may not be necessary once the immigrants have fully integrated in to Argentine culture. In other words, both the circularity and the accent implied by the existence of a translation – as a translation creates a bridge between two languages – may be erased when the original document is no longer necessary.

Poletti’s novel explores the blurred borders of ethics in translation. Nora recognizes the impact her role as a translator has on others, and in fact considers her job an *oficio*, or vocation. She reflects on the words of her grandmother: “el *oficio* debe entrar en la sangre para que sirva.”²⁵ This service to others leads to Nora bending, and at times completely breaking, both the rules of translation and the law. Anthony Pym discusses the role of ethics in translation, dividing ethics into two areas: the first,

²⁴ John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 6.

²⁵ Syria Poletti, *Gente conmigo*, 198.

referring to the translator's presumed "ideal loyalty to a source text, author or sender" and the second, "codes of ethics [...] for the profession of translation."²⁶ Moreover, he maintains that the ultimate purpose of translation is "to improve the intercultural relations with which they are concerned."²⁷ Nora takes this final view to an extreme by prioritizing the physical and social mobility of her clients over the desire to perform a faithful translation. In other words, her loyalty is to her clients and not to the original document or to her profession.

Nora reveals her personal ethical code in her sustained interaction with a poor Calabrian couple and their many children, helping them bring their twelve-year-old son, Rafael, to Argentina. Rafael has a hunchback, the mother explains, "Una jorobita," which prevents him from migrating with the rest of his family.²⁸ Nora's efforts to help bring Rafael to Argentina are a prime example of her empathy for his situation, which leads her to omit crucial information in the translations she performs. When discussing the situation with her sister, Bertina, Nora thinks: "si ella llegara a conocer el problema de esta familia, se empeñaría en que yo lo solucionara," making the assumption that everyone follows the same ethical code. Nora justifies her actions because she has the ability, through translation, to reunite this family. In her first meeting with them, Rafael's mother shows her the boy's medical records, as well as the photograph of his back. Nora attempts to explain that her translations cannot make Rafael's medical condition disappear: "Para mí no es una molestia traducir estos documentos. Es otra cosa. Entiendan: hay que traducirlos tal como están. Y tal como está, constituyen una especie

²⁶ Anthony Pym, *Translation and Text Transfer: An Essay on the Principles of Intercultural Communication* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1992), 151.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 166.

²⁸ Syria Poletti, *Gente conmigo*, 116.

de condena. Con este certificado, su hijo no entrará jamás en el país.”²⁹ When they, confused, ask why such laws exist, Nora struggles to give an adequate response, saying, “Las leyes son... leyes. Se hace en defensa de la gente... Y a veces se vuelvan contra la gente.” The words on Rafael’s medical certificate, combined with Argentina’s laws, indicate only one outcome: Rafael must remain in Italy. Translating the words that name his condition will do nothing to change this.

National borders, by their nature, serve to keep many out and allow only those with the correct documentation in. However, Nora herself is an example of how it is possible to exploit the space between original documents, laws, and physical reality. She has a similar medical condition as Rafael and, on her first attempt to board a ship to Buenos Aires, was also turned away. Her sister, Bertina, found a way to obtain documentation for Nora that allowed her to avoid a medical examination and, thus, migrate.³⁰ From this experience, Nora understands that all laws have loopholes: “La vida impone las leyes y la vida enseña las trampas.”³¹ Just as altered documents allowed Nora to migrate and settle in Argentina, through her work as a translator she can facilitate others’ migration and integration. In the end, Nora removes the photographs of Rafael’s back from his file and writes a letter that lets him forego a medical examination, so that he will be allowed to join the rest of his family in Buenos Aires:

²⁹ Ibid., 118.

³⁰ Ibid., 27.

³¹ Ibid., 28. A non-linguistic loophole that Nora tries to exploit, but without success, is attempting to grant them an audience with Evita Perón, the wife of current President Juan Perón. She hopes that, if they can speak with Evita and explain their situation she will step in and help them, but this effort is unsuccessful (124-5). Politics also becomes relevant in the story of the Calabrian family when the father agrees to carry packages for members of the Communist party in exchange for them arranging for Rafael’s migration. He is caught placing a bomb and placed in jail for a time, receiving no help from those who provided him with the bomb (140-8).

Traduje nuevamente las partidas de Rafael y alteré el texto del diagnóstico. Suprimí toda referencia a enfermedades crónicas y contagiosas. Hice figurare al menor como afectado de leve deformación que no disminuiría en absoluto su idoneidad para el desempeño de tareas útiles. Naturalmente suprimí también ‘esa foto.’³²

Nora’s translation is able to erase Rafael’s medical condition from official records and reunite him with his parents and siblings, but the condition, of course, remains. The fact that translations can change the legal status of a person but cannot cure illnesses is a recurring theme in Poletti’s novel, and Nora feels the effects of this in her own life. During her voyage to Buenos Aires years prior, she reflects on her own situation: “yo era como un producto deteriorado que debía pasar inadvertido, entremezclado con los productos destinados a la exportación; los emigrantes aptos.”³³ Nora, Rafael, and other “unsuitable” or accented immigrants must work harder than others to find a place for themselves in society and Nora, in particular, never feels fully accepted. For this reason, she works to help other immigrants assimilate and achieve a level of acceptance that is impossible for herself.

When Rafael and his family come to thank Nora for her work, he is not the polite, intellectually curious young man she expected. Rafael’s mother told Nora in their initial meeting: “¡Sabe más que un abogado! ¡A los siete años leía el diario!” This led Nora to believe that they had more in common than their medical condition.³⁴ Instead, when she asks him to read an Italian translation of a text from his school notebook he admits he is illiterate: “–¿Por qué no lees? –No puedo...”³⁵ and then attempts to seduce her: “intentó

³² Ibid., 151.

³³ Ibid., 27-8.

³⁴ Ibid., 117.

³⁵ Ibid., 155.

ceñirme de la cintura [...] –Sos una linda mujer...”³⁶ This contrast between how a person is described (or describes himself) and reality becomes even clearer when examining Nora’s work with two other clients: Prince Zedir and Gastón Richard.

Nora’s interactions with the “príncipe Zedir,” are an extreme example of social interactions as theatrical performance. In the 1950s, having analyzed how individuals attempt to present themselves in a certain way, the sociologist Erving Goffman proposed that everyone who takes part in a social interaction operates under a set of guidelines that help this performance run smoothly.³⁷ A flawless performance projects a stable identity (what Goffman calls the self) while awkward or unexpected occurrences can destabilize identity.³⁸ Prince Zedir is a well-known pianist who pretends to be Arab but is actually Northern Italian. The conversations between Nora and him again highlight Nora’s need to feel empathy for a client in order feel justified in falsifying a translation and also demonstrate the role of dialect as a means of informal communication and highlights circularity.

When Nora first sees the Prince up close, after having attended one of his concerts, she realizes he is not as culturally accented as his name implies: “El príncipe Zedir me decepcionó por su baja estatura” and she decides that his eyes are the only sign of his true personality: “Entonces advertí que sus ojos eran auténticos. Digo los ojos porque todo lo demás, barba, palidez, ademanes, eran tan decorativos que parecían

³⁶ Ibid., 157.

³⁷ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1959).

³⁸ Goffman writes: “Audiences tend to accept the self projected by the individual performer [...] as a responsible representation of his colleague-grouping, of his team, and of his social establishment” and, “When an event occurs which is expressively incompatible with this fostered impression, significant consequences are simultaneously felt” (Ibid., 242).

postizos.”³⁹ Then, when Zedir speaks in Italian, he affects a foreign accent: “Su italiano era exótico y como remoto.”⁴⁰ Nora spends much of their subsequent time together attempting to destabilize his performed identity in order to tease out an authentic reaction from him and thus understand his true personality.

Nora and Prince Zedir’s conversations are characterized by constant linguistic negotiations, as they move between French, Spanish, Italian, and the Lombard dialect. Goffman outlines the differences between what he calls two “language[s] of behavior,” the frontstage, which is more formal, and the backstage, which is more intimate and may include the “use of dialect or sub-standard speech” as well as cursing.⁴¹ Goffman also notes: “By invoking a backstage style, individuals can transform any region into a backstage.”⁴² Nora and Prince Zedir’s frequent movement between frontstage and backstage language signals their uncertain relationship with one another. Italian scholar Renata Londero points out “the dynamic between approaching the interlocutor and estrangement from him” in Poletti’s writing, which these conversations exemplify.⁴³ These characters risk a breakdown in communication, not because of limited linguistic ability but, instead, because Nora attempts to use backstage language to highlight the circularity between them, while Prince Zedir prefers to maintain a formal distance.

When Prince Zedir first comes to Nora’s office with documents to translate as part of his application to become an Argentine citizen, their interaction is awkward, as Nora keeps pushing for a backstage language, while Prince Zedir attempts to maintain his

³⁹ Syria Poletti, *Gente conmigo*, 46.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁴¹ Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 128.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ “la dinamica tra avvicinamento all’interlocutore e allontanamento da lui.” Renata Londero. “Alla ricerca del contatto,” 92. Londero uses the short story “El tren de medianoche” in *Línea de fuego* as an example of this.

persona, which risks breaking down in informal situations. When he hands her his birth certificate, she learns his name is Antonio Croatti and that he was born in the province of Cremona. In an attempt to elicit a more authentic reaction from him, she speaks in his dialect:

Hubiese podido hablarle en italiano. Pero me dominó un oscuro afán de escarnecerlo. Entonces, esgrimí su dialecto:

–Chiaravalle es una linda aldea.

–¿Usted es lombarda?

–No.

–Como habla ese dialecto...

–¿Su dialecto? –sonreí son sorna.

–Yo, en realidad, viví muy poco en provincia....⁴⁴

Prince Zedir thinks Nora's use of dialect is an attempt to create a sense of camaraderie between them and immediately distances himself from it, by claiming that he has little knowledge of his hometown and, by implication, the regional dialect. In other words, Nora uses dialect to highlight the circularity between them, while for Prince Zedir, admitting knowledge of the dialect would signal an unwelcome (in his opinion) accent. He has no interest in creating a personal connection with Nora, viewing her as a mere tool through which to obtain Argentine citizenship, while Nora sees him as a fake, who has abandoned his identity in order to obtain fame: "Yo me había dejado subyugar por su personalidad y él sólo me había visto como una máquina de traducir. Y no pude evitar el deseo de que él me sintiera como un ser humano."⁴⁵ She has little interest in helping him if they are unable to move beyond such a superficial connection.

Their conversation continues, as Nora continues to push Prince Zedir to employ a backstage language, and his assumed persona begins to linguistically unravel:

⁴⁴ Syria Poletti, *Gente conmigo*, 50.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

–Me gustaría saber si usted insulta en dialecto o en qué idioma...
–¿Yo? ¿Por qué habría de insultar?
–¡Me refiero a solas! ¿No maldice, no injuria, no manda al infierno?
–Bueno. A veces... En francés.
–Cuidado, príncipe –reí-. Está hablando en italiano... ¡No se olvide del acento exótico!⁴⁶

Nora wants Prince Zedir to admit to using a backstage language by asking him to think of a time when he is alone and angry, thus an instance when he is presumably to be at his most authentic. He again refuses to match her level of informality and says he uses French at such times, which corresponds with his identity as Prince Zedir but not with how Nora expects him to behave when he is alone. As she makes him increasingly uncomfortable, he forgets to concentrate on his speech and his Italian loses its artificial accent. The ellipses in the text are another sign of Prince Zedir's inability to react quickly to Nora's unexpectedly personal questions, and of the emotional distance between these two characters.

Prince Zedir finally explodes in anger, when he asserts that documents cannot encapsulate a person's identity and then reveals some of his real personality: “–Usted creyó saber todo porque tuvo en sus manos unos documentos! ¡Se equivoca! ¡Usted ni siquiera sospecha por qué razones cambié de identidad! ¡En las actas legales no figura la historia del hombre! ¡Y tampoco la verdad de su vida y el porqué de sus actos!”⁴⁷ Nora's initial disappointment at Prince Zedir's behavior blinds her to the fact that, as she knows from her own life experiences, documents do not tell the whole story of a person's life, and may even omit crucial information about a person.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 51.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 52.

Prince Zedir also explains that the creation and adoption of this persona helps him not only attract more attention for his career but also enables him to more easily hide aspects of his personality: “¡El disfraz puede ocultar más reserva que la actitud más autentica! ¡Pero usted nunca podría comprender la mueca que oculta la sonrisa de una máscara!”⁴⁸ After he leaves, Nora learns that he has tuberculosis, and realizes that his exaggerated act is also to hide his illness. She reflects: “Muchas personas saben que el príncipe Zedir es el músico Antonio Croatti. Y todos aceptan el desdoblamiento como un requisito indispensable para alcanzar el éxito. En cambio, ninguno sabe que esté enfermo.”⁴⁹ In other words, he adopts an exotic, but not negative, accent in order to hide his illness, not his Italian accent. Thus, when people learn that he is Italian, they believe they have uncovered the truth of his identity and do not consider the fact that there may be another layer of concealment. From this point, Nora becomes more sympathetic to Prince Zedir’s request and, consequently, more willing to bend the rules for him.

In Nora’s final conversation with Prince Zedir months later, she decides to alter his birth certificate, and conveys her decision through the use of dialect. In a conversation that echoes their first meeting, dialect becomes a way for them to communicate without others understanding them, as well as an intimate, shared backstage language. As his illness progresses, Prince Zedir ends up in a clinic for treatment. After obtaining citizenship, he asks Nora to help him with the paperwork to begin receiving a pension from the Argentine government, but his birth certificate declares him too young to be eligible. His letters to Nora become more desperate over time as he, increasingly sick and

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 54.

with no money, begs her to do what she can to help him.⁵⁰ Finally, Nora visits him and, as they talk, she resolves to alter the birthdate on his birth certificate and to send a translation of the now-altered certificate to the Argentine government. She communicates this decision using dialect:

Entonces, dije en dialecto lombardo:

–Chiaravalle es una linda aldea...

–¿Chiaravalle...?

[...]

–Antonio Croatti: le hablo en su dialecto. Esto debe quedar entre nosotros, Usted no nació en 1907. Nació en 1905. No lo olvide.⁵¹

Once Croatti understands, he replies: “Y por primera vez dijo algo natural y lleno de sentido: –¡Qué lindo es el dialecto!”⁵² In this interaction, Antonio Croatti has become just a man with advanced tuberculosis, with none of the affected speech or mannerisms of Prince Zedir, the well-known pianist and personality. Nora appreciates this authenticity, as reflected in his revealing his vulnerability to her. Thus her use of dialect becomes, not a means of goading him as it was in their first sustained interaction, but a gesture of solidarity, and signals the circularity between them. Croatti’s response, although in Spanish and not dialect, shows an acceptance of their shared heritage and, to revisit Londero’s quote, a sign of “approaching the interlocutor” that is markedly different from his previous distancing language.⁵³ The paperwork for Croatti’s pension is approved, but he dies before receiving his first paycheck. As in Rafael’s case, a translation cannot cure

⁵⁰ His supposed friends no longer contact him, and now refer to him as “pobre Croatti” (57) a sign that his persona can only be maintained when he can feign being healthy.

⁵¹ Ibid., 60.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Renata Londero. “Alla ricerca del contatto,” 92. The fact that the Lombard dialect is not Poletti’s native language (she is Friulian) is another confirmation of her ability to navigate multiple languages and make connections with others in all of them.

Croatti's illness, but Nora's initial translation for him does culturally translate him into an Argentine citizen.

Gastón Richard is similar to Prince Zedir/Antonio Croatti in that he is another Italian member of the upper class who has adopted an exaggerated persona; Gastón Richard presents himself as a gay French fashion designer. However, when Nora attempts to destabilize this performed identity, again using dialect, she finds that the only secret he is hiding is his humble origins. This, in her opinion, is not enough to justify falsifying the translation of the birth certificate that he will use to apply for Argentine citizenship. In fact, she only breaks the rules of translation at her boyfriend Renato's request, admitting to herself, "es la única historia para la que no encuentro justificación ética en mi proceder."⁵⁴ In this case, Nora's unfaithful translation serves to erase her client's true origins and justify his place in the Argentine upper class.

Gastón Richard was born Giuseppe Marcuffi in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, the same Northern Italian region that Nora and Renato are from. When Nora meets him, she suspects that his homosexuality is as much an act as his Frenchness, "una hábil mimetización impuesta por el ambiente."⁵⁵ Thus, any speech act runs the risk of exposing the gap between Gastón Richard's performed and "real" identities. Similar to Prince Zedir, Gastón Richard constantly distances himself linguistically from her with a more formal frontstage language. His first words to her when they meet are, "Parlez-vous français?" – a choice of language that is furthest from their origins or current linguistic environment. When Nora responds in the Italian dialect they both grew up with, saying, "creo que nos entenderemos mejor hablando nuestro dialecto," he is horrified, exclaiming

⁵⁴ Poletti, *Gente conmigo*, 169.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 172.

in French, “¡Imposible! ¡Imposible!”⁵⁶ With his linguistic choices, Gastón Richard emphatically denies his Italian lower-class origins and rejects the connection between himself and Nora implicit in her use of “nuestro.” While they share similar origins, they occupy widely different social spaces in Buenos Aires. Nora remains in constant contact with lower-class Italians and considers herself one of them. Gastón Richard, instead, has culturally translated himself into upper-class society in Buenos Aires. However, his adopted gay, French, upper-class identity is unstable and being in contact with Nora, who is in reality not so different from him, puts that identity at risk.

Nora and Gastón Richard reach an uneasy linguistic compromise that allows their conversation to continue and keeps the performance going. Their conversation settles into a standard Italian, although a contaminated one, and he uses what Nora considers an, “acento divertidísimo: el acento nórdico, el tono [...] del barrio Norte [of Buenos Aires] y [...] las erres a la francesa.”⁵⁷ As is the case for Prince Zedir, speaking in Italian does not undermine Gastón Richard’s assumed French identity. When Renato first tells Nora to translate Gastón Richard’s birth certificate from Italian, not French, she asks, surprised, “¿Y no se hace pasar por francés?” to which Renato replies, “No; ahora no. Todos saben que es italiano.”⁵⁸ Being Italian is not a sign of a negative accent for Gastón Richard, but having lower class origins is. For this reason, Gastón Richard refuses to speak Italian dialect and insists that the translation of his birth certificate legitimize his current social standing.

⁵⁶ Poletti, *Gente conmigo*, 170. It is important to note that, aside from the initial “Parlez-vous français?”, while the narrative voice tells us that Nora speaks in Italian dialect and Richard replies in French, the text remains in Spanish. Other authors, including Laura Pariani and Mariangela Sedda, frequently insert words and phrases from multiple languages into their narratives.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 170.

After their linguistically awkward initial conversation, Nora and Gastón Richard begin discussing her initial translation of his birth certificate, which he finds unacceptable. As they speak, it becomes apparent that Gastón Richard does not want an accurate translation but, instead, one that erases his humble origins. He attempts to convince Nora to stretch the rules of translation to such an extent as to essentially sever the connection between the original and the translation. Gastón Richard is, as written on his birth certificate, the son of a newspaper delivery man “diariero” and a peasant “campesina,” in Italian “giornalaio” and “contadina.”⁵⁹ Gastón Richard, with many expressions of “¡qué horror!” and “¡Dios mío!” explains to Nora that *giornalaio* would be better translated as *periodista*, journalist, while *contadina* is an embarrassing misprint of *contessa*, countess.⁶⁰ This transparent attempt by Gastón Richard to adjust language in order to replace his lower-class origins with a proud and noble lineage represents a desire to justify his current position in the upper class and to erase his connection with the poor.

Gastón Richard becomes increasingly flustered when Nora does not immediately agree to his suggested modifications and, as their conversation progresses, his carefully constructed persona begins to break down linguistically. First, when explaining the supposedly incorrect translation of *giornalaio*, Nora notices that he “replicó olvidándose de la erre francesa.”⁶¹ The power dynamic between the two characters begins to destabilize as it becomes clear that Nora, in her role as a translator, has the ability to ignore Gastón Richard’s requests. As they continue to discuss the word *giornalaio*, Nora asks a question in French, while Gastón Richard continues speaking in Italian.⁶² Finally,

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² “¿Cuál es el otro horror? –dije en francés,” (174).

when Nora continues to question the need to change “peasant” to “countess,” suggesting that the misspelling of “contadina” with two “ds” is an orthographical error and not a complete mistake, he exclaims, “Ma que ortografía coglioni!” in a mix of Italian and Spanish.⁶³ In this moment, when a linguistically correct translation challenges Gastón Richard’s performed identity, that very identity almost entirely breaks down and he inadvertently employs an informal, even vulgar, backstage language. A client’s entrance interrupts their conversation, giving Gastón Richard the chance to recover and adopt his constructed persona once again. In the end, Nora follows his instructions and Gastón Richard is able to become the son of a countess and a journalist, at least according to the Argentine government.

Nora can take such liberties with the translations I have examined so far – for Rafael, Prince Zedir, and Gastón Richard – because, once the translation exists, the original document is no longer needed in Argentina. All of these characters expect to settle in Argentina and remain there, even those who remain in contact with friends and family in Italy. However, the final character I analyze, Valentina, is an example of someone for whom Nora cannot complete a translation, because others in Argentina will report any mistranslations. Valentina’s situation allows me to return to Austin’s reflections on performative utterances, and is a further reminder of the limits of translation.

Valentina is a young Sicilian woman married by proxy to Esteban, a Northern Italian, with a marriage certificate signed before she immigrated to Argentina.⁶⁴ However, during the religious ceremony the day after her arrival, she decides she no longer wants to

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ It is unclear why he is called Esteban, although this is likely the Spanish version of the Italian name, Stefano.

marry him. A conflict arises because, in Valentina's opinion, saying "I do," during the ceremony is an utterance that performs the act of marrying. Thus, when in church she says: "¡No! No quiero casarme! ¡No quiero!" in the church, she believes she is invalidating her signature and is therefore not married.⁶⁵ Everyone else sees signing the marriage certificate as the performative action and the ceremony as just a formality.

Austin discusses the act of saying "I do," as a performative utterance, and then delineates a series of what he calls "infelicities," or "*the things that can be and go wrong*" when a phrase is uttered.⁶⁶ These infelicities can be divided into two categories: misfires, during which "the act in question, e.g. marrying, is not successfully performed at all," and abuses, in which case "the act *is* achieved, although to achieve it in such circumstances, as when we are, say, insincere, is an abuse of the procedure."⁶⁷ Valentina sees the marriage ceremony as a misfire, since she does not say her vows, while Esteban and others consider it an abuse, as her saying the vows does not determine whether or not they are legally married.

Valentina's refusal to believe that signing a piece of paper makes her into a married woman becomes relevant to Nora's translations when the woman requests her services, so that she would be able to work legally in Argentina. The discrepancy between Valentina's official documents, which state that she is married, and her own insistence that she is single, mean that she is unable to obtain a work permit. She asks Nora to translate the necessary documents to say that she is single. Their conversation, in which Nora attempts to explain why such a translation will not resolve Valentina's

⁶⁵ Ibid., 72.

⁶⁶ Italics in original. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, 14.

⁶⁷ Italics in original. Ibid., 16.

predicament, is an example of a case in which Nora is unable to falsify documents, because Esteban has the originals:

- Ante las leyes estás casada.
- ¡Una mujer no puede estar casada por un pedazo de papel!
- Vos firmaste esos papeles.
- ¿Y por una firma me casé? Sé buena: poné ‘señorita’...
- Sería inútil. Descubrirían el error...
- Claro... Porque él tiene otros papeles que dicen que estamos casados.⁶⁸

Nora desperately wants to help Valentina, as she believes that the institution of marriage by proxy is outdated and exploitative, but she can only offer to help Valentina obtain a divorce, which Valentina rejects on the grounds that she does not consider herself married.⁶⁹ Similar to Prince Zedir, whose falsified birth certificate cannot halt the progression of his illness, an unfaithful translation of the documents stating that Valentina is a married woman would do nothing to improve her situation.

Valentina refuses to culturally translate herself into the Argentine context if that means being married to Esteban, and she has no means of returning to Italy. Her case is an example of a failed act of both linguistic and culture translation, and she serves as a reminder to Nora of her inability to fix all of her clients’ problems. Nora learns that Valentina had a difficult life in Sicily, as the eldest child in a poor family. Her love letters to Esteban convince him to send her money and pay for her voyage to Argentina, but she admits to Nora that her only motivation was to leave her life in Italy.⁷⁰ As with Nora’s other clients, Valentina’s personality as expressed in these letters and the signed marriage documents is markedly different from reality. Moreover, Nora is unable to satisfy

⁶⁸ Syria Poletti, *Gente conmigo*, 99-100.

⁶⁹ Part of the reason Nora is so invested in helping Valentina is her view that “El casamiento por poder debería suprimirse” (Ibid., 103).

⁷⁰ Ibid., 77.

Valentina's request to reconcile the two by writing that she is single. In the end, Valentina commits suicide because, "death becomes ultimately the only means of escape."⁷¹ Valentina's story demonstrates how words on a page can change the path of a person's life, and have tragic consequences.

Nora's clients demonstrate varying degrees of success in making lives for themselves in Argentina and becoming Argentine. However, in each of their cases, Nora's linguistic translations only move in one direction, from Italian to Spanish, as do the cultural translation of individuals, from Italian to Argentine. More broadly, this work suggests a future in which the role of the translator may become obsolete, as immigrants and their children become Argentine and have no more use for Italy or the Italian language. This view is most apparent in Nora's own life as, in the final chapter of the novel, Renato leaves her for a young woman from a rich family and compels her to have an abortion. After the procedure, she reflects on its effects: "Pero extirpan todo, ¿sabe? Después, la raíz queda destruida, seca. Y esa cosa muerta sigue doliendo sangre adentro [...] esa cosa muerta lo invade todo."⁷² Nora's abortion represents the end of her family line and also hints at a future in which the role of translator will no longer be needed. Nora's *oficio*, passed down from her grandmother, cannot be passed on to a subsequent generation.

However, despite Renato leaving her, the forced abortion, and Prince Zedir and Valentina's deaths, *Gente conmigo* ends on a somewhat hopeful note, as Nora pushes her own problems aside to devote herself more fully to her vocation: helping others through her writing. She remembers her grandmother's words: "lo que escribiste ya no es tuyo. Es

⁷¹ "la muerte se convierte finalmente en la única salida." Corina S. Mathieu, "Syria Poletti: Intérprete de la realidad argentina," *Sin nombre* 13 no. 3 (April-June 1983): 91.

⁷² Syria Poletti, *Gente conmigo*, 196.

de la gente. Tu oficio es interpretar a la gente, ver por dentro y decir la verdad.”⁷³

Therefore, rather than worrying about the future, or her own problems, Nora chooses to continue “doing things” with her writing, carrying out performative translations whenever possible and not letting setbacks deter her from her work.

Poletti’s novel shows the consequences of a society in which assimilation is viewed as erasing or concealing accents by conforming to the linguistic and cultural norms of Buenos Aires. In this case, translations are revealing insofar as they can facilitate this process of linguistic and cultural translation, whether through removing medical conditions, changing birthdates, or concealing poor origins. When viewed in this light, Nora’s abortion becomes representative of the immigrant experience, during which Italy and the Italian language are excised and leave a hole that cannot be filled, even if an immigrant is able to culturally translate herself into Argentine society. While she and her clients have multi-faceted identities, official documents force them to define themselves by only a handful of characteristics, such as medical condition and nationality, which then signal how accented they are.

Through her role as a bridge between Italy and Argentina, Italian and Spanish, Nora works to make borders more permeable. Thus, her actions call into question the laws that decide who is a “suitable” immigrant and who can become a citizen by proposing a view of a world in which everyone is given a chance to migrate and assimilate into a community. Finally, while *Gente conmigo*’s bittersweet ending indicates that translations, and thus translators, may no longer be necessary once immigrants are accepted into Argentine culture, a 1998 translation of *Gente conmigo* into Italian allows

⁷³ Ibid., 200.

Poletti's words to continue bridging languages and cultures half a century after its initial publication.⁷⁴

Cultural Translation in Mariangela Sedda's *Oltremare* (2004) and *Vincendo l'ombra* (2009)

Translation plays a central role in the three novels I examine in this chapter, but while Poletti's Nora overlooks ethics and the law in her linguistic translations in order to help culturally translate her clients, the sisters in Sedda's books prioritize maintaining their relationship over providing accurate cultural translation in their letters. In other words, an "unfaithful" cultural translation is better than nothing at all. Thus, in order to preserve their emotional bond, they concentrate on similarities between their experiences, gloss over disagreements, and self-censor anything that could either anger the other sister or, in the latter novel, attract the notice of censors. In other words, highlighting circularity is of paramount importance. These narratives explore the limits of letters as cultural translation, suggesting that distance, time, and self-censorship ultimately result in transatlantic correspondence ceasing.

In Sedda's narratives, letter writing is an example of a circular accent, simultaneously evidencing the similarities and differences between the two sisters' lives. In addition, epistolarity is cultural translation in action. Janet Altman, writing about epistolary literature, outlines the tension inherent in correspondence by letters: "Given the letter's function as a connector between two distant points, as a bridge between sender and receiver, the epistolary author can choose to emphasize either the distance or the

⁷⁴ Syria Poletti, *Gente con me*, translated by Claudia Razza (Venice: Marsilio, 1998).

bridge.”⁷⁵ This opposition between the letter as bridge and the letter as distance or barrier is comparable to the task of translation.⁷⁶ The letter writers in Sedda’s two books are cultural and linguistic translators, between Italy and Argentina, and between three languages: Italian, Sardinian, and Spanish. They must constantly mediate this tension between similarity and difference, emotional proximity and physical distance, as they attempt to convey their experiences in two linguistically and culturally different communities so the other reader can understand them.

Like Poletti’s novel, Sedda’s narrative highlights the impermeability of borders for those with medical conditions. Antonia remains in Sardinia because she suffers from epilepsy and, in her first letter to Grazia, she writes that their mother, “quando mi guarda dice che peccato che non mi prendono all’Argentina per la mia malattia perché anche io potevo andare a cercare fortuna.”⁷⁷ Years later, after having fallen in love with an Austrian, Grazia wonders if marrying him would have provided a loophole: “Con un marito austriaco forse in Argentina mi facevano entrare anche malata.”⁷⁸ Unlike Nora and her clients, Antonia and Grazia are unable to exploit any loopholes and Antonia does not emigrate.

Frequently, particularly in the first years of their separation, the sisters focus on the circularity between Argentine and Italian language and culture. For instance Grazia, in Argentina, comments on the similarities between Spanish and Sardinian. Speaking of Spanish, she writes: “Questa lingua è come una parente che non hai confidenza ma si

⁷⁵ Janet Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982), 13.

⁷⁶ Altman later outlines the bridge/barrier polarity: “epistolary narrators regularly make it emphasize alternately, or even simultaneously, presence and absence, candor and dissimulation, mania and cure, bridge and barrier” (43).

⁷⁷ Mariangela Sedda, *Oltremare*, 14.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 105.

vede che ci somiglia.”⁷⁹ They also mention how often they think about one another, and of the conversations they have with others to attempt to bridge the distance between them. For instance, Grazia writes, “Anche se le mie parole ti arrivano poche volte in un anno, ogni giorno [...] dico ai figli cosa starà facendo zia Antonia e anche per le creature sei sempre presente nella famiglia.”⁸⁰ In this way, the sisters remain relevant in each other’s lives and differences, whether linguistic or cultural, are made familiar through comparisons to shared knowledge and experiences.

This strong bond between the sisters is most clearly expressed in how they end each letter, with a version of the affectionate phrase: “Da tua sorella che mai ti dimentica.” Italian scholar Emilia Perassi discusses what she calls this “liturgical formula,” writing that these “bridging words [are] maintained with meticulous regularity during the period of distance and separation.”⁸¹ Thus, regardless of the content of the rest of the letter, the ending emphasizes the letter’s role as a bridge and reaffirms the connection between family members on both sides of the Atlantic. In addition, while its substance remains the same over the decades, its contents change when their mother in Italy dies, and then evolves to account for Grazia’s growing family.⁸²

The sisters clearly want to remain present in one other’s lives. However, letter-writing is an inherently unstable form of communication. As Altman says, “In letter

⁷⁹ Ibid., 18.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 103.

⁸¹ “formula liturgica.” “parole ponte [sono] mantenute con minuziosa costanza nel tempo della lontananza e della separazione.” Emilia Perassi, “Scrittrici italiane ed emigrazione argentina,” *Oltreoceano* 6 (2012): 105.

⁸² It first includes the sisters’ mother, with whom Antonia lives, then grows to include Grazia’s children and, in 1941, her daughter, Antonietta’s fiancé. In addition, Grazia’s mixed Italian, Sardinian, and Spanish in her writing at times affects even this final sentence. In April, 1936 she writes, “Siempre pensando en ti, tua sorella Grazia che mai ti dimentica” (111) and in October of the same year, “A chentànnos chin salute, tua sorella Grazia e famiglia che mai ti dimentica” (120). I will explore the significance of this contaminated writing in a bit.

correspondence, any letter may be the last one. At the same time, at any time communication can resume with a new letter by either party.”⁸³ In other words, cultural translation will continue only as long as the transatlantic correspondence does. Prior to the advent of Fascism and censorship, one argument in particular puts the sisters’ continued communication at risk and highlights the fragility of their relationship. In 1916, Antonia falls in love with an Austrian war prisoner, Franz, and Grazia strongly disapproves of their relationship: “Sto preoccupata per te sorella mia [...] Cosa ti può promettere uno che non parla la tua lingua, uno straniero? un nemico?”⁸⁴ Their disagreement intensifies over a series of letters and, from November 1917 to January 1919, their contact is only sustained through letters between two of their friends.⁸⁵ The situation only resolves itself when Franz dies and Antonia resumes communication with a short letter. Grazia replies with an apology: “Perdona, tutto quello che ho scritto non era per male ma per dovere. [...] Antonia mia, colpa non ne avevi se ti aveva voluto un nemico, ma non eravate destinati.”⁸⁶ This incident highlights the fragility of a relationship maintained solely through letter writing. A temporary disagreement could easily become a permanently severed connection, and the end of cultural translation. It also highlights the importance of being a part of a community that supports the transatlantic relationship. Grazia and Antonia’s friends ensure that news still travels between them while they are angry. Without their assistance, the letters may have stopped entirely.

Antonia’s relationship with Franz is the most dramatic instance in *Oltremare* of the cultural translation between Italy and Argentina being put in jeopardy. However, in

⁸³ Altman, *Epistolarity*, 148.

⁸⁴ Mariangela Sedda, *Oltremare*, 59.

⁸⁵ In her last letter to Grazia, on October 21, 1917, Antonia tells her, “ti scrivo ma è l’ultima volta se tu seguiti a dire queste cose” (Ibid., 64).

⁸⁶ Ibid., 87.

the latter part of *Oltremare* and the entirety of *Vincendo l'ombra*, the changing political situation in both countries complicates the sisters' correspondence. In several letters sent in the 1920s, Antonia cautions Grazia to be careful when discussing politics. Then, the final letter in *Oltremare*, dated February 4, 1928, is memorized by a Sardinian traveling to Argentina, then later written down and delivered to Grazia. In it, Antonia explicitly tells Grazia:

Cara sorella, in questo brutto mondo bisogna dirsi solo bugie e non quello che pensiamo e sappiamo. Adesso è male dire che il latte e il formaggio ai pastori glielo pagano una miseria e la gente in paese lavora per niente e si sta peggio di prima della guerra. Scriviamoci le nuove delle nostre semplici vite, scriviamoci dell'affetto nostro, della salute, delle stagioni, delle nostre piccole soddisfazioni [...] perché fuori l'aria del mondo sporca tutto e le parole le dobbiamo maneggiare come dinamite accesa.⁸⁷

Both sisters take this to heart, and *Vincendo l'ombra* is full of innocuous anecdotes within the text of the letter, only hinting at the many difficulties they experience in their lives. In this way, as I will now show, they resist what they call the “ombra” of censorship.⁸⁸

In *Vincendo l'ombra*, the sisters self-censor their letter-writing both to evade censors and to withhold information that could anger the other sister or otherwise put their continued relationship at risk. This self-censorship is reflected in what Antonia calls a “mutilated” writing.⁸⁹ Both sisters learn to move beyond linguistic borders as well as

⁸⁷ Ibid., 184.

⁸⁸ This threat of censorship is never made explicit, as there is no clear indication that any of the letters are tampered with. Only one letter is lost in transit, a letter from Antonia dated July, 25 1939. The letter briefly mentions Italian troops in Albania and expresses the importance of remembering their recently dead brother, who was perhaps active in Argentine politics. However, it is impossible to know whether the letter was censored or simply lost and, if the former, why. Neither sister speculates on this.

⁸⁹ This phrase recalls Gabriele D'Annunzio's reaction after Italy did not receive the land promised after World War I, when he coined the expression “vittoria mutilata,” (Gabriele D'Annunzio, “Vittoria nostra, non sarai mutilata,” *Corriere della Sera*, Oct. 24, 1918).

beyond the boundaries of the letter in an attempt to continue their communication.

Antonia, in Italy, begins keeping a journal, in which she writes her many experiences and thoughts that she is unable to include in her letters to Grazia. Grazia, instead, employs an increasingly contaminated writing. This mixed Italian, Sardinian, and Spanish expresses her hybrid identity but also reflects the increasingly complicated political and personal situation in which she finds herself. However, this “mutilated,” or accented, writing limits their ability to perform cultural translation in their letters.

In her private diary, Antonia complains frequently about the shallowness of her letters and her inability to write freely to her sister in Argentina. Early on, in 1934, she writes “Sempre è mutilato quello che scrivo a Grazia.”⁹⁰ Then, two years later:

“Rispondere a mia sorella mi costa fatica. Sempre di più. Pure questa volta ho scritto falsità e credo anche Grazia [...] Temo l’ombra che legge le mie lettere. Ce l’ho sempre alle spalle.”⁹¹ However, letters are her only means of maintaining ties with her family in Argentina. Historian David Gerber, in a study of immigrant letters, writes that letters express:

the commitment to preserve a bond between individuals. [...] There are a variety of obvious reasons [...] why correspondents might not choose to tell the truth to protect the people with whom they correspond, while remaining faithful to the larger purpose of maintaining a relationship by responsibly sustaining the cycle of correspondence.⁹²

⁹⁰ Mariangela Sedda, *Vincendo l’ombra*, 73.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 114-5.

⁹² David A. Gerber, “Epistolary Masquerades: Acts of Deceiving and Withholding in Immigrant Letters,” in *Letters Across Borders: The Epistolary Practices of International Migrants*, eds. Bruce S. Elliot, David A. Gerber, and Suzanne M. Sinke (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 145.

Both Grazia and Antonia choose to withhold information or write falsehoods rather than stopping communication altogether. In other words, they preserve their emotional bond at the expense of providing faithful cultural translations of their experiences.

Antonia withholds any controversial discussions of politics in her letters. However, it is her self-censorship of her love life that most limits her ability to truthfully write about her experiences. The sisters' disagreement over Franz teaches Antonia that similar topics must be off limits if their correspondence is to have a chance of continuing. Antonia does not write about Franz again, except in her diary. In fact, in 1940 we learn through the diary that she had a miscarriage years prior: "il figlio mio e di Franz [...] Ventidue anni avrebbe avuto."⁹³ This traumatic event is not mentioned in previous diary entries because Antonia has only recently begun to come to terms with it, with the help of a married man with whom she is having an affair: "Da quando Andrea si è preso un poco del mio dolore, riesco a pensare al bambino."⁹⁴ Andrea, Franz, and the unborn child are completely absent from Antonia's letters, an act of self-censorship arguably more damaging to an authentic relationship than her political omissions. Similar to Nora's abortion, Antonia's miscarriage represents the end of their family line in Italy, while their family is able to thrive in Argentina, through Grazia's three children.

Because Sedda's second novel includes Antonia's diary entries, we have a better idea of what is really happening in Italy, and of the extent to which Antonia's letters are self-censored, than we do of the situation in Argentina. However, infrequently, messages are passed verbally by other immigrants. This is particularly important when their brother, Francesco, dies in Argentina in 1938. His death brings the sisters together in

⁹³ Mariangela Sedda, *Vincendo l'ombra*, 205.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 206.

their shared grief but ultimately shows the extent to which letter-writing limits their relationship. They are unable to discuss the manner of Francesco's death, which was perhaps politically motivated. Antonia learns of his disappearance from a returned immigrant, who tells her: "Grazia non te l'ha potuto scrivere, puede ser peligroso, possono pensare che è clandestino contro al governo. Buscala, me ha dicho Grazia, diglielo a Antonia il tormento di non poterlo scrivere, non sapere quali parole ce la fanno a scappare agli occhi della censura."⁹⁵ The letter telling of his death is short, as is Antonia's reply, as neither sister is able to fully express her emotions. In fact, the letter sent from Argentina is perhaps the only instance of their final phrase not including anything about remembering. Instead, it says, "ricevi un abbraccio forte da tutti noi."⁹⁶ The breakdown in this always repeated phrase is further evidence of the emotional strain Grazia and her family in Argentina are under as a result of Francesco's death.

Antonia never hears the full story of Francesco's death, but two returned immigrant brothers tell her some of the rumors, which involve his lover and their daughter coming down with an illness and Francesco threatening the doctor when he is unable to save them. Then, "Un giorno ha minacciato un militare e questo l'ha fatto chiudere in un carcere di anarchici e delinquenti."⁹⁷ Whether Francesco was an anarchist or distraught at the death of his loved ones is less important than the fact that Grazia and Antonia are unable to authentically discuss his death or grieve in their letters. Thus, aside

⁹⁵ Ibid., 165. Antonia's account of her conversation with this returned immigrant, Antonio, is linguistically interesting, as Antonia's writing resembles her sister's, peppered liberally with Spanish to accurately reflect Antonio's speech. She writes "Per la pratica che ho con la scrittura di Grazia ho compreso il parlare a mischiatura di Antonio Porru" (163). Her linguistically mixed diary entry show the extent to which Antonia has become culturally and linguistically accented through the years of correspondence with Grazia, despite never leaving Sardinia.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 166. This letter is written by Antonietta, Grazia's daughter. I will discuss her letter-writing in a bit.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 192.

from brief, infrequent messages passed through returned immigrants, we must read between the lines of the letters themselves to attempt to understand what Grazia is experiencing in Argentina.

Grazia's writing – which is a mix of Italian, Sardinian, and Spanish – is the clearest indication of the complicated political and cultural situation in Argentina. Her frequent apologies for this contaminated writing, and Antonia's subsequent reassurances, become a new form of communication, and a way for the sisters to apologize for their inability to communicate freely with one another. In one letter Grazia writes, "Ho mesclado palabras italianas, castigianas y sardas. Un embroglio, un minestrone, pero credo che despues veinte annos yo soy de ambos los mundos, de duos mundos soe."⁹⁸ In another, "desculpe se non scrivo italiano chiaro come a te, pero ho scritto di notte e no tengo tempo de poner en limpio."⁹⁹ Thus, as Grazia apologizes for her mixed language, she is also apologizing for having to lie or deceive in her letters.

Antonia reassures her sister, indicating that she understands and appreciates Grazia's continued communication, in spite of the threat of censorship:

Non disprezzare la tua scrittura, scrivi come puoi. Se ti vengono prima le parole castigliane ora stai tranquilla, maestra Martis mi ha dato un vocabolario di spagnuolo [...] e se non comprendo la parola la cerco ma qualche volta ci arrivo col sardo. Se mi resta dubbio vado da Gianuario che è sempre contento di avere nuove di Argentina.¹⁰⁰

In other words, Antonia is able to use outside sources – such as a dictionary or a returned emigrant – to read beyond the content of the letters. In this way, she is able to perform a linguistic translation of any Spanish words she doesn't recognize. In addition, with these

⁹⁸ Ibid., 62.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 79.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 81.

outside sources, she also performs a cultural translation, in order to better understand what is really happening in Argentina.

Grazia's contaminated writing is evidence of her inability to communicate simply and the need, thus, to rely on multiple languages to try to get her point across. It is also an example of translation not occurring, because she is writing in whatever language comes to her. However, this puts the burden on the reader to become the translator. Her writing shows that self-censorship limits the ability of these letters to be examples of cultural and linguistic translation. Grazia does not linguistically translate anything and both sisters provide false accounts of their lives. Despite the fact that the sisters do manage to communicate through their "mutilated" writing, the half-truths and unmentioned events in their letters continually increase their emotional distance.

By 1939, the sisters have been communicating by letter for over 25 years. Letters are arriving less frequently, due in part to them taking longer to arrive, but also because the sisters write to each other less often. Antonia begins to worry that their relationship will not last much longer. She writes to her sister and her niece:

Cara sorella, spero che col tempo le nostre parole seguitino a viaggiare da una parte all'altra del mondo come in questi ventisei anni [...] Non lasciatemi senza il conforto delle vostre lettere, se non ne ricevo posso pensare che si è tagliato il filo. [...] Parla, sorella mia, anche con la voce di Antonietta.¹⁰¹

Antonietta, Grazia's daughter, begins authoring some of the letters in 1937, when she is 23 years old. Born and raised in Argentina, she is bilingual in Italian and Spanish and understands some Sardinian. Her writing, unlike her mother's, is not at all linguistically contaminated, and her apologies for her writing are because she fears she is unable to accurately convey her mother's thoughts and affection: "credo che a volte, avere studiato

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 176.

e avere a disposizione tante parole non sempre faccia uscire dalla penna quelle espressioni di affetto che mamma scrive con tanta naturalezza.”¹⁰² She recognizes that her writing is a poor substitute for her mother’s. In addition, her almost perfect standard Italian lacks the nuance of her mother’s contaminated writing. However, her letters are better than no letters at all, and even show hope for a continued transatlantic cultural translation in future generations.

By 1942, the letters, and thus the cultural translation between the sisters, have stopped, indicating that a relationship built on “false” cultural translations cannot be sustained forever.¹⁰³ In other words, these letters smooth over any potential conflict, so an accent only remains in small ways, such as Grazia’s multilingual writing. Under these conditions, an accent cannot survive, and neither can the circularity between Italy and Argentina. In fact, on the last day of 1943, Antonia writes one last letter to Grazia, but one that she has no plans to send. She ends her letter, and the book ends, with her having the front door of the house painted the color of “l’oltremare [...] una tinta azzurra di mare trasparente [...] E ora [...] il colore vince l’ombra del vicolo.”¹⁰⁴ Perassi calls Antonia’s decision to keep a diary “an act of resistance just as meticulous as obstinate that results in defeating the shadow.”¹⁰⁵ However, I maintain that this view, as well as the final words of the book, are overly optimistic within the context of the narrative. While both sisters are able to maintain their bond for decades, in the end, communication has stopped, perhaps

¹⁰² Ibid., 180.

¹⁰³ Grazie and Antonietta send their last letter on June 28, 1941 and Antonia her final response March 30, 1942. In December of that year, Antonia writes in her diary: “Io non lo dico a voce alta ma penso [...] che potrebbe capitare che dall’Argentina lettere non ne arrivino più. [...] Non aspetto niente. L’Argentina è lontana più di prima.” (Ibid., 240).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 263.

¹⁰⁵ “un atto di resistenza tanto meticoloso quanto caparbio che finirà per vincere l’ombra.” Emilia Perassi, “Scrittrici italiane ed emigrazione argentina,” 105.

permanently. Moreover, while the novel leaves open the possibility of the sisters' communication beginning again at some point in the future, once Antonia dies, there will be nobody to write to in Italy.

As is the case with Poletti's novel, moving beyond the boundaries of Sedda's narratives to the field of contemporary literature paints a more positive picture. While Grazia and Antonia are unable to maintain their transatlantic communication, in Sedda's books their letters appear side-by-side, along with Antonia's diary entries, making this private writing public.¹⁰⁶ Altman discusses this "move from private to public reading" that characterizes epistolary literature.¹⁰⁷ The publication of Antonia and Grazia's story makes it accessible to a wider audience and, thus, the "very existence of the novel belies such a myth of oblivion."¹⁰⁸ These novels, and the others I examine in this dissertation, are re-opening communication with Argentina and reintroducing the readers to the role migration has played in Italian history. They are current examples of cultural translation, introducing new cultural and linguistic elements to Italian and Argentine literature.

¹⁰⁶ This dichotomy between private and public writing is an overly simplified explanation of the role this has in Sedda's texts. Antonia does not originally intend for her diary to be private, and in her first entry she expresses the hope that Grazia will one day be able to read it: "dentro di me devo custodire i pensieri [...] Fino a quando Grazia le potrà leggere, senza che altri occhi le abbiano frugate prima" (*Vincendo l'ombra*, 12). However, in her final entry, written in the form of a letter, she indicates that it may never be sent: "forse questa lettera non uscirà mai da questa casa e resterà nella còrbula insieme a tutte le tue lettere. Per me la scrivo, non per te" (*Vincendo l'ombra*, 259). In addition, the sisters' awareness of the censors means that, while they supposedly are writing only for one another (and for Grazia's Argentine family) the letters are written keeping this possible audience in mind. However, for the purposes of my argument, my focus is on the difference between the readers within the narrative world and those outside of it.

¹⁰⁷ Altman, *Epistolarity*, 106

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 109. In this quote, Altman outlines one way in which the publication of an epistolary novel may interact with the internal narrative itself.

Impermanent Circular Accents

The characters Nora, Grazia, and Antonia are able to maintain a connection with Italy through written texts, Nora by translating documents for Italian immigrants and the sisters in their transatlantic correspondence. In *Gente conmigo*, Nora's linguistic translations serve to help her clients come to Argentina and become Argentine, while the sisters' letters in *Oltremare* and *Vincendo l'ombra* attempt to sustain the relationship between family members in Italy and Argentina. The characters in these works are more linked to Italy than the ones in the previous chapter, but Poletti and Sedda highlight the many limitations of cultural translation through writing – such as medical conditions, time, distance, and self-censorship – that limit the mobility of people and information across borders.

While re-ethnicization places the focus on ethnicity as a dynamic category, translation's dynamism arises from the ways in which it emphasizes negotiations between multiple languages and cultures. Linguistic and cultural translators act as bridges that allow others to move between Italy and Argentina, Italian and Spanish, while others, such as Prince Zedir, Gastón Richard, and Grazia's daughter Antonietta, are able to more fully adopt an Argentine identity. In Poletti's novel, once the translation is complete there is no need for a connection to Italy to remain, while in Sedda's books, letters are not enough to maintain the sisters' relationship and there is no second generation in Italy who would be able to continue writing letters after Antonia's death. In both cases, circularity is only maintained for a time and, while the Italian accent in Argentina remains, it risks being subsumed under a broad conception of Argentine identity. Circularity is only re-created when these works, and others, are published and read in both countries. At that point,

these novels become works of cultural translation themselves, whose performative purpose is to remind their readers of the influence of migration and examine how immigrants negotiate multiple languages, identities, and cultural contexts.

Poletti and Sedda demonstrate the increased circularity that writing provides, as well as the limits of writing and translation. The novels I examine in the following chapter – Mempo Giardinelli's *Santo Oficio de la Memoria* (1991), Massimo Carlotto's *Le irregolari* (1998) and Laura Pariani's *Quando Dio ballava il tango* (2002) – narrate examples of “return” or “backwards” migration, as the characters attempt to understand their family history. These works intertwine themes of Italian migration and identity with the history of the more than 30,000 Argentine *desaparecidos*, and propose that remembering the past, and sharing those memories widely, can allow for circular accents over the long-term.

Chapter 3

Remembering Two Lost Generations

For many Argentines, the 1970s was a decade of violence and fear, punctuated by a coup in 1976 and the subsequent establishment of a military junta. The Dirty War (1974-1983), officially known as el *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* or *El Proceso*, led to the disappearance of an estimated 30,000 political dissidents, whose actions still remain largely unknown today.¹ In Italy, this period marks the end of large-scale emigration and, as time passed, it became easy for those on both sides of the Atlantic to think little about their overseas relatives.² In this chapter, I examine two novels – Mempo Giardinelli's *Santo Oficio de la Memoria* (1991) and Massimo Carlotto's *Le irregolari: Buenos Aires Horror Tour* (1998) – that draw connections between two lost generations: the *desaparecidos* and Italian emigrants.³ Of course, *desaparecidos* and emigrants are not

¹ For a comprehensive overview of the Dirty War, see Paul H. Lewis' *Guerrillas and Generals: The "Dirty War" in Argentina* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2002).

² “The years 1960-1961 can be considered the emblematic moment of the end of Italian emigration to Argentina. Already in 1960, the balance of entries and exits of Italians (the net migration) is practically equal to zero and from 1961 it will be [...] permanently negative.” “Los años 1960-1961 pueden ser colocados como el momento emblemático del fin de la emigración italiana a la Argentina. Ya en 1960, el balance de ingresos y egresos de italianos (el saldo migratorio) es prácticamente igual a cero y desde 1961 será [...] permanentemente negativo.” Fernando Devoto, *Historia de los italianos en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2006), 384.

³ Mempo Giardinelli, *Santo Oficio de la Memoria* (Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2009), original publication while Giardinelli was still in exile (Barcelona: Grupo Editorial Norma, 1991); Massimo Carlotto, *Le irregolari: Buenos Aires Horror Tour* (Rome: Edizioni e/o, 1998). I will be citing from the 2009 edition of the book. Another narrative that connects Italian immigration and Argentine *desaparecidos* is Nicola and Fabrizio Valsecchi's *Giorni di neve, giorni di sole*

equivalent. However, these narratives suggest that the families of these individuals are united in the desire to uncover the details of the remainder of their lives and the circumstances of their death.

Argentine writer Mempo Giardinelli (b. 1957) was born and raised in Chaco, a rural province in Northeastern Argentina. Soon after the 1976 coup, he went into exile primarily in Mexico, returning to Argentina for the first time in 1984. *Santo Oficio de la Memoria* was initially published in Spain in 1991, and won the prestigious Rómulo Gallegos International Novel Prize in 1993.⁴ The novel is more allegorical than autobiographical, but the character Pedro, like Giardinelli, is a writer who spends years in Mexico and has three daughters.⁵ The family saga narrates a century of Argentine history – from patriarch Antonio’s arrival in Argentina in 1885 to his great-grandson Pedro’s return from exile in the 1980s – from the points of view of twenty-three narrators, all members of, or closely tied to, the Domeniconelle family.

Massimo Carlotto, born in Padua in 1956, is perhaps best known for the *Saga dell’alligatore*, a series of detective novels, as well as for his work on a number of

(Barzago: Marna, 2009) where the focus is more on the general experiences of the Italian protagonist when he returns to Italy than on him telling the story of his *desaparecida* daughter to the Italian community. Then, in Laura Pariani’s *Quando Dio Ballava Il Tango* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2002) the characters are more interested moving into the future than they are in learning more about the *desaparecidos*. I will examine Pariani’s book within the context of contemporary Argentine and Italian identities in Chapter 4.

⁴ Other winners include Mario Vargas Llosa, Gabriel García Márquez, and Ricardo Piglia.

⁵ For information on Giardinelli’s life see, for example, an interview with him in Alicia Rolón, *Historia, ficción y escritura: la novelística de Mempo Giardinelli entre 1980 y 1991* (Buenos Aires: Quince editores, 2004), 261-5, or an overview of Giardinelli’s experience writing the novel in Gustavo Pellón, “Ideology and Structure in Giardinelli’s *Santo Oficio de la memoria*,” *Studies in 20th Century Literature* 19, no. 1 (1995): 81-5. See also Giardinelli’s own account of his exile: Jorge L. Bernetti and Mempo Giardinelli, *El exilio que hemos vivido: memoria del exilio argentino en México durante la dictadura, 1976-1983* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes Editorial, 2003).

screenplays.⁶ *Le irregolari* is a largely autobiographical account of Carlotto's trip to Argentina.⁷ In the book, the protagonist Massimo's initial search for information about his grandfather's years spent in Argentina leads to his involvement with the association *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*, which seeks to unite the lost children of *desaparecidos* with their still-living relatives. Massimo soon learns that he is related to Estela, the leader of the association, which transforms his research on the distant past into an obligation to help Estela and others connect biological family members in the present.

These two novels are works of witness literature, which tell the stories of those who witnessed traumatic events and urge the reader to think critically about those events. Ross Chambers notes that narratives within the "genre of witnessing" all:

tell a story about atrocious circumstances to an audience whose readiness to hear the story or capacity to imagine its import is dubious, given the 'unimaginable' extremity of the events related but also the mechanisms of willed or unconscious rejection, the unwillingness to *hear*, that is generated in the audience by the very character of those events.⁸

As I examine these novels, I will frequently return to the concepts of witnessing, remembering, and audience, taking into account the differences between an Argentine and an Italian audience. These acts of witnessing simultaneously re-establish the circularity between past and present and accent the present with past events.

⁶The first novel in the saga is *La verità dell'Alligatore* (Rome: Edizioni e/o, 1998) first published in 1995. His screenplays include *Il fuggiasco* (2003) based on his first published novel of the same name (Rome: Edizioni e/o, 1994).

⁷ Alberto Zava, "Il tour guidato di Massimo Carlotto nella Buenos Aires della dittatura," in *America Latina: la violenza e il racconto*, eds. Margherita Cannavacciuolo, Ludovica Paladini, and Alberto Zava (Venice: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2012), 43. I will refer to the author as Carlotto and the protagonist as Massimo in order to distinguish between the two.

⁸ Italics in original. Ross Chambers, *Untimely Interventions: AIDS Writing, Testimonial, and the Rhetoric of Haunting* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2004), 6.

After giving a broad overview of the function of memory in migration literature, I focus on its role in Giardinelli and Carlotto's books, as their characters attempt to understand the influence of the past on the present as well as come to terms with the loss of a generation, whether to death or emigration. In these narratives, remembering allows the characters to connect past and present events, and shared memories unite individuals and communities. I engage with Mieke Bal's work on narrating traumatic events to analyze how members of the Italo-Argentine Domeniconelle family in Giardinelli's text attempt to make the traumas experienced during their lives – including emigration and the tragic events of the Argentine dictatorship – narratable. While these characters disagree on just how to confront the past, the overall message of the novel both places identification with an Italian identity in the past and promotes the importance of each witness telling their own version of the truth. This allows for memories to be preserved without smoothing over differences or inconsistencies between the stories. I then use Jennifer Burns' work on performative cultural memory in migration literature to examine Carlotto's semi-autobiographical novel, as his Italian and Argentine characters share their experiences with migration, political activism, and loss, with one another. Carlotto's characters, like Giardinelli's, advocate remembering without creating a hierarchy of memories or a homogenous official history. Moreover, the protagonist Massimo becomes interested in the *desaparecidos* years after their disappearance, making him further removed than Giardinelli's characters, and more similar to the average Italian reader. Massimo becomes a stand-in for the Italian reader and, as he becomes accented by learning of his familial connection to these stories of loss, the readers become accented as well. Through witnessing, remembering, and narrating the past, these books establish

memory as a circular accent and indicate the need to come to terms with past events in order to purposefully move into the future.

Memory in Literature

Memory serves as a circular accent, influencing the present without completely controlling it. Cultural theorist Nelly Richard explains how memories blur the lines between past and present:

The separation between past and present cannot be controlled by the clear line of today because the division between times is always contaminated at its borders by adhesions and permeations of diluted memory that muddy the limits of memory. [...] Memory describes a region of voluntary and involuntary associations that move *between* past and present.⁹

In other words, the act of remembering involves a negotiation between past and present, and often present emotions and events can recolor how we remember the past, just as past experiences partially determine how we act when we subsequently encounter similar situations. Moreover, past and present also interact with the future: “We speak of the past without suspending the present and, many times, also inferring the future.”¹⁰ Giardinelli and Carlotto’s characters must constantly contend with this tension between past, present, and future, as they try to use and share their memories of long-gone immigrant and

⁹ Italics in original. La separación entre pasado y presente no puede ser controlada por el corte nítido del hoy porque la división de los tiempos se ve siempre contagiada en sus bordes por adherencias e impregnaciones de la memoria diluida que enturbian los límites del recuerdo. [...] La memoria designa una zona de asociaciones voluntarias e involuntarias que se mueven *entre* el pasado y el presente. Nelly Richard, *Crítica de la memoria (1990-2010)* (Santiago, Chile: Ediciones Universidad Diego Portales, 2010), 15-6.

¹⁰ “Del pasado se habla sin suspender el presente y, muchas veces, implicando también el futuro.” Beatriz Sarlo, *Tiempo pasado: Cultura de la memoria y giro subjetivo. Una discusión* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores Argentina, 2005), 11.

desaparecido relatives constructively in the present, in order to work towards a positive future.

The circularity between past and present is particularly important for immigrants, whose connection to their country of origin may be entirely based in past memories. And yet, from the moment an emigrant departs, he remembers his hometown and its residents as they are in that moment, and as time passes the comparison between the past memory and present reality becomes progressively weaker. Historian Srdja Pavlovic analyzes his own experience of migration: “Departure is not only the physical act of separation from loved ones, but it also freezes time for both myself and those who stayed behind. [...] Those [memories] will remain with me forever, timeless and unchanged.”¹¹ The circularity of memory is further weakened when it is not shared with others. In other words, personal memory dies along with the individual, unless it becomes collective memory.

The role of memory in contemporary migration literature is not just confined to characters’ memories, but also to broader national and cultural memories. In Italy, many feel no direct connection to instances of past emigration. Writers in Italy who narrate stories of Italians and their descendants abroad must remind their Italian audience about Italy’s past. Literary scholar Federica Pastorino notes this in an article on Laura Pariani: “With her books, Pariani attempts to ‘fill the holes’ in Italian culture and, in order to achieve this, in her writing she includes elements of Argentine history, society, and

¹¹ Srdja Pavlovic, “Memory for Breakfast,” in *Memory and Migration: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Memory Studies*, Eds. Julia Creet and Andreas Kitzmann (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 43-4.

literature that are only partially known, and at times forgotten, by Italians.”¹² Other contemporary Italian works about Argentina, including Carlotto’s, share this goal.

While Argentina views itself as a country largely built by immigrants, the ever-aging population of Italian immigrants means that there are no longer many who can recount their own experiences. Ilaria Magnani writes:

in cultural memory, forty years signal a threshold, that is, the moment in which memory runs the risk of disappearing [...] Returning to the Argentine context, this signifies that narratives produced starting in the 1980s seem to also be driven by the urgency of concretizing a material that threatens to be lost with the, now relatively close, passing of those adults who took part in the phenomenon of migration.¹³

Giardinelli’s inspiration for his novel is the product of conversations with his aunts.¹⁴

Similarly Antonio dal Masetto, whose work I will examine in the following chapter, began research for his trilogy by taping his Italian mother telling her life story.¹⁵

Giardinelli, dal Masetto, and other contemporary authors recognize the value in documenting individual stories of migration in an attempt to keep those memories alive.

¹² “Con i suoi libri, Pariani tenta di ‘colmare dei buchi’ nella cultura degli italiani e per fare ciò ingloba nelle sue pagine aspetti della storia, della società e della letteratura argentina solo in parte conosciuti e, a volte, dimenticati dagli italiani.” Federica Pastorino, “L’Argentina di Laura Pariani,” *Otto/Novecento* 30, no. 3 (Sept./Dec. 2006): 143.

¹³ “nel ricordo culturale quarant’anni segnano una soglia, cioè il momento in cui la memoria rischia di scomparire [...] Riportato al contesto argentino questo significa che la narrativa prodotta a partire dagli anni Ottanta sembra guidata anche dall’urgenza di fissare un materiale che minaccia di perdersi con la scomparsa, ormai relativamente prossima, di quanti, adulti, hanno preso parte al fenomeno migratorio.” Ilaria Magnani, *Tra memoria e finzione: l’immagine dell’immigrazione transoceanica nella narrativa argentina contemporanea* (Reggio Emilia: Diabasis, 2005), 20.

¹⁴ “His three aunts had made ravioli in honor of his homecoming. As they ate, he heard them remembering the stories his great-grandfather used to tell, and stories about the Giardinellis in Italy and the town from which they came. This gave him the key to the novel.” Gustavo Pellón, “Ideology and Structure in Giardinelli’s *Santo Oficio de la memoria*,” 84.

¹⁵ Ilaria Magnani, *Tra memoria e finzione*, 20-1. Magnani cites a 1994 interview: Nora Domínguez, “Antonio Dal Masetto,” *The Buenos Aires Review*, Buenos Aires, 30 Jan. 1994, 6-7.

Giardinelli and Carlotto's books connect past migration with the more recent exile of Argentine intellectuals during the dictatorship. Adriana Corda's analysis of contemporary Argentine fiction outlines how migration and exile interact:

the exile of Italian immigrants, discursivized in the literary text through recounting the transatlantic trip, becomes the forced exile of those Argentines who rebelled against censorship. This reversal, when compared to the voyage of their ancestors, uncovers the traces of a society silenced by horror. In these literary texts the voices of exile intervene, and look at the reality of Argentine that establishes, through fiction, the forbidden word.¹⁶

In these texts, and in comparable books published in Italian, remembering the past allows us to see the parallels between these two migratory flows.

The role of memory is particularly salient in works of migration literature that narrate the aftermath of Argentina's Dirty War, due to the many voices silenced during this period. Even those who survived often preferred not to talk about their experiences. In an interview with Alicia Rolón, Giardinelli describes life during the dictatorship: "From 1976 to 1983 there is an entire generation, two young generations, or three, that continued being young in each of these periods, who were raised in a time of fear, of violence, of persecution, of censorship, and so forth."¹⁷ Giardinelli's novel is a response to the forced silence of the dictatorship: "the novel reaffirms its right to participate in

¹⁶ "el exilio de los inmigrantes italianos, discursivizado en el texto literario a través del relato del viaje transatlántico, deviene exilio forzoso de los argentinos que se rebelan contra el discurso de la censura. La inversión del signo con relación al periplo de los antepasados descubre las marcas de una sociedad silenciada por el horror. En estos textos literarios, operan las voces del exilio que miran la realidad de la Argentina que instaura, a través de la ficción, la palabra prohibida." Adriana Corda, *La identidad italiana en la novela argentina a partir de 1980: discurso e inmigración en textos de Antonio Dal Masetto, Mempo Giardinelli y Héctor Tizón* (San Miguel de Tucumán, Argentina: Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad Nacional de Tucumán, 2004), 175.

¹⁷ "Entre el 76 y el 83 hay toda una generación, dos generaciones de jóvenes, o tres, que fueron siendo jóvenes en cada uno de esos períodos, que se educan en el miedo, en la violencia, en la persecución, en la censura y demás." Alicia Rolón, *Historia, ficción y escritura*, 261.

cultural debates in order to question and resist ideologically dominant discourses that – as in the case of Argentina – promote forgetting by means of negation or misrepresentation of the dark parts of national history.”¹⁸

Giardinelli’s work is thematically similar to narratives by other Argentine writers who went into exile during the dictatorship and then returned: “With the end of El Proceso, many writers returned home, bringing with them a series of questions and formulations about the meaning and purpose of their work. [...] they] take a retrospective look at the past in an effort to reflect the current situation in their country.”¹⁹ This group, in turn, is part of a larger group of post-Boom or post-Proceso authors that also includes those who remained in Argentina. This generation of writers promotes remembering, rather than forgetting, and shares a positive view of the future:

Giardinelli, like many of his generation, appears to have realized that he could not afford to share the pessimism that the previous generation of Latin American writers had accepted in the far more hopeful political circumstances of the ‘60s. [...] That rejection of cynicism, the refusal to shrug one’s shoulders and accept ‘reality,’ is grounded on the moral imperative to denounce the silence, the acceptance and pragmatism that made possible the barbarity of the Dirty War.”²⁰

Giardinelli, as well as Carlotto, “denounce the silence” by writing works of narrative memory, which Burns explains as “emerging from and, in a sense, organizing,

¹⁸ “la novela reafirma su derecho a participar en los debates culturales para cuestionar y resistir los discursos de las ideologías dominantes que –como en el caso de la Argentina- promueven el olvido mediante la negación o tergiversación de las zonas oscuras de la historia nacional.” Ibid., 208.

¹⁹ Patrick L. O’Connell, “Individual and Collective Identity through Memory in Three Novels of Argentina’s ‘El Proceso,’” *Hispania* 81, no. 1 (Mar., 1998): 32. This article is a comparative analysis of Giardinelli’s novel alongside Tununa Mercado’s *En estado de memoria* (Mexico: Serie Rayuela Internacional, 1992) and Ana María Shua’s *El libro de los recuerdos* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1994). Other Argentine writers who went into exile include Osvaldo Bayer, Juan Gelman, Rodolfo Puiggrós, and Luisa Valenzuela.

²⁰ Gustavo Pellón, “Ideology and Structure in Giardinelli’s *Santo Oficio de la memoria*,” 92.

personal memory.”²¹ In these texts, the authors weave together the many threads of their characters’ personal memories into a coherent whole. Narrative memory becomes a means of remembering the lost generation of *desaparecidos*. Pastorino writes of “the need many Argentines have to recuperate and reconstruct family memories in order to fill a ‘black hole’ in their society’s collective memory, caused by the ‘elimination’ of an entire generation.”²² Giardinelli’s book in particular narrates “the historical experience of this Argentine ‘lost generation’ that believed in and fought for a revolutionary utopia but found only death, prison, and exile.”²³ In addition, Giardinelli and Carlotto demonstrate the parallels between *desaparecidos* and Italian emigrants, suggesting that the latter group can be viewed as another lost generation. By re-integrating stories of these two lost generations into contemporary Argentine and Italian society, these authors highlight the circularity between Italian and Argentine family histories while still maintaining the accent present in each individual’s experiences.

Narratable Traumatic Memory in Mempo Giardinelli’s *Santo oficio de la memoria* (1991)

Giardinelli’s book narrates much of Argentine history, and multiple generations of the Domeniconelle family, through the voices of its many narrators. As I analyze this text, my focus will be on the role of memory as expressed by La Nona and her two great-

²¹ Jennifer Burns, *Migrant Imaginaries. Figures in Italian Migration Literature* (Italian Modernities 18. New York: Peter Lang, 2013), 67.

²² “la necessità di molti argentini di recuperare e ricostruire le memorie familiari per colmare un ‘buco nero’ nella memoria collettiva della loro società, causato dalla ‘cancellazione’ di un’intera generazione.” Federica Pastorino, “L’Argentina di Laura Pariani,” 131.

²³ “la experiencia histórica de esa ‘generación perdida’ de la Argentina que creyó y luchó por una utopía revolucionaria para encontrarse sólo con la muerte, la prisión y el exilio.” Alicia Rolón, *Historia, ficción y escritura*, 211.

grandsons: El Tonto de la buena memoria and Pedro. Drawing on Mieke Bal's writing on narrative memory and traumatic recall, I examine how Giardinelli's novel takes two traumatic events in this family's history – their immigration to Argentina and the dictatorship – and makes them narratable. In other words, the act of remembering and narrating past events becomes a form of circularity between past and present, and between personal memories and official history. However, this circularity retains an accent, represented in particular by La Nona's Italianness and the remaining gaps between individuals' memories. These characters witness notable events in Argentine history – mass immigration in the early twentieth century and, during the dictatorship, the loss of *desaparecidos* and those who go into exile – and narrate the stories of those losses so they may never be forgotten.

Before analyzing these three characters, I want to briefly highlight the significance of their names, which signal how they identify, or the role they play in the narrative. Giardinelli says of his decision-process when naming characters: "Names always come to me in unexpected ways. I choose them for their resonance, sometimes for their grandness. You can write 'Juan was happy scratching his beard,' but it sounds much better to write: 'Rosendo Arias was happy scratching his beard.'"²⁴ In La Nona's case, her grandchildren and great-grandchildren refer to her by this modified version of the Italian *nonna*, meaning grandmother. This emphasizes her Italian identity, but an Italian identity accented by decades spent in Argentina.²⁵ El Tonto's name underlines his role as the character who remembers everything, including the experiences of the other members

²⁴ "A mí los nombres siempre me surgen de maneras inesperadas. Los escojo por la resonancia, a veces por la imponencia. Usted puede escribir 'Juan era feliz rascándose las barbas', pero suena muchísimo mejor si escribe: 'Rosendo Arias era feliz rascándose las barbas.' Personal interview over e-mail with Mempo Giardinelli, 18 & 31 July 2012.

²⁵ Other characters call her mother or use her given name, Angela, or its diminutive, Angiulina.

of the Domeniconelle family.²⁶ Pedro has an unaccented Spanish name, but La Nona often calls him by the Italian version, Pietro, representing his own identification as Argentine, while La Nona insists that all of her descendants are Italian. The other characters, Giardinelli says, are based on family members or have Italian-sounding names:

in the case of SOM [*Santo Oficio de la Memoria*], obviously, it was important that they have an Italian sound. There were some that I chose as a tribute: my grandfather Cayetano, in Italy was called Gaetano. And I had an aunt who I loved a lot named Rosa. Of course the rest are fictional names.²⁷

Finally, the last name Domeniconelle, as well as La Nona's last name, Stracciativaglini, sound Italian but are so obviously exaggerated, it is clear they are fictional: "Regarding the last names, yes I wanted them to sound Italian, but I also wanted them to be impossible, fictional last names. Neither Domeniconelle nor Stracciativaglini exist, but they are spontaneous and dramatically Italian."²⁸ As with other aspects of the novel, these names weave together reality and fiction, while also highlighting a particularly dramatic and almost performed Italian identity.

As the matriarch of the Domeniconelle family and one of the only family members born in Italy, La Nona represents Italian identity and, more broadly, memory of the past. Thus, she is the clearest example of the family's Italian accent while she also

²⁶ El Tonto's incredible memory recalls Jorge Luis Borges' short story "Funes el memorioso" in which the character Ireneo Funes remembers everything (*Ficciones, 1935-1944* Buenos Aires: Sur, 1944.). Funes and El Tonto are both incapable of moving past the innumerable details of everyday life.

²⁷ "en el caso de SOM, obviamente, era importante la sonoridad itálica que tuviesen. Hubo algunos que elegí por homenaje: mi abuelo Cayetano se llamaba, en Italia, Gaetano. Y tuve una tía a la que quise mucho que se llamaba Rosa. Claro que todos y todas los demás son nombres ficcionales." Personal interview over e-mail with Mempo Giardinelli, 18 & 31 July 2012.

²⁸ "En cuanto a los apellidos, sí quise que tuvieran sonido italiano, pero también quería que tuvieran apellidos imposibles, ficticios. Ni Domeniconelle y Stracciativaglini existen, pero son espontánea y dramáticamente italianos." Ibid.

regularly highlights the circularity between past and present, Italy and Argentina. According to Corda: “La Nona is the character that represents memory in all of its forms; the one responsible for keeping the sense of Italian identity alive.”²⁹ However, her strong identification with Italy and desire to transmit an Italian identity to her descendants only becomes important to her many years after arriving in Argentina: “Evidentemente la Nona tomó varias decisiones la tarde siguiente a la del asesinato del abuelo Antonio: una fue defender a toda costa la unidad familiar y hacerla crecer en el orgullo de la italianidad.”³⁰ This physical and temporal distance from Italy makes it difficult for her descendants, born and raised in Argentina, to feel a similar sense of Italianness. Furthermore, La Nona’s Italian identity is based on texts she reads in Argentina about Italian history and literature, rather than on her own memories: “La Nona era otra cosa [...] después de todo venía de la más completa ignorancia y se había inventado una cultura. Toda mezclada, cierto. Por eso era caprichosa y arbitraria y confusa, como sucede con los autodidactas. Pero tenía lo suyo.”³¹ This personal, arbitrary, and constructed Italian identity calls into question La Nona’s descendants’ ability to identify with it.

La Nona’s identification with Italy is not only made up of an amalgam of different sources but is also an archaic view, based in references to the Roman Empire and the Italy of Dante. She speaks of these time periods as though she lived them: “Roma era, para ella, lo máximo. Parecía vivir veinte o más siglos atrás”³² and “describía la vida

²⁹ “La Nona es el personaje que representa la memoria en todas sus manifestaciones, la encargada de mantener vivo el sentimiento de italianidad.” Corda, *La identidad italiana*, 118.

³⁰ Giardinelli, *Santo oficio de la memoria*, 26.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

³² *Ibid.*, 25.

florentina del *trecento* como si allí y entonces hubiera vivido.”³³ Even La Nona’s frequent use of Italian words and phrases mixed in with Spanish recalls the past: “el italiano nuestro en realidad era el cocoliche. Un italiano mezclado con intrusiones de castellano. Una especie de itañol, diríamos, ¿no?, o de espaliano. [...] Yo no lo conocí, porque eso fue a fines del Diecinueve, pero la abuela Angiulina me lo contó.”³⁴

La Nona’s delayed decision to transmit an Italian identity to her descendants, and the fact that this identity is largely based on books and ancient history, reflect the trauma of emigration that permanently separated her from her two younger sons.³⁵ Rather than maintaining close ties with Italy based on family bonds and her own memories of growing up there, La Nona instead chooses the less emotionally painful route of artificially constructing an Italian identity. Instances of trauma, such as immigration, can block the creation of narrative memory. Bal distinguishes between narrative memory and what she calls traumatic recall:

Traumatic memories remain present for the subject with particular vividness and/or totally resist integration. In both cases, they cannot become narratives, either because the traumatizing events are mechanically reenacted as drama rather than synthetically narrated by the memorizing agent who ‘masters’ them, or because they remain ‘outside’ the subject.³⁶

La Nona’s Italian identity is more re-enacted than synthetic, and is composed of outside influences rather than her own experiences. This is also apparent in her use of Spanish-

³³ Ibid., 94.

³⁴ Ibid., 367-8. This linguistic mixing recalls Pariani’s writing, or the character Grazia’s writing in Sedda’s text. For more on Italo-Argentines and cocoliche, see for example Ana Cara “Cocoliche: The Art of Assimilation and Dissimulation among Italians and Argentines,” *Latin American Research Review* 22, no. 3 (1987): 37-67.

³⁵ La Nona narrates: “*para una madre un hijo es un pedazo propio, una parte del cuerpo. Por eso abandonarlos duele como si te arrancaran los brazos o las piernas.*” Italics in original. Ibid., 492.

³⁶ Mieke Bal, “Introduction,” in Mieke Bal, Jonathan V. Crewe, and Leo Spitzer (eds.), *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College, 1999), vii.

influenced Italian when she speaks. This hybrid language both shows her partial integration into Argentine society and her inability to completely come to terms with her relationship to Italy, or to an Italian identity.

La Nona not only serves as a reminder of the family's Italian origins but also outlines the tension between memory and history that the novel as a whole explores. In a conversation between La Nona's ghost and Pedro, she warns against blindly accepting official histories:

La historia es el momento en que se recrea una memoria. La historia no es lo que sucedió, sino lo que alguno escribió que ha sucedido, leído en otro momento por uno que cree lo que lee [...] Desconfiar siempre. Porque cuando la historia se oficializa, se petrifica: y cuando se petrifica empieza la mentira. De lo que se desprende que la verdadera historia es la que está viva, la que no se detiene, la que está activa, es decir, la memoria.³⁷

I will further elaborate on this quote when analyzing El Tonto's view of writing and remembering. For now, it is important to highlight La Nona's focus on the lack of circularity between memory and official history. While the former is ever-changing, the latter, when widely accepted, can lead to other versions of history being marginalized and ignored. Giardinelli's novel is one attempt to bridge the gap between memory and history, through telling a version of history that might otherwise be forgotten.

While La Nona reminds her family members of their Italian accent and highlights the importance of remembering, her great-grandson (and Pedro's younger brother) El Tonto de la buena memoria is the voice of the present that refuses to be silenced. He represents those who survived the repression of the dictatorship without going into exile, as Pedro did. El Tonto writes everything he witnesses, forgetting nothing, but his inability

³⁷ Italics in original. Giardinelli, *Santo oficio de la memoria*, 412.

to sort through or reflect on those memories make his writing a form of traumatic recall rather than narratable memory: “yo nunca me pongo a pensar en lo que escribo. pero eso sí: me acuerdo de todo lo que me cuentan.”³⁸ While El Tonto is unable to synthesize memory in a productive way, during the dictatorship his family members see his writing as a threat and he is placed in an insane asylum. This is one example of a view that highlights the potential dangers of remembering, and thus sees the circular accent of memory in a negative light.

The family’s attempt to hide away and ignore El Tonto is representative of many Argentines’ preference to forget about the years of the dictatorship rather than make those memories narratable. La Nona succinctly expresses her view of forgetting in one phrase: “‘Olvidar es matar,’ decía la Nona, y ése era una especie de dogma, una verdad consagrada en la familia.”³⁹ O’Connell comments on this phrase: “Forgetting, from this vantage point, deals specifically with collective attempts to change the meaning of the past. Memories, when they are repressed and/or written outside of history, cannot be assimilated into the current situation.”⁴⁰ In other words, repressed traumatic events run the risk of completely disappearing from official histories, leading to a lack of circularity between the two.

El Tonto is not the only member of the family who many want to forget. He recounts the family’s similar treatment of his uncle Alfredo, which serves as a concrete example of the connection between “olvidar” and “matar”:

³⁸ Ibid., 31.

³⁹ Ibid., 336.

⁴⁰ Patrick L. O’Connell, “The Recuperation of Immigrant Identity: Remembering with a Purpose in Argentina,” *Revista Hispánica Moderna* 54, no. 2 (Dec., 2001): 503.

en esta familia se ha olvidado a un miembro[, Alfredo]. ¿O vos te creés que él no se da cuenta de que lo encerraron, después de la tragedia, para poquito a poco ir olvidándolo? Cesaron de visitarlo, de interesarse. Hicieron como que no existía. Y así lo fueron enterrando, al encerrarlo, que es una forma de entierro. . Con él hicieron como si hubiera esfumado en el aire, como si hubiera *desaparecido* [...] Esta familia es así, [...] Aquí lo que no se menciona no existe. Lo que no es nombrado no es. Y como es la designación lo que da vida, entonces el silencio les resulta calmante, balsámico, pero no porque cura sino porque mata. Yo me di cuenta y por eso empecé a joder con que no debíamos olvidar [...] Hablarle es una forma de que no se muera, porque lo que se habla, lo que se pone en palabras, sigue vivo. La memoria es una semilla que planta la vida, pero que sólo florece mediante la palabra.⁴¹

El Tonto acknowledges the appeal of forgetting but shares La Nona's view that forgetting kills, rather than cures. He writes in order to keep memory alive: "*olvidar es matar* [...] *hacer memoria es revivir*."⁴² Thus, remembering and living again re-establish circularity between past and present, and between official history and unofficial histories.

El Tonto's writing is an example of an unofficial history that contrasts with the official history La Nona discusses above. In addition, he recognizes that his version of history is just one of many, using the metaphor of a bicycle wheel to describe how these versions should interact with one another: "El único orden es que no todos hablan a la vez. Como los rayos de la rueda de una bicicleta: uno sigue al otro, a poquísimos centímetros, y todos giran en el mismo sentido, hacia delante."⁴³ The structure of Giardinelli's novel follows this view, as each narrator's story is interwoven into the rest and their voices, together, are able to tell the history of their family and of Argentina. Moreover, "This discourse of remembering proposed by El Tonto is produced at the margins of society and, as such, antagonizes any implicit attempt to generalize about

⁴¹ Emphasis is mine. Giardinelli, *Santo oficio de la memoria*, 281-2.

⁴² Italics in original. Ibid., 493.

⁴³ Ibid., 283.

Argentine society to the point of excluding the artistic contributions of the periphery.”⁴⁴ The many narrators, and Giardinelli’s book as a whole, do not pretend to encompass *the* history of Argentina but rather one small part of that history, or one version of it. It also serves as an open invitation to others to write down their own histories so that, together, these many narratives can produce a multi-faceted, multi-vocal collection of unofficial histories. This view promotes preserving the circularity between past and present, as well as between different versions of history, while the non-hierarchical nature of these histories allows for an accent to remain.

While his uncle Alfredo lived at the beginning of the twentieth century, El Tonto’s use of the word “desaparecido” when describing Alfredo’s place in the family draws a concrete connection to the *desaparecidos*, and to many Argentines’ desire to forget about this tragic period in Argentine history.⁴⁵ Similar to the *desaparecidos*, El Tonto and Alfredo disappear from society because they are perceived as a threat. However, El Tonto is still very much alive and refuses to be forgotten. Like La Nona and Pedro, he also more broadly resists the desire to ignore the past:

El Tonto de la Buena Memoria functions in *Santo Oficio* as an allegory of the national conscience, the national memory, the embodiment of all the *desaparecidos*, all exiles, and all internal exiles during the Dirty War. El Tonto writes out of fury because he won't be silenced; he won't allow memory to disappear.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Patrick L. O’Connell, “Narrating Memory and the Recuperation of Identity by Mempo Giardinelli: ‘una historia sin olvido,’” *Confluencia* 15, no. 1 (Fall 1999): 52.

⁴⁵ Roberta, Pedro’s aunt, also draws connections between Alfredo, El Tonto, and the *desaparecidos*: “Alfredito estaba internado. Porque nosotros tuvimos otro hermano. El segundo varón de la familia, Alfredito. Sí, nadie habla de él. Todos lo niegan, lo negaron siempre. Igual que a tu hermano [El Tonto ...] Claro, de estas cosas nadie habla en la familia, ni lo harán jamás. Creen que cuando no se habla, no hay memoria. Pero la memoria es tenaz, sobrevive a la gente. Reaparece y se reproduce, como los hongos en el verano. Pero eso de Alfredito nunca más se habló. Ni aun ahora. Lo han borrado. Lo desaparecieron” (301-2).

⁴⁶ Gustavo Pellón, “Ideology and Structure,” 92.

These three groups – desaparecidos, exiles, and internal exiles – inhabit a marginal place in Argentine society and while El Tonto is neither a *desaparecido* nor an exile, he attempts to speak for them and for their experiences, which should not be forgotten.

El Tonto is the voice of marginalized Argentines, and in addition he and Pedro represent, respectively, those Argentines who remained in the country during the dictatorship and those who left. This view of the brothers highlights the different experiences Pedro and other exiles had, with respect to the Argentines who stayed. However, O'Connell says of El Tonto's desire to speak to his brother: "Tonto in effect is reaching out to Pedro in an effort to address those who share a sense of guilt for having gone into exile instead of remaining at home to fight a battle that would have certainly resulted in more deaths."⁴⁷ The brothers' relationship as well as the decision of the Domeniconelle family (including the dead) to gather at the port to welcome Pedro home, demonstrate a willingness for there to once again be a circularity between these two groups. Pedro's return represents a hope for the future, and a re-integration of exiled Argentines into Argentine society and history.

El Tonto's writing certainly takes one step towards keeping memories alive. However, his inability to prioritize one memory over another or to organize them in a coherent way make it difficult for anyone else to make sense of them. In other words, his writing is too accented. According to Bal, "To enter memory, the traumatic event of the past needs to be made 'narratable.'"⁴⁸ El Tonto acknowledges his inability to make his memories narratable and, instead, awaits his brother Pedro's return: "¿Dónde está Pedro

⁴⁷ Patrick L. O'Connell, "Narrating Memory and the Recuperation of Identity," 51.

⁴⁸ Mieke Bal, "Introduction," x.

ahora, en un barco? Yo quiero mostrarle mis cuadernos, decíle que venga.”⁴⁹ Within Giardinelli’s book, Pedro is the overarching narrator, who ultimately decides how to structure the entire narrative – thus drawing out the circularity between each character’s story – while still allowing each of the other narrators to speak – preserving the accent.

While La Nona is stuck in the past and El Tonto writes furiously of the present, Pedro is able to begin narrativizing the past in order to help it serve the present and inform the future. His writing is a concrete example of El Tonto’s earlier vision of the bicycle wheel: “uno sigue al otro, a poquísimos centímetros, y todos giran en el mismo sentido, hacia delante.”⁵⁰ Pedro represents hope for the future, as his return signals perhaps a new start for Argentina. As I will show, this return also firmly places the Italian identity so strongly held by his great-grandmother, La Nona, within the confines of a multiethnic Argentine identity and limits circularity with Italy to the past.

The Domeniconelle family’s history is one of shifting centers, as La Nona’s center is Rome, her son Gaetano’s is Buenos Aires, and her grandson Enrico and then great-grandson Pedro’s is Chaco.⁵¹ When La Nona’s ghost ascribes an Italian identity to Pedro, he immediately corrects her: “Yo no soy italiano, Nona. Soy argentino.”⁵² Even after years spent in Mexico, he continues to consider Chaco his home, and feels a close connection with other Argentines from the same province. While in Zurich on business, Pedro writes a diary entry in which he states his general dislike of speaking to other Argentine’s abroad: “No me gusta encontrar me con compatriotas por el mundo. [...] el

⁴⁹ Giardinelli, *Santo oficio de la memoria*, 392.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 283.

⁵¹ O’Connell notes, “For many immigrants in *Santo oficio de la memoria*, identity is linked to a specific location such as El Chaco, Buenos Aires, Italy, or Mexico.” Patrick L. O’Connell, “The Recuperation of Immigrant Identity: Remembering with a Purpose in Argentina,” 504.

⁵² Giardinelli, *Santo oficio de la memoria*, 132.

insoportable etnocentrismo de los porteños es garantía de vulgaridad y fanfarronería.”⁵³

However, when an Argentine woman approaches him and they learn that they are both from Chaco, they become like family: “Me atendió como si fuera su hijo, hablando con más acento chaqueño que yo.”⁵⁴

In the same conversation between Pedro and La Nona in which he rejects an Italian identity, Pedro explains his decision to return to Chaco. This return home is a trip La Nona never makes, and reflects a different relationship with the trauma these two characters experience in their lives. La Nona’s life was largely shaped by her emigration, and while she never returns to Italy, she maintains a strong Italian accent. In conversations between her ghost and Pedro, she advises him to take a similar path, by remaining in Mexico. When he attempts to explain his desire to return, saying, “Es mi tierra y la quiero”⁵⁵ she replies, “Y entonces, ¿para qué volver? Se puede amar a la distancia. Todos los Domeniconelle lo hicieron.”⁵⁶ While she has had to accept loving Italy from a distance, Pedro makes a different choice. By returning to Argentina, he demonstrates a willingness to work through that trauma of the dictatorship with those who remained in the country rather than continuing his life in another country.

Pedro’s return also represents a desire to engage with his Argentine identity in the present, rather than through memories of the past and contact with family members still living there. O’Connell highlights Pedro’s return as a sign of him embracing Chaco as the center of his identity:

⁵³ Ibid., 207.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 207.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 131.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 132.

Thus for Pedro his return to the point of departure is not an admission of defeat but is rather an acceptance of the fact that neither the artist nor immigrant can escape the influence of history; after examining his past through voluntary memory, Pedro understands that El Chaco is the origin of his true heritage, that of the descendent of a family of Italian immigrants.⁵⁷

The expression “voluntary memory” places the emphasis on Pedro’s conscious decision to remember, and to then act on those memories. Moreover, while Pedro acknowledges his Italian heritage, this does not lead to identification as Italian or a desire to immigrate to Italy. Instead, he chooses not only to identify as Argentine, and from Chaco, but to return there to build his future.

While Pedro considers himself to be from Chaco, on the voyage to Argentina he both recognizes that his memories of the country are nine-years removed and acknowledges that the next generation, his three daughters, do not identify as he does: “¿Me emociona arribar a una patria que ya no será la de mis hijas, y que para mí sólo es recuerdos?”⁵⁸ In fact, The Domeniconelle name will end with Pedro and his daughters, as his brother, El Tonto, has no children.⁵⁹ Again, Giardinelli’s novel presents the different decisions each character makes and the different ways in which they interact with the past. While Pedro does not want Argentina to just remain in his memories, and thus re-inserts himself into Argentine society, his daughters may take different paths. More broadly, the novel demonstrates how identity can change from one generation to the next,

⁵⁷ Patrick L. O’Connell, “The Recuperation of Immigrant Identity: Remembering with a Purpose in Argentina,” 503.

⁵⁸ Giardinelli, *Santo oficio de la memoria*, 386.

⁵⁹ Pedro has a relationship with a married Argentine woman, Silvina, while in Argentina. She has a son, but Pedro does not know if the child is his or not: “un niño que no llevaría el apellido Domeniconelle y que él [Pedro] no sabría jamás si era o no era su hijo” (Ibid., 536). Even if the child is his biological son, he will grow up with no knowledge of his heritage as a member of the Domeniconelle family.

and with Pedro's daughters growing up in Mexico, suggests that future generations may become just as removed from Argentina as Pedro's generation is from Italy.

However, Pedro's writing pushes back against his daughters' and others' emotional distance and disinterest in the past. He uses his ability to remember and speak with multiple generations of family members (including the dead) to connect what he witnessed at the beginning of the dictatorship with the memories of witnesses who remained – including El Tonto – and those long dead – like La Nona. Thus, he represents what Chambers describes as:

the witnessing writer as a mediating agent, connecting or attempting to (re)connect those who cannot speak (the dead) to those (the living) who seem oblivious to their fate, as if it were not relevant to them. But they do not imply that the author writes 'on behalf of' or ventriloquizes those who cannot speak. The implication is rather that writing is an act of agencing by means of which the haunting characteristic of the writer's consciousness is transferred or carried over as a haunting of the reader's consciousness.⁶⁰

In other words, Pedro's writing attempts to accent the readers as they learn about and remember the traumatic events of the past. In works of witness literature (as well as of migration literature) the reader is important, because it is "as if the witness's own survival means little unless the story the witness tells also lives, in the specific sense of its being taken to heart by the audience."⁶¹ These stories' survival means that the circularity between past and present is maintained and they can continue influencing, or accenting, the present.

Giardinelli's novel does not elaborate on the dictatorship or the *desaparecidos*, but does at times mention what life was like in Argentina during this period. These brief

⁶⁰ Ross Chambers, *Untimely Interventions*, 37.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

moments hint at the fear and loss experienced when someone disappeared and, as in El Tonto's description of Alfredo, both demonstrates the appeal of forgetting and the pain of remembering. Pedro's youngest aunt, Franca, is the one most personally connected to the *desaparecidos* as her lover, Hipólito, was one. She describes his disappearance in just a handful of phrases: "ese hombre incomparable cometiera un único error, un pequeño, pequeñísimo único error aquella tórrida noche de diciembre del 76 [...] y ésa fue la última noche que nadie vio a Hipólito porque al amanecer se lo llevaron."⁶² In addition, Pedro provides the most direct description of the violent actions of the government and contrasts his memories of death with his ex-wife, Silvina's:

[...] me persigan los recuerdos del pibe Mauricio, asesinado a los 22 años y pintadas las paredes de su casa con su propia sangre; y del petiso Enrique baleado a la puerta de su departamento; y del inglés secuestrado una tarde en un cine de Flores cuando las tropas encendieron las luces y fueron directamente a buscarlo. Yo mejor no pienso más en todo eso, decía Silvina. Pero en cambio yo sí, le decía yo, pienso en aquello todo el tiempo y los recuerdos no me dejan, ni los remordimientos, ni las culpas.⁶³

It is fitting that Pedro narrate both the loss of life and his reflections on this event, as he is the character who not only remembers like La Nona, and writes like El Tonto, but also makes those memories narratable and uses them to guide his decisions. His return to Buenos Aires is the culmination of the desire to narrate the past and share those memories with all Argentines.

While the name Domeniconelle may disappear in Argentina, the book shows how this family has helped shape the country's history, and the bloodline will live on through the women in the family: "the family's story and heritage are preserved and passed on by

⁶² Ibid., 69-70.

⁶³ Ibid., 427-8.

the thriving and uncontrollable female offspring, with Angela [La Nona] in a matriarchal position.”⁶⁴ The emphasis on women’s role in preserving memories connects the female characters in Giardinelli’s book to the Madres y Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, whose work I will elaborate on in the following section. Alicia Rolón draws an explicit connection between Giardinelli’s female characters and the Madres y Abuelas:

In a sense, these fictional women [in *Santo Oficio de la Memoria*] recall the image of the Madres y Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo and the important role those women played [...] these Argentine women, during the dictatorship, were the first to defy the military powers, the first to resist the repression and to openly and publicly risk giving an opposing version from that of the dictators.⁶⁵

Giardinelli’s book gives an opposing, or an alternative, version of Argentine history that highlights the importance not just of remembering, and thus maintaining circularity with the past, but of making those memories narratable and allowing them to accent others’ lives. In this way, he encourages Argentines to work through the traumas of the dictatorship as a community, which will help them begin a new, hopeful, chapter in Argentine history.

Performative Cultural Memory in Massimo Carlotto’s *Le irregolari* (1998)

On August 5, 2014, Italian author Massimo Carlotto wrote on his Facebook page:

111. This is the number of the most recent grandchild discovered by the grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo. However this time, for us Carlottos the joy is uncontrollable. Number 111 is Guido, son of Laura Carlotto, born in a military

⁶⁴ Kerstin Bowsher, “Nation and Identity in Crisis and Beyond: Mempo Giardinelli’s *Santo Oficio de la Memoria*,” *Hispanic Review* 75, no. 1 (2007): 74.

⁶⁵ “De alguna manera, esas mujeres de la ficción retrotraen la imagen de las Madres y Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo y el importante papel por ellas desempeñado. [...] esas mujeres argentinas, durante la dictadura, fueron las primeras en desafiar al poder militar, las primeras en resistir la represión al atreverse abierta y públicamente a dar una versión contrapuesta a la de los dictadores.” Alicia Rolón, *Historia, ficción y escritura*, 203.

hospital before his mother was killed. Estela, the great Estela, President of the grandmothers, had never lost hope in finding this grandson of whom she knew only the name, through the testimony of a prisoner who survived. Those who kidnapped him called him Ignacio; he became a pianist but always had doubts about his identity. In the end, he decided to take a DNA test and he became the 111th grandchild. What joy. In this moment we would like to be in Argentina and we hope to have the opportunity to meet him and to rejoin the rest of the family. Sometimes even these stories of pain and death turn out well. Actually, very well!⁶⁶

Carlotto's message highlights his transatlantic family ties and also the importance of remembering the *desaparecidos*. His semi-autobiographical novel, which he dedicates "To the Carlottos of Italy and of Argentina / To the memory of Laura / To the return of Guido" elaborates on these views and expresses the need to take action to unite the over 400 children of *desaparecidos* (often secretly born in camps and then adopted out) with their biological family.⁶⁷

Carlotto's primary audience consists of Italian readers who may know little about Italian mass emigration or the Argentine Dirty War. Thus, Carlotto's work highlights the performative nature of cultural memory by accenting Italian history with important events from Argentine history. Jennifer Burns writes that works of contemporary

⁶⁶ "111. È il numero dell'ultimo nipote ritrovato dalle nonne di Plaza de Mayo. Solo che questa volta per noi Carlotto la gioia è incontenibile. Il numero 111 è Guido, figlio di Laura Carlotto, partorito in un ospedale militare prima che sua madre fosse assassinata. Estela, la grande Estela, presidentessa delle nonne, non aveva mai perduto la speranza di ritrovare questo nipote di cui conosceva solo il nome per la testimonianza di una prigioniera sopravvissuta. Chi lo aveva rapito, lo aveva chiamato Ignacio, è diventato un pianista ma ha sempre avuto dubbi sulla sua identità. Alla fine si è presentato spontaneamente per l'esame del DNA ed è diventato il nipote 111. Che gioia. In questo momento ci piacerebbe essere in Argentina e speriamo di avere presto l'occasione di conoscerlo e di ricongiungerci con il resto della famiglia. A volte anche queste storie di dolore e di morte finiscono bene. Anzi benissimo!" Massimo Carlotto, Facebook, Aug. 5 2014 (https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=789641334391117&id=297673736921215). Later, the number would be corrected from 111 to 114.

⁶⁷ "Ai Carlotti d'Italia e di Argentina / Alla memoria di Laura / Al ritorno di Guido." Carlotto, *Le irregolari*, 9. For an overview of the work done to reunite biological families, see *Niños Desaparecidos, Jóvenes Localizados: en la Argentina de 1975 a 2007* (Buenos Aires: Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, 2007).

migration literature are, “a consolidation of cultural memory [... and] in texts written in Italian and published in Italy, these acts of memory have a performative function, bringing such practices into being in a different context and for a different audience.”⁶⁸ In this, the novel differs significantly from Giardinelli’s text, largely written for Argentines who need no reminder of the devastating effects of the dictatorship. Giardinelli and Carlotto’s readers can be placed along the spectrum Chambers describes: “we readers of testimonial narratives are all in a position that lies somewhere on a continuum between the highly ‘proximate’ denial [...] and the ‘distanced’ insensitivity and ignorance.”⁶⁹ While many of Giardinelli’s Argentine readers are in a position of “proximate denial,” the average Italian reader may initially feel emotionally distant from the subject matter of Carlotto’s book. This difference in audience means that Carlotto must spend more time convincing his Italian readers of the significance and, more importantly, the relevance of Argentine history and personal stories to their own lives.

Carlotto makes Argentine history relevant to his Italian readers by linking his own life story to that of Argentine *desaparecidos* in two ways: as an Italian with relatives who were *desaparecidos* and as a member of the same activist generation as the *desaparecidos*. Thus, while Giardinelli’s novel places Italian identity and circularity with Italy in the past, Carlotto’s novel indicates that these are still very much present today. In addition, the many stories of the *desaparecidos* presented in Carlotto’s text remain distinct from one another, thus preserving an accent. These stories serve as just some of many examples of injustice in the world that, according to Carlotto, everyone should feel motivated to resolve, not just Italians with emigrant relatives. Giardinelli examines Italian

⁶⁸ Burns, *Migrant Imaginaries*, 98-9.

⁶⁹ Ross Chambers, *Untimely Interventions*, 6-7.

immigration to Argentina in order to help explain Argentina's present and speculate about the future. Carlotto's narrative, instead, incorporates Italian emigration into the fabric of Italian history in order to urge Italians to care about what the Italian government is doing today to help families of *desaparecidos* learn the truth, connect with grandchildren, and seek justice.

The book's protagonist, Massimo, decides to visit Argentina in order to discover the truth about his grandfather Guglielmo Carlotto's time spent there.⁷⁰ As he tells the hotel doorman in Buenos Aires what he does know about Guglielmo's life, and why he wants to learn more, he raises the themes that the novel as a whole explores. First, his grandfather's life, like the lives of Massimo and the *desaparecidos*, was largely shaped by his political beliefs: "Guglielmo Carlotto, anarchico vicentino, aveva preferito imbarcarsi su un veliero diretto in Argentina piuttosto che servire il re. Correva l'anno 1886 e il nonno aveva diciannove anni. Rimase a Buenos Aires fino al 1990, poi decise di ritornare e affrontare le autorità militari."⁷¹ Next, the lack of knowledge about Guglielmo's years in Argentina are a mystery to everyone in the family, which is a small-scale version of the mystery surrounding the *desaparecidos*' deaths and the whereabouts of their children: "[Guglielmo] rifiutò sempre, categoricamente, di parlare dell'Argentina. [...] Di quell'avventura argentina era rimasto solo un baule [...] e i racconti di mio padre

⁷⁰ A text with a similar premise is Laura Pariani's autobiographical short story "Lo spazio, il vento, la radio" (in *Il pettine*. Palermo: Sellerio, 1995: 95-109). In this text, she recounts her first trip to Argentina with her mother to visit her grandfather, an Italian anarchist who went into exile and never returned to Italy. Pariani's narrative focuses, not on politics, but on the transformative experience she had as a teenager living for a short time in the Pampas. The story helps explain Pariani's long-standing interest in Argentina and the empathy she feels for everyone who lives, even for brief period, as an immigrant.

⁷¹ Carlotto, *Le irregolari*, 22.

e degli altri parenti su quel nonno che io non avevo mai conosciuto.”⁷² Finally, Massimo’s need to learn the truth corresponds to the view the association *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo* holds: “Fin da piccolo sono rimasto profondamente affascinato dal mistero di quegli anni argentini oltre che dalla figura del nonno, e mi sono spesso ripromesso di attraversare l’oceano per scoprire le ragioni di quell’ostinato silenzio.”⁷³ Massimo’s search for information about his grandfather’s life becomes a point of connection with the Argentines who research their own family histories. Throughout the book, he attempts to balance his own investigation with learning about the actions of the many people he meets, as they all work to fill the gaps in their family histories.

Massimo’s journey parallels witness literature in which: “audiences are turned from the circle of their everyday concerns toward what they may least wish to hear about”⁷⁴ In fact, testimonials “function as a kind of visitation, a cultural wake-up call.”⁷⁵ As soon as he learns about Estela and her association, Massimo is turned from his initial desire to learn about his grandfather and towards learning more about the horrors of the dictatorship as well as the association’s current work. This decision to learn about the *desaparecidos* and accept the traumas of the past into his present is represented by Massimo allowing the doorman to throw away his guidebook.⁷⁶

Just as Massimo opens himself to hearing the stories of the many Argentines he meets, Carlotto wants his Italian reader to be open to reading and digesting the contents of his book. Chambers discusses the “metaphor of relay” with regards testimonial writing because, “in order to be successful a relay must be well performed by a writer but also

⁷² Ibid., 23.

⁷³ Ibid., 24.

⁷⁴ Ross Chambers, *Untimely Interventions*, 21.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 36.

⁷⁶ Carlotto, *Le irregolari*, 17.

‘picked up,’ as it were in a second act of relay, by a reader [...] a relay can be fumbled, dropped, or otherwise misperformed; and it may even be refused.”⁷⁷ The familial connection between Massimo and Estela highlights the circularity between Italy and Argentina, which would make an Italian reader more interested in reading the book and, thus, more likely to become accented by its contents.

The last name Massimo shares with Estela, the leader of the association *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*, becomes both evidence of a familial connection between the two and a means of learning more about this association’s work searching for the truth about the *desaparecidos* and reconnecting children of *desaparecidos* with their biological families. During their first encounter, Massimo and Estela learn that his grandfather and her husband’s father were cousins, thus joining Massimo and his Italian family’s lives with Estela’s. Once their connection is confirmed, Estela includes him in the search for her grandson:

La nostra famiglia è stata duramente perseguitata dalla dittatura [...] Una delle mie figlie, Laura [...] è stata sequestrata incinta di due mesi e tenuta in vita fino al parto. Poi è stata assassinata. Sappiamo che ha dato alla luce un maschietto a cui ha dato il nome Guido. Come suo padre e suo nonno. Lo stiamo cercando da diciannove anni.”⁷⁸

Massimo and Estela’s family ties and Massimo’s search for information on his grandfather’s time in Argentina also allows him to relate to other members of the organization. When introducing himself Massimo leverages this circularity, in order to explain his presence there as well as to prompt others to tell their stories. Before meeting Estela, he talks to two women and briefly speaks of his grandfather. Then, after a moment of silence, says “<<Una notte sono arrivati i soldati...>> attaccai con tono da ‘c’era una

⁷⁷ Ross Chambers, *Untimely Interventions*, 38.

⁷⁸ Carlotto, *Le irregolari*, 44-5.

volta'. <<E se llevaron Augustina María, mia figlia>> [...] <<Se llevaron Daniel José, mio figlio.>>⁷⁹ Later, Massimo meets Carlos Enrique Pisoni, a son of *desaparecidos*, and as a means of introduction: “sentii il bisogno di specificare che ero il nipote italiano della presidente delle Nonne e lui, nella mia lingua, mi invitò a bere del mate.”⁸⁰ In this encounter, he highlights the familial connection and his Italianness, while Pisoni also indicates a familiarity with Italian.

Similar to Giardinelli, Carlotto advocates creating an accented collective memory by piecing together individual stories. This can be seen through the association’s constant search for information on all of the *desaparecidos* and their children, not just their own family members. This view of memory as an amalgam of microstories is clearest in the protagonist’s nightly trips on a bus around the city, which give the novel the second part of its title: *Buenos Aires Horror Tour*. Alberto Zava maintains that the bus “represents a mechanism for memory, the instrument that makes time travel to the period of the Argentine dictatorship possible,⁸¹ while “the task of remembering, in its mechanical and infinite repetitiveness, is assumed by Santiago, the driver.⁸² On his second night of the tour, Massimo realizes that Santiago never met the vast majority of the people whose stories he is telling, but instead has memorized any available information about them. When Massimo asks him why he does this, Santiago explains: “Della maggior parte di loro non è rimasto altro”⁸³ and, on a subsequent night, elaborates:

⁷⁹ Ibid., 41.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 105.

⁸¹ “rappresenta il meccanismo del ricordo, lo strumento grazie al quale il viaggio nel tempo della dittatura argentina diventa possibile.” Zava, Alberto, “Il tour guidato di Massimo Carlotto nella Buenos Aires della dittatura,” 44.

⁸² “L’impegno della memoria, nella sua meccanica e infinita ripetitività, è assunto da Santiago, l’autista.” Ibid., 45.

⁸³ Carlotto, *Le irregolari*, 58.

l'unico modo per fare uscire i desaparecidos dall'anonimità degli elenchi e restituire loro un minimo di fisicità è mostrare dove vivevano e raccontare chi erano, che cosa facevano... soprattutto i loro ultimi istanti di libertà... Quando erano ancora degli individui, prima che l'oliata macchina della desaparición li rendesse tutti uguali... Torturati, uccisi, occultati.⁸⁴

Santiago's views promote collective memory not as a homogenizing action, smoothing over differences and erasing the accent, but instead as a means of highlighting the particulars of each story and creating a multivocal chorus. As Zava notes, "the only means of giving an identity to each of the individual victims of disappearance was precisely through remembering them and ensuring that the memory is not vague, generic."⁸⁵ Reflecting on Santiago's words, Massimo suggests that this attention to detail makes the stories more memorable: "Aveva ragione. Un nome, una data, una fotografia sbiadita si dimenticano presto. Le storie, invece, anche solo per un particolare, si ricordano più facilmente."⁸⁶ Carlotto, like Giardinelli, narrativizes the traumatic and fragmentary memories of the past. He attempts to strike a balance between focusing on a handful of stories, in particular the lost members of the Carlotto family, and including the stories of the many Argentines he meets.

Carlotto's text introduces us to an Argentine society that is still coming to terms with the trauma of the dictatorship, and to characters who fight back against the fear and silence that characterized that period by speaking out today. Zava highlights the psychological effects of the dictatorship that Carlotto's book demonstrates:

the journey in the horror of Buenos Aires during the dictatorship goes beyond a simple act of violence and calls attention to the atmosphere of reflected terror that

⁸⁴ Ibid., 89.

⁸⁵ "l'unica possibilità di dare un'identità a ciascuna delle singole vittime della *desaparición* era proprio quella di ricordarle e di fare in modo che il ricordo non fosse indistinto, generico." Zava, "Il tour guidato," 45.

⁸⁶ Carlotto, *Le irregolari*, 89.

projects itself from the beginning on the Argentine population, so much so that the very fear of disappearing constitutes an extreme form of psychological violence (calculated and theorized in the dictatorial system) applied to everyone, and of likewise devastating consequences, although in different forms.⁸⁷

As already mentioned, the *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo* were among the first to speak up in order to combat years of silence, and Carlotto joins their fight to be heard:

Against the forced silence of the *desaparecidos* the response is the voice: the chorus of protest from human rights organizations, testimonials by survivors or the clandestine detention centers, stories that over time keep the individuality of those who disappeared alive. And it is precisely the voice that takes center stage in Massimo Carlotto's novel.⁸⁸

In this context, Santiago the tour guide serves as an example of someone who, in his attempt to memorize every detail he can, is unable to move beyond this trauma. During “la notte degli italiani” on their third night together, Massimo becomes overwhelmed and asks to return home early. Santiago, only partway through his tour, is unable to stop his storytelling, which breaks down into a litany names: “E mancano ancora Schettini, Andreani, Bossi, Soldati, Bartolini, Rigoni, Berardo, Armellin, Privitera, Casaretto, Busetto, D’Amico, Nicolini, Bugatti, Marcon, Bonin, Spinella, Parodi, Angelini, Scala, Mirabelli, Baldassarre....”⁸⁹ Before exiting the bus, Massimo asks him how many Italian *desaparecidos* there were, but Santiago has never counted them. Santiago is so focused on the minutiae of each story, he is unable to see the forest for the trees. Similar to

⁸⁷ “il viaggio nell’orrore della Buenos Aires della dittatura va al di là del puro atto di violenza e punta l’attenzione sull’atmosfera di terrore riflessa che si proietta fin da subito sulla popolazione argentina, tanto che la paura stessa della *desaparición* costituisce un’estrema forma di violenza psicologica (calcolata e teorizzata nel sistema dittatoriale) applicata a tutti e dalle conseguenze altrettanto, pur in forme diverse, devastanti.” Zava, “Il tour guidato,” 48.

⁸⁸ “Contro il silenzio forzato dei *desaparecidos* la risposta è la voce: i cori di protesta delle associazioni per i diritti umani, le testimonianze dei sopravvissuti ai centri di detenzione clandestina, i racconti che nel tempo tengono in vita le individualità delle persone scomparse. Ed è proprio la voce ad essere in primo piano nel romanzo di Massimo Carlotto.” Ibid., 47.

⁸⁹ Carlotto, *Le irregolari*, 96.

Giardinelli's El Tonto, who writes everything without thinking, Santiago remembers and recounts without much reflection.

At several points in the text, Massimo reminds us that the *abuelas'* search for their grandchildren is a race against time. This parallels the already mentioned situation of the aging population of Italian immigrants in Argentina, whose stories will be lost if they are not recorded. When speaking with several children of *desaparecidos*, Massimo tells them, "Tra non molto toccherà a voi reggere tutto il peso della ricerca della verità e della giustizia. Toccherà a voi conservare la memoria."⁹⁰ Then, the doorman Inocencio speaks to Massimo at the end of his time in Buenos Aires: "Sono vecchio, señor e non ho più nessuno. Vorrei affidarle la memoria di mio figlio."⁹¹ Through reminding the reader of the advancing age of the parents of *desaparecidos*, Carlotto adds a sense of urgency to the association's work and encourages younger generations to step forward and continue searching for the truth. The problem of forgetting also faces testimonial literature:

the survival of memory [...] will have to depend on the availability, from generation to succeeding generation, of an art of witness- that is, of singularity-capable of keeping fresh, or of presencing, by figural means-and of re-presencing-what more conventional representations will increasingly consign to an (unpresenced) past.⁹²

In other words, writers like Carlotto bring the past into the present while keeping the material "fresh"—a circular accent.

Carlotto urges his readers to incorporate the histories of the people whose lives and deaths he narrates into their own view of the world. Another way of examining the connection between trauma, memory, and narrative is through the concept of

⁹⁰ Ibid., 114.

⁹¹ Ibid., 181.

⁹² Ross Chambers, *Untimely Interventions*, 42.

postmemory, a term Marianne Hirsch coined in her research on memory and trauma related to the Holocaust:

I use the term *postmemory* to describe the relationship of children of survivors of cultural or collective trauma to the experiences of their parents, experiences that they ‘remember’ only as the stories and images with which they grew up, but that are so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right. The term is meant to convey its temporal and qualitative difference from survivor memory, its secondary or second-generation memory quality, its basis in displacement, its belatedness.⁹³

Postmemory, in Carlotto’s book, is even more displaced and belated than in Hirsch’s studies, as the children of *desaparecidos* grow up knowing nothing of their biological parents’ lives. Even in Massimo’s case, he is the grandson of an emigrant but grows up knowing nothing about his grandfather’s time in Argentina or his familial connection to the *desaparecidos*. Many of those who could directly recount their experiences of either emigration or of being a *desaparecidos* are long dead, leaving the survivors piecing together fragmented memories. Perhaps the memory Carlotto narrates in his novel can be considered a post-postmemory, even further removed than the cases Hirsch examines. However, Hirsch’s elaboration of postmemory as “a question of adopting the traumatic experiences—and thus also the memories—of others as one’s own, or, more precisely, as experiences one might oneself have had, and of inscribing them into one’s own life story,” does correspond with the message of the novel.⁹⁴

This narrative also links memory and identity when discussing the children of *desaparecidos*, many who grow up knowing nothing of their birth parents. The

⁹³ Marianne Hirsch, “Projected Memory: Holocaust Photographs in Personal and Public Fantasy,” in Mieke Bal, Jonathan V. Crewe, and Leo Spitzer (eds.), *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College, 1999), 8.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

association's work to reunite the children of this lost generation with their living relatives is a fight for their identity, the belief that, as one member of the association says: "Ogni essere umano ha diritto alla propria identità: questo è il senso della lotta delle Nonne. Ai figli dei desaparecidos, oltre l'identità, è stata falsificata la memoria della propria famiglia."⁹⁵ According to the members of the association, knowing the truth about their biological parents' past will help these children understand who they are in the present. Similar to how learning about the circularity between Italy and Argentina accents Carlotto's Italian readers, children of *desaparecidos* will become accented after connecting with their biological family. More broadly, through uncovering the stories of the *desaparecidos*, Argentines today can more fully recognize who they are as a society.

One of the objectives of Carlotto's narrative is to make the reader feel empathy for what Argentines went through during the dictatorship, as well as their continued struggle to learn about the *desaparecidos*. For Italian readers, he also clearly wants them to feel embarrassed that the Italian government did not intervene during the Argentine dictatorship and, even today, is doing little to pressure the Argentine government to help uncover the truth. Massimo represents Italians in general, the majority who knows little about the *desaparecidos* or the Italian government's lack of action. When speaking to one Italo-Argentine woman, Alba Rosa Lanzillotto, she mentions "il processo," and when Massimo expresses confusion, she explains: "Quello che lo Stato italiano dovrebbe celebrare nei confronti dei criminali della dittatura per i desaparecidos italiani [...] Davvero se ne sa così poco in Italia?"⁹⁶ Massimo's embarrassment at his ignorance expresses what the Italian reader is supposed to feel; embarrassment and, once he learns

⁹⁵ Carlotto, *Le irregolari*, 47.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.

more, a desire to put pressure on the Italian government to do something. Thus, while Giardinelli implores that his Argentine readers not forget about the events of the dictatorship because they are an important part of history, Carlotto informs his readers about Argentine history and wants them to act on this new knowledge.

Carlotto's book returns several times to the passive role the Italian government played during Argentina's Dirty War and its continued lack of action today. Massimo speaks to María Esther, who tells him of the inaction of the European community, both during the dictatorship and still today. As he listens, Massimo thinks: "Avrei voluto interromperla, ribattere punto per punto, dimostrarle che si sbagliava, ma nel profondo del mio cuore e della mia coscienza sapevo che stava dicendo la verità."⁹⁷ Again, Massimo represents any Italian who finds it difficult to accept that his government did little to help Argentines.

While in Argentina, and then after returning to Italy, Massimo must learn to balance the desire to remember every story he is told – during the nightly tours and by the many people he meets – and his particular desire to learn about his grandfather and his Argentine relatives. Soon after arriving, he tells the hotel doorman, Inocencio: "Domani conoscerò la storia della mia famiglia argentina [...] Oggi, invece, non ho fatto altro che incrociare altre storie [...] Storie che non si dimenticano."⁹⁸ Inocencio replies: "Ogni giorno ne conoscerà di nuove, ma non dimentichi quella del nonno [...] Deve riannodare tutti i fili tra il passato e il presente, altrimenti il dolore di tutte le storie la schiaccerà."⁹⁹ A recurring theme in this book is the broad need to find the circularity between past and present without abandoning the search for your own family histories.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 109.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 54.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 54.

As Massimo learns more about the *desaparecidos*, he is struck by the fact that the majority of them were of his generation. This generational circularity, along with the fact that many were Italo-Argentine, makes their loss more personal. As he attends one of the weekly demonstrations in the Plaza de Mayo he looks at those gathered there and, “mi resi conto per la prima volta che era proprio vero che la generazione degli anni Settanta era stata sterminata.”¹⁰⁰ He quickly recognizes this combined blood and generational connection, telling Santiago:

Mi sento già parte della storia dei Carlotto d'Argentina [...] E non solo per le enormità delle ingiustizie che hanno subito o per i lontani legami di sangue, ma perché è una storia della mia generazione [...] È un passato che già mi appartiene... Una storia che i Carlotto d'Italia hanno vissuto negli stessi anni... Anzi a partire dallo stesso anno, il '76.¹⁰¹

This even becomes a point of connection between Estela and Massimo's mother, who later meet in Italy: “si intesero subito alla perfezione: sapevano benissimo entrambe che cosa significava difendere i propri figli dalle persecuzioni.”¹⁰²

Carlotto's text focuses on the story of the Carlotto family in Italy and Argentina in order to more broadly speak to themes of political activism, loss, and identity. Massimo's trip to Argentina allows him to incorporate his Argentine relatives' lives into his own sense of identity and also prompts a stronger association with a whole generation of activists. The clearest example of the global view Carlotto promotes is when Massimo learns that his friend Torito, who has recently disappeared and was likely killed in Peru, had a son. The boy, Roque, had been adopted as a baby by a French couple, so he could grow up away from the dangers Torito and his partner, Névida, faced as revolutionaries.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 101.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 86.

¹⁰² Ibid., 200.

Massimo is tasked with telling the now-sixteen-year-old about his biological parents. Roque's story serves as a reminder that *desaparecidos* were not only in Argentina. In fact, Massimo tells Roque of the large community of children of *desaparecidos* living in France: "Sono cileni, colombiani, peruviani, guatemaltech e hanno deciso di condividere questa esperienza, riunendosi in un'associazione."¹⁰³ Just as Massimo must learn to balance his particular interest in the Carlotto family with the many stories of Argentine *desaparecidos*, he must also balance stories of Argentines with comparable stories in other countries.

Roque's story also drives home how learning the truth about your family history can change how you see yourself and can connect you with other communities. His adoptive mother tells Massimo: "Tutto a un tratto ha scoperto di appartenere a un altro mondo, molto lontano dall'Europa," while still remaining firmly part of the family that raised him: "Siamo sempre molto uniti."¹⁰⁴ Roque is accented by this new knowledge about his biological family, which ultimately leads to a more complete understanding of who he is, and an ability to fully engage with all aspects of his identity.

By the end of the book, Massimo has also managed to incorporate all the knowledge he has gained and act on it in a meaningful way, once again emphasizing the importance of both circularity and the accent in this narrative. In the final scene of the text, he and a group of fellow activists return to Buenos Aires and play protest music in front of one of the concentration camps during the dictatorship, with plans to go to Lima, Peru next. When Santiago asks him "Hai trovato il tuo autobus?" Massimo is able to

¹⁰³ Ibid., 198.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 198.

reply: “Sì.”¹⁰⁵ Carlotto’s book follows Massimo’s journey of becoming connected to an entire network of people and associations working to uncover, remember, and narrate innumerable individual stories of loss, death, and injustice. Massimo increasingly discovers the circularity between himself and others, but also learns to pursue his own family story and focus on the injustices that most resonate with him. Returning once again to El Tonto’s metaphor of the bicycle wheel, Carlotto’s work is another example of a circular accent, connecting languages and cultures without erasing or concealing the specificity of each individual story. Furthermore, as a work of both migration and witness literature, it encourages each reader to seek out his own cause and to fight for it.

Circular Accents for All

These novels connect two lost generations and also speak out against the tendency to ignore or conceal the trauma of the dictatorship and of emigration. Giardinelli presents a messier view of memory, with different versions of the same events and characters who disagree on the value of remembering at all. Carlotto shows many individuals who are taking it upon themselves to learn about, and remember the past. In both works, the authors focus on the importance of remembering, and thus the positive aspects of memory as a circular accent, despite how complicated and potentially traumatic those memories may be.

While in previous chapters re-ethnicization and translation play similar roles in the primary texts I examine, in this chapter the roles of memory and of migration are greatly influenced by the novels’ intended audience. Giardinelli’s Argentine audience is

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 205.

still contending with the effects of the dictatorship, thus the novel above all wants to explain Argentine history and identity. Italian migration, language and culture serve as a backdrop but are largely confined to the past. Carlotto, instead, writes for Italian readers who may know little about Argentina but who instead are dealing with the past trauma of emigration. In these novels, Italian emigration becomes a means of making the stories of the *desaparecidos* relevant to Italians today.

These works focus on characters who are simultaneously participants in, and observers of, a culture, and are able to narrate traumatic events. In Giardinelli's case, he "analyzes Argentina both from an inner point of view having grown up in Argentina as well as from that of an outsider living abroad."¹⁰⁶ Similarly, Carlotto does not grow up in Argentina but is accepted into the association due to his connection to Estela and his life as a political activist. Within the novels, the characters Pedro and Massimo are the ones most capable of bridging multiple countries and identities, while other characters are either less willing or less able to do so.

Giardinelli and Carlotto briefly show interactions between Italy, Argentina, and other countries without dwelling on the consequences of this. The narratives I analyze in the final chapter – Laura Pariani's *Quando Dio Ballava Il Tango* (2002), Clementina Sandra Ammendola's *Lei che sono io – Ella que soy yo* (2005), and Antonio Dal Masetto's trilogy *Oscuramente fuerte es la vida* (1990), *La tierra incomparable* (1994), and *Cita en el Lago Maggiore* (2011) – use the theme of the return to the hometown in order to raise questions of identity and project the idea of a hybrid, constantly changing identity. These works examine similar themes as all of my primary texts – including

¹⁰⁶ Patrick L. O'Connell, "Narrating Memory and the Recuperation of Identity," 46.

ethnicity, language, and memory – but differ in their focus on the future. In this way, they propose that circular accents will continue to exist in the future and can even expand beyond the borders of Italy and Argentina.

Chapter 4

Italian-Argentines Return Home

From the 1980s to today, Italy has transformed into an immigrant destination country and Argentina continues to accept immigrants, particularly from neighboring countries. In addition, both countries are contending with small-scale emigration, primarily of educated individuals looking for work. These recent migratory flows, combined with the relative ease of airplane travel, has made it increasingly possible for Italian emigrants and their descendants to travel to Italy. This chapter concentrates on Laura Pariani's *Quando Dio Ballava Il Tango* (2002), Clementina Sandra Ammendola's *Lei che sono io – Ella que soy yo* (2005), and writing by Antonio Dal Masetto, in particular the last two books of his trilogy: *La tierra incomparable* (1994) and *Cita en el Lago Maggiore* (2011). In these works, the Italian-Argentine characters' "return" trips to Italy lead to them better understanding their national identities.¹ Through movement between countries and conversations with others, these characters realize the advantages of having a multinational identity based in ties to Italy, Argentina, and in some cases additional countries.

¹ Rather than applying any outside definition of national identity to the characters in these novels, I will instead look at how the authors present the characters' sense of belonging with respect to different places and identities. This allows each character to present one particular means of self-identification, which may not be the same as that of the other characters.

Laura Pariani's *Quando Dio ballava il tango* follows six intertwined families over a century that begins with their immigration to Argentina from Italy in the late 1800s and ends with one descendant, Cora, and her young daughter escaping Argentina in 1978, when Cora's husband becomes a *desaparecido*. Cora returns to her ancestors' hometown and chooses to remain in Italy, only returning to Argentina for a visit in 2001. Her daughter, Malena, grows up in Italy but then finds work in Germany.

Italo-Argentine author Clementina Sandra Ammendola's *Lei che sono io – Ella que soy yo* is part of the series *I Mappamondi* by publishing house Sinnos, intended for use by Italian and immigrant students in Italian schools. Each book is written by a migrant author from a different country, and is presented in both Italian and the native language of the author. In her book, Ammendola discusses her childhood in Argentina as the daughter of an Italian and then her life after immigrating to Italy in 1989 in search of work. Along with this autobiographical narrative, the book also includes a brief history of Argentina, riddles, recipes, and information on Argentine associations in Italy.

Antonio Dal Masetto (1938-2015) was born in Northern Italy and immigrated to Argentina in 1950. He published numerous novels and short stories exclusively in Spanish, and his trilogy narrates three generations of movement between Italy and Argentina. The first book of the trilogy, *Oscuramente fuerte es la vida*, takes place entirely in Italy and recounts the life of the protagonist, Agata, from her birth in the early 1900s to the moment she boards a boat to Argentina with her children. Agata is a fictionalized version of Dal Masetto's mother and the name of her hometown, Tarni, is a reorganization of the letters of Dal Masetto's birthplace, Intra. *La tierra incomparable* takes place in the 1980s and recounts when a now-elderly Agata visits Tarni for the first

time since emigrating.² In *Cita en el Lago Maggiore*, Agata's son and granddaughter travel to Tarni together in the early 2000s and attempt to form a shared connection to a place the son left as a child, and the granddaughter is seeing for the first time.

The characters in these three books feel what Homi Bhabha calls "unhomeliness." He writes that the term unhomely "captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world" and that a moment of unhomeliness can occur when "the border between home and world becomes confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting."³ These instances of unhomeliness, which can even occur in the characters' hometowns, challenge the idea of there being just one home, identity, or return. Instead, they suggest a blurring, or at times a doubling, of different identities and homes, and the possibility of multiple departures and returns.

After giving an overview of contemporary (Italian-)Argentine migration to Italy, I use Loretta Baldassar's anthropological study of Italo-Australians' return trips to Italy to examine Cora's sense of home and identity. Cora's migration to Italy and subsequent visit to Argentina allow her to better understand the Italian accent in her Argentine identity and adopt an Argentine-accented Italian identity. I then analyze Ammendola's own reflections on circularity and national identity in the context of her narrative, where an ongoing circular movement between Argentina and Italy allows for the coexistence of her dual identity as Argentine and Italian. Finally, I use Marc Augé's work on non-places

² Another novel that follows an elderly Italian emigrant returning to visit his hometown is Nicola and Fabrizio Valsecchi's *Giorni di neve, giorni di sole* (Barzago: Marna, 2009). However, the book's focus is not on return migration or identity but, rather, on the protagonist wanting to share the story of his *desaparecida* daughter with his country of birth.

³ Bhabha, Homi K. "The World and the Home" *Social Text*, no. 31/32, Third World and Post-Colonial Issues (1992): 141. Bhabha expands on the concept of unhomeliness in his book *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

and Zygmunt Bauman's writing on tourists and vagabonds to show how space, identity, and sense of belonging interact in Dal Masetto's writing, as three generations of Italian-Argentines visit their town of origin in Northern Italy. Agata's return to Tarni demonstrates how her time in Argentine has given her a strong Argentine accent. Her son and granddaughter's visit reaffirm Italy as their origin, but the son's life is in Argentina, while the granddaughter has found work in Spain. Taken together, all of these narratives show some of the ways in which returning to Italy, whether temporarily or permanently, allows Italian-Argentines to renegotiate their sense of belonging to both Argentina and Italy, and accept both the circularity and the accent present in a multinational identity.

Italo-Argentines in Italy

Historical studies of emigration often distinguish between emigrants who settled permanently in the host country and those who eventually returned to their home country. Of the over three million Italians who immigrated to Argentina, about half returned to Italy.⁴ As the population of Italian-born Argentine residents dwindles, now the vast majority of those immigrating from Argentina to Italy are Argentines who have previously never set foot in Italy. The current movement of people from Argentina to Italy is widely different from the past mass emigration of Italians. However, my primary texts in this chapter draw connections between Italy's past as a country of emigration and its recent present as an immigrant destination country, and the effect this history has on their characters' lives and self-identification.

⁴ Samuel Baily, *Immigrants in the Lands of Promise: Italians in Buenos Aires and New York City, 1870-1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 58-60.

Since the end of large-scale Italian emigration in 1960, migration from Argentina to Italy can be divided into two broad periods: from the 1960s to the early 1980s Argentines emigrated largely due to the political unrest in the country, while since the late 1980s emigration has tended to be for economic reasons. These periods correspond to the texts I analyze in this chapter. Marzia Rosti further subdivides each of these periods into two distinct phases to better match the flow of Argentines to Italy. The first phase encompasses Argentine emigration during the decade beginning in 1966, which was primarily composed of intellectuals who went into exile in other South American countries. Second, over 200,000 Argentines emigrated after the March 24, 1976 coup, and 2,000-3,000 of them went to Italy, including Pariani's character Cora.⁵ Dal Masetto's Agata makes her return trip to Italy in the relatively calm 1980s, after Argentina has returned to democracy but prior to the economic problems. The following two phases correspond to economic downturns in Argentina, the first in the late 1980s and the second from 2001-2002. Ammendola arrives in Italy in 1989 and becomes one of the almost 65,000 Argentines recorded in Italy in 1991, over 60% of those who, like her, have Italian citizenship.⁶ Then, Agata's son and granddaughter travel to Italy in the early 2000s, after the granddaughter has immigrated to Spain in search of work.

Studies of (Italo-)Argentine migration to Italy – particularly those focused on the twenty-first century – have found that Argentines who acquire an Italian passport tend to do so in order to more easily find work in the European Union, rather than to claim an Italian identity. Graciela Bramuglia and Mario Santillo's analysis of Italo-Argentines' reasons for attempting to acquire Italian citizenship from 2001-2002 found that there was

⁵ Marzia Rosti, "Gli argentini in Italia e il Bicentenario dell'indipendenza argentina," *RiMe*, no. 6 (June 2011): 633.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 634.

a significant increase in citizenship requests after the 2001 economic crisis. Furthermore, for these Argentines “Possessing Italian citizenship has an intrinsic value; it is an asset.”⁷ The researchers conclude: “The Italians in Argentina, save exceptions, do not display signs of identifying with Italian culture – if by this we mean knowledge of the language, participation in associations, or close contact with Italian relatives.”⁸ Mélanie Fusaro’s broader study of Italo-Argentines who arrived in Italy from 1998-2006 asks whether this migration is a “<<return to the roots>> or a new departure?”⁹ In other words, Fusaro examines whether Italo-Argentines are returning to the country of their ancestors or are escaping from a negative economic situation in Argentina and simply choosing Italy to take advantage of the benefits afforded by their Italian citizenship. Fusaro argues: “it seems for them to be not so much <<returning to the country, >> but escaping from a disastrous economic situation” and furthermore, “Italian citizenship thus appears to be a passport towards Europe; an access key.”¹⁰ Thus, these Italo-Argentines with both Argentine and Italian citizenship take advantage of Italy’s citizenship laws without necessarily feeling any desire to reconnect with distant family members or learn the Italian language.

Research shows that Italo-Argentines who go to Italy generally do not call themselves Italian, and scholars do not consider their migration a return. However, some

⁷ “Possedere la cittadinanza italiana ha un valore intrinseco, è un capitale.” Graciela Bramuglia and Mario Santillo, “Un ritorno rinviato: discendenti di italiani in Argentina cercano la via del ritorno in Europa,” *Altreitalie*, no. 24 (January-June 2002): 40.

⁸ “Gli italiani in Argentina, salvo eccezioni, non presentano segni di identità con la cultura italiana – se per questi si intende la conoscenza della lingua, la partecipazione alle associazioni o lo stretto contatto con parenti italiani.” *Ibid.*, 50.

⁹ “<<ritorno alle radici>> o nuova partenza?” Mélanie Fusaro, “Gli italoargentini in Italia (1998-2006): <<ritorno alle radici>> o nuova partenza?,” *Altreitalie*, no. 36-37 (Jan.-Dec. 2008): 233.

¹⁰ “sembra che si tratti per loro non tanto di «tornare al paese», ma di sfuggire a una situazione economica disastrosa,” “La cittadinanza italiana appare quindi come un passaporto verso l’Europa, una chiave d’accesso.” *Ibid.*, 239.

Italo-Argentines do choose to immigrate to Italy in order to reconnect with Italian relatives and learn more about their ancestor's home country. Bramuglia and Santillo's research gives several examples of Italo-Argentines who search for information about Italian ancestors out of curiosity, or to better understand their origins. This research "of the possible birthplaces of kin until establishing a link, would represent further evidence of the curiosity to tie themselves to their origins – «and obtaining citizenship in some cases is just a pretext.»"¹¹ These Italo-Argentines, who are the characters that populate the narratives I analyze in this chapter, may initially go to Italy out of convenience. However, ultimately their migration allows them to better understand the Italian accent present in their Argentine identity, and to perhaps adopt an Argentine-accented Italian identity.

**Nostalgia and Belonging in Laura Pariani's *Quando Dio Ballava Il Tango*
(2002)**

Pariani's novel is similar to the books I examined in the previous chapter, particularly in how it connects Cora's identity as an Argentine of Italian descent to her husband's disappearance during the Dirty War. However, in contrast with Giardinelli's Pedro, Cora goes into exile in Italy, which then becomes her permanent home. The narrative includes sixteen female narrators writing from 1935-2001, and the chapters do not progress chronologically. I will focus on the first chapter, when Cora first arrives at her grandmother's house in Northern Italy in 1978, and the final chapter, where she visits Argentina for the first time in 2001. Cora has always been aware of her accented

¹¹ "dei possibili luoghi di nascita del familiare fino ad arrivare a instaurare un legame, rappresenterebbe una prova in più della curiosità di legarsi alle proprie origini – «e l'ottenimento della cittadinanza in qualche caso arriva a essere un semplice pretesto»." Graciela Bramuglia and Mario Santillo, "Un ritorno rinviato," 49-50.

Argentine identity, but these two returns allow her to better understand and accept that Italian accent, more closely identify her relationship to both countries, and empathize with others whose lives have been affected by migration. Her story presents nostalgia as a feeling that accents those who have migrated, diminishing their ability to feel they belong in either Italy or Argentina.

Cora, similar to Giardinelli's Pedro, is the narrator who weaves together her family's story into a coherent multi-vocal narrative. Federica Pastorino describes it as:

a novel with a circular style, whose point of union is in the character Corazón Bellati. She is entrusted with the task of gathering the threads of the narrated stories in order to rescue the memories of the past.¹²

Thus, Cora gives meaning to the circularity of the narrative. Cora's given name, Corazón (heart), further explains her significance, as she is not only the center but the heart of the story, and of her family's memories: "Memories in search of a center, of a heart-Corazón."¹³ Cora recognizes that Italy contains her family's past: "her trip is an escape into the past [...] And this farmstead in the Ticino valley is the land of memory."¹⁴ Her migration is a return to this past, in an effort to integrate this Italian accent into her present and future.

In the first chapter of the book, through Venturina's storytelling, Cora and the reader learn about her great-grandfather's experiences as one of many seasonal workers who moved between Italy and Argentina. Togn's situation is comparable to the past

¹² "un romanzo dall'andamento circolare, il cui punto d'unione sta nel personaggio di Corazón Bellati. A lei spetta il compito di raccogliere le fila delle storie narrate per riscattare la memoria del passato." Federica Pastorino, "L'Argentina di Laura Pariani," *Otto/Novecento* 30, no. 3 (Sept./Dec. 2006): 127.

¹³ "Memorie alla ricerca di un centro, di un cuore- Corazón." Vera Horn, "Sotto <<un cielo straniero>>. Gli emigranti di Laura Pariani," *Cahiers d'études italiennes*, no. 7 (2008): 279.

¹⁴ "il suo viaggio una fuga nel passato. [...] E questa cascina nella valle del Ticino è la terra della memoria." Laura Pariani, *Quando Dio ballava il tango*, 20.

Italian immigration to Argentina that I already examined in *Dio non ama i bambini* and *Luz de las cruels provincias*, when maintaining a connection to both Italy and Argentina is often impossible. This impossibility is reflected in his constant feeling of nostalgia, and of unhomeliness, both in Italy and Argentina. He tries to explain this in a conversation with Venturina, which she recounts to Cora:

<<Una volta sono andata con lui a far legna. ‘Pà, cos’è la nustalgìa, che la nominate sempre?’ gli ho chiesto.
<<È un dolore...’
<<‘Ma un dolore come?’
<<‘Come si fa a dire, la mé Venturina?... Per esempio, in Mèrica era il dolore di non vedere mai un monte [...] di non poter battere il piede contro una pietra [...] Ecco cos’è la nustalgìa... Invece adesso è all’incontrario, mi mancano quei posti-là.’¹⁵

Togn’s nostalgia for Italy when he is in Argentina makes it difficult for him to feel he belongs there. However, this turns into nostalgia for Argentina when he returns to Italy, suggesting he will remain accented whether he chooses to remain in one country or the other.

Nostalgia is a feeling shared by many Italian emigrants, and as Togn’s experiences show, it may not disappear even after returning to Italy. Loretta Baldassar’s research on members of the Italo-Australian community in Perth who travel to Italy demonstrates some parallels with Togn’s story, especially with regard to the theme of nostalgia: “For them there is only one remedy for nostalgia, for the painful desire to return (the Greek *nostos*): a visit to the country. But what happens when, after returning, you do not feel you have arrived home?”¹⁶ Togn’s struggles reflect how difficult this

¹⁵ Ibid., 19-20.

¹⁶ “Per loro non c’è che un rimedio alla «nostalgia», al doloroso desiderio di «ritorno» (il *nostos* greco): una visita al paese. Ma che cosa succede quando al ritorno uno non sente di essere

question is to answer. He feels a sense of unhomeliness in own home, suggesting he may not feel at home anywhere. Moreover, Italians who never emigrated, including Togn's wife and daughters, find it difficult to understand why he cannot re-integrate into the Italian community. Venturina expresses her confusion: <<Sì, era un uomo strano. Come se non si sentisse bene qui a câ sua.>>¹⁷ This confusion turns into frustration, which only increases the emotional separation between Togn and his family.

Cora, as a descendent of emigrants, understands nostalgia and unhomeliness even before becoming an emigrant herself: “come tutti coloro che son nati in Argentina, la sa lunga sia sulla nostalgia sia sui sotterfugi a cui questo sentimento costringe.”¹⁸ This circularity between Cora and Togn allows her to reflect on the consequences of not finding a balance between the two countries:

‘Golondrinas’ si chiamano in castellano i lavoratori stagionali come il Togn. ‘Rondini’. Che nome poetico per una vita d’inferno: doppia terra con cui fare in conti – Argentina e Italia – e doppia lingua; il più delle volte anche doppia famiglia. Come se si vivesse contemporaneamente in due mondi paralleli. [...] Due pianeti paralleli, l’Italia e l’Argentina, in cui per un po’ si può anche pensare di riuscire a barcamenarsi: bilanciandosi in quella regione intermedia che si chiama equivoco, ambigüedad. Ma guai se le orbite dei due mondi si incrociassero: sarebbe la catastrofe.¹⁹

This image of two parallel planets precludes the possibility of integrating both places, even at a metaphorical level. Togn's life in Italy, with a wife and daughters, is fundamentally incompatible with his life in Argentina, with his pregnant partner Pilar.

arrivato a casa?” Loretta Baldassar, “Tornare al paese: territorio e identità nel processo migratorio,” *Altreitalie*, no. 23 (July.-Dec. 2001): 6.

¹⁷ Laura Pariani, *Quando Dio ballava il tango*, 14.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

His inability to unite his two families also represents Togn's sense of identity, which is neither solely Italian nor Argentine.

In the late 1800s, Togn returns to Italy planning to remain there, but finds himself unable to completely re-integrate into Italian life and family, or to force himself into a solely Italian identity. Baldassar describes a similar situation for Italo-Australians in Italy: "After a short time, therefore, the emigrants began to feel disoriented; they were unable to easily integrate into life in their country and had to decide whether to remain or to return to Australia."²⁰ Togn chooses to leave Italy permanently, preferring to make a new home for himself in Argentina rather than conforming to his life and family in Italy. He ultimately feels more at home in Argentina, with Italians and other immigrants, than in his hometown.

Everything we learn about Togn in this first chapter of the book is filtered through his daughter Venturina's thoughts and memories. Through Venturina, we see an example of an Italian who never emigrated and yet who has been accented by emigration throughout her life. During the conversation between grandmother and granddaughter, Venturina tends to focus on her inability to understand her father's experiences and her anger at being left behind. Baldassar explains what those who never emigrate feel towards those who did:

Those who had never emigrated did not realize what life was like in Australia. They had no idea of the difficulties the emigrants had to overcome and, instead, considered those emigrants fortunate because they had had the possibility to go in

²⁰ "Dopo poco tempo, dunque, gli emigrati incominciavano a sentirsi spaesati, non riuscivano a inserirsi facilmente nella vita del loro paese e dovevano decidere se rimanere o tornare in Australia." Loretta Baldassar, "Tornare al paese," 10.

search of fortune, while they had to remain to take care of the elderly; and thus they harbored a certain resentment.²¹

Furthermore, Venturina's bitterness extends to men in general as, in her experience, they are the ones who emigrate, even today:

Gli uomini sono solo loro che gli sembra di patire [...] Loro liberi di andarsene per il mondo, ch e son solamente le montagne che restano al loro posto. Le montagne e noi donne; sempre qui a aspettare [...] Succede cos  con padri e mariti, e poi la cosa si ripete pure coi figli: ch e a me   toccato il fiele che i miei due maschi, prima il Pipp n e poi il Costante, se ne sono voluti andare, dicevano che l  in M rica c'era un futuro migliore... Parola che odio, "il futuro": una balla giustificatoria per l'abbandono, la fuga, magari pure il tradimento.²²

Venturina's thoughts, which she chooses not to share with Cora, demonstrate the negative impact of emigration on her life. Since she has never emigrated, she finds it difficult to relate to her father or, more recently, her sons' decision to do so.

Unlike Venturina, Cora's experiences as a descendant of immigrants, and now as an immigrant herself, allows her to understand Togn's actions. This leads to numerous moments when Venturina says a sentence or two about Togn and Cora fills in the gaps by imagining how he would have felt, or what he would have said. For instance, Venturina says, "Eh, difficile immaginarselo come ci trattava" which is immediately followed by, "Invece Coraz n se lo pu  figurare benissimo il Togn; per questo sorride alle parole della vecchia Venturina. Si immagina perfino i discorsi che il Togn poteva tenere con gli

²¹ "Quelli che non avevano mai emigrato non si rendevano conto di quella che era la vita in Australia, non avevano idea delle difficolt  che gli emigrati avevano dovuto superare e li ritenevano invece fortunati, perch  avevano avuto la possibilit  di andare a cercare fortuna, mentre loro erano dovuti rimanere a occuparsi degli anziani, e nutrivano per questo un certo risentimento." Ibid., 8.

²² Italics in original. Laura Pariani, *Quando Dio ballava il tango*, 17.

amici.”²³ These moments highlight the similarities between Cora and Togn’s lives as well as the differences between Cora and Venturina.

While migration has shaped Cora and Venturina’s lives in different ways, Venturina sharing her memories of her father allows for a circularity between grandmother and granddaughter. This emotional bond, based in their shared family history and the loss they have experienced, forms despite the linguistic barrier. Venturina quickly understands that words are not the only means of communication: “*sono cresciuta senza parole, soltanto con gli sguardi, ne’ ... E adesso arriva ‘sta ragazza, spuntando dal nulla insieme alla sua bambina; con l’aria di una che sa leggere le facce, col silenzio di chi sa di meritare le parole; ché anche lei ha dentro il dolore di un uomo che se n’è andato.*”²⁴ Facial expressions, gestures, and silence, become a means of communication for these two women who have different native languages. In addition, both have lost members of their family— Venturina her father and sons, and Cora her husband. Like novels examined in the previous chapter, in Pariani’s book loss becomes a means of connection. Cora also recognizes their extra-linguistic connection when Venturina apologizes for her informal language: “Non so se parlo chiaro. Intende? Voglio dire: intendi quello che dico? Ché io parlo un po’ dialetto, ne.” Cora thinks: “Forse le sfugge il senso di qualche parola, ma complessivamente Corazón comprende benissimo le parole della vecchia.”²⁵ Again, shared feelings allow them to understand one another. This conversation is an example of circularity created despite, or through, the accent. The many differences between these two women remain, and yet they share an emotional connection.

²³ Ibid., 18.

²⁴ Italics in original. Ibid., 16.

²⁵ Ibid., 20.

Cora's arrival to Italy, and to Venturina's home, completes the circle of migration Togn began. However, Cora's migration is in many ways a reversal of Togn's, which is reflected not only in the direction of migration, but also in her gender and native language. Returning to Fusaro's question of whether recent Argentine migration to Italy is a return migration or a new migration, in Cora's case it can be considered a return. This is the first time Cora has set foot in Italy, and yet it is the country of her ancestors. In fact, this movement between Italy and Argentina in both Togn and Cora's lives calls into question the division between the point of departure and the destination, as well as notions of origin or home. Venturina's house is the nexus of these migratory flows, serving as both a point of departure and arrival, a space that is both familiar and foreign for Togn and Cora. For Togn, it is not enough of a home to keep him in Italy, while for Cora it offers a sense of home and family in an unfamiliar country.

Togn, Venturina, and Cora demonstrate three distinct ways in which migration and identity interact, and how circumstances have changed since Togn's emigration. Togn's Italian identity becomes so accented in Argentina, he finds himself unable to fit in when he returns to Italy. Like the characters I examined in the first chapter, Togn lived in a time period when being culturally or ethnically accented was largely viewed in a negative light. Thus, he must definitively choose between one country or the other. Prior to Cora's arrival, Venturina has only felt the negative effects of (male) family members who depart and never return. Her Italian identity, accented by emigration even though she has never left Italy, helps her form an emotional connection with Cora, who initially appears to have an accented Argentine identity. In this first chapter, Venturina's storytelling to Cora about Togn allows for a negotiation, or in the case of Venturina and

Togn a renegotiation, of the relationships between these three characters. In the final moments of the chapter, Cora and Venturina have managed to form a connection despite their differences and the language barrier: “Stanno in silenzio davanti alla tazzina di caffè, la Venturina e Corazón; ognuna seguendo il filo di due vite diversissime che non si mescolano l’una con l’altra, ma armonizzano nonostante tutto, perché in qualche punto della distanza che le separa compongono una risposta.”²⁶ The circular accent, composed of their different lives and family ties, becomes a point of connection for these two women.

In the final chapter of Pariani’s book, Cora visits Buenos Aires in 2001, and this return gives her a chance to reflect on her relationship to two countries, languages, and cultures. While her arrival in Italy completed Togn’s circle of migration, her trip to Argentina completes her own circular movement. In other words, the two circular movements the book outlines – the first originating with Togn’s emigration and the other in Argentina with Cora’s escape – overlay one another such that, when one circle is closed, the other reopens. Like Togn’s ever-present nostalgia, the book suggests that Cora will never achieve a complete sense of resolution or, consequently, feel she entirely belongs, in either country. As Cora explains her decision to finally return to Argentina, she expresses this tension between these two circular migrations:

Le ci sono voluti tanti anni per decidersi a tornare in Argentina. Quando se ne è andata, nel ’78, dopo mesi passati con la paura che ogni notte fosse l’ultima, ha pensato che fosse per sempre; una vera e propria fuga col cuore straziato, essenzialmente per salvare sua figlia Malena che a quell’epoca era una bambinetta. Mai più Argentina, si è ripetuta in questi anni. Epperò, qualcosa di più forte l’ha spinta qualche mese fa a farvi ritorno: il motivo dichiarato è stato quello di raccogliere materiale filmato per ricavarne un documentario sulla

²⁶ Laura Pariani, *Quando Dio ballava il tango*, 28.

situazione degli italoargentini; riguardo a quello più profondo, ancora stenta a parlare, forse è troppo presto.”²⁷

Going to Argentina allows Cora to begin confronting her past, in order to achieve a sense of closure after the loss of her husband and her forced exile. It also, through conversations with Italian-Argentines, allows her to continue exploring the theme of migration and her own Italian-accented identity. Moreover, just as she admits her continued inability to come to terms with her husband’s death, she may never fully understand the actions of Italian-Argentines like her great-grandfather. However, with each return, she continues to learn more about her family history and herself.

One way in which Cora reconnects with her Argentine identity is through visiting the places of her childhood. However, she worries about feeling like stranger in these places: “Durante questo viaggio da una parte all’altra dell’Argentina, si è sentita costantemente in bilico tra la voglia di rivedere luoghi amati e la paura dell’estraneità.”²⁸ Baldassar discusses how returning immigrants navigate this tension between feeling at home and feeling like a stranger. Their experience depends on whether they initially feel Italian or Australian:

It is no coincidence that among the interviewed, those who defined themselves as “Australian” prior to leaving affirm that they have become more “Italian” as a result of their visit. [...] On the other hand, those who, born in Australia, defined themselves Italian often described their stay in the “homeland” as unpleasant and disconcerting, because while there they found themselves to be very different from the Italians in Italy.²⁹

²⁷ Ibid., 286.

²⁸ Ibid., 287

²⁹ “Non è un caso che fra gli intervistati, coloro che si definivano <<australiani>> prima della partenza affermano di essere diventati più <<italiani>> come risultato della loro visita. [...] Dall’altro lato, quelli che, nati in Australia, si definivano italiani spesso descrivono il loro soggiorno in <<patria>> come spiacevole e sconcertante, perché lì hanno scoperto di essere molto diversi dagli italiani d’Italia.” Loretta Baldassar, “Tornare al paese,” 14.

As we have seen, the linguistic and cultural affinity between Italy and Argentina makes the limits between an Italian or an Argentine identity more porous than the ones between Italian and Australian identities. Cora, in particular, is an example of an Italo-Argentine who is able to claim both an Argentine identity and an accented Italian one. However, similar to the Italo-Australians Baldassar interviews, Cora's return to Argentina forces her to think about how she has changed since her emigration. In this, Cora's experiences mirror Togn's, as they both feel a sense of unhomeliness after returning "home."

For Cora, being in Argentina reaffirms the fact that Italy is her future and that she has become an Italian with an Argentine accent. She also understands that her linguistic accent will always mark her as a foreigner in Italy:

l'impressione che dava agli altri era quella di una persona integrata nella nuova situazione: si esprimeva in un italiano quasi perfetto, solo con un lieve accento straniero se per caso le capitava di parlare di Sudamerica [...] Realisticamente l'Italia era il suo futuro; l'Argentina quasi un male da dimenticare.³⁰

While living in Italy makes Cora's Italian identity more relevant to her everyday life, she remains Argentine, and these two identities will always have a conflicted relationship with one another: "ha sperimentato sulla propria pelle cosa si prova a vivere in una terra dove non si è nati, parlando un'altra lingua con un accento mai perfetto, quasi fosse un marchio di diversità: come se, invece di appartenere a due paesi, non si appartenesse a nessuno. Confondendo uno y otro."³¹ The linguistic mixing in the final sentence expresses how these languages and identities interact in Cora's mind. Her movement between Italy and Argentina allow her to simultaneously belong to both countries, but also remain accented in both.

³⁰ Ibid., 287-8.

³¹ Ibid., 291.

Circular Movement in Clementina Sandra Ammendola's *Lei che sono io/Ella que soy yo*

Pariani's book narrates Cora's "return" migration to Italy and her first return to Argentina, which highlights each return as a significant and infrequent life event. Ammendola's narrative, instead, shows numerous departures and returns, each forming a part of the ongoing circularity between Italy and Argentina, and between the protagonist's Italian and Argentine identities. This circularity allows her to feel at home in multiple spaces. Ammendola considers her own migration to Italy a return migration, saying in an interview: "Along the road of migration there are many stories. Mine is that of a returned immigrant."³² However, she clarifies in an article that "We may talk of a forced rather than chosen return because we come to Italy after having been expelled from our country of origin [...] Italy is not chosen as a country of attraction."³³ In interviews and in her writing, Ammendola presents the binational Italian-Argentine culture her protagonist inhabits, regardless of whether she is living in one country or the other.

Ammendola most clearly demonstrates her protagonist's Argentine and Italian identities through the refrain included in the title of the book: "Lei che sono io." This phrase, along with "Clementina Sandra, che sono io," and "Sandra, che sono io," appears

³² "Lungo la via della migrazione ci sono molte storie. La mia è quella di un'immigrata di ritorno." Tiziana Carpinelli, "Clementina Sandra Ammendola: Il verso della clandestinità," Oct. 1 2014 (<http://www.fucinemute.it/2004/10/il-verso-della-clandestinita/>).

³³ Italics in original. Clementina Sandra Ammendola, "Return Immigration and Routes to Citizenship," in *Borderlines: Migrazioni E Identità Nel Novecento*, trans. Elizabeth Wren-Owens, eds. Jennifer Burns and Loredana Polezzi (Isernia: C. Iannone, 2003), 396. The first half of this book is in Italian and the second half presents the same content in English. The original version of the article, "Immigrazione di ritorno e percorsi di cittadinanza," is available on pages 213-220.

constantly in the narrative. The frequent shift between third and first person serves as a reminder that protagonist and narrator are the same person while also distinguishing between the younger Sandra (Lei) and the writer Ammendola (Io), who is now looking back on her own life. Silvia Camilotti considers this refrain a “strategy that also evokes the double condition/identity of the migrant, her belonging to multiple places, or none.”³⁴ Raphael d’Abdon further argues that the phrase exemplifies the tension of one person having two national identities:

The doubling of the narrating subject, who already defines herself as bilingual in the title, represents the Italian migrant “I” who converses with her complementary Argentine self; not in a sterile dialogue between deaf people but in a constant tension towards unity, harmony between two intertwined subjects.³⁵

In other words, in the text the Argentine-accented Italian Ammendola of today narrates her childhood experiences as an Italian-accented Argentine. Throughout the narrative, we see how these hybrid identities interact with one another throughout her life, particularly as characters move between Italy and Argentina.

All of the books in the series I Mappamondi are bilingual, however in the case of Ammendola’s writing, this double narrative further highlights her double, or hybrid, identity. Being able to simultaneously see her story in the languages associated with her two national identities constantly reminds the reader that Ammendola’s life is lived in these two languages. Camilotti adds: “The decision to position the two languages side-

³⁴ “strategia che evoca anche la doppia condizione/identità del migrante, quel suo appartenere a più luoghi o a nessuno.” Silvia Camilotti, “La ‘doppia assenza’: peregrinazioni letterarie tra Italia e Argentina in Clementina Sandra Ammendola, Miguel Ángel García e Laura Pariani,” *Zibaldone. Estudios Italianos* 3, no. 1 (Jan. 2015): 238.

³⁵ “Lo sdoppiamento del soggetto narrante, che si auto-esplicita fin dal titolo bilingue, rappresenta l’io ‘migrante’ italiano che dialoga con il suo io complementare, quello argentino, non in uno sterile dialogo tra sordi quanto in una costante tensione verso l’unità, l’armonia tra i due soggetti coinvolti.” Raphael d’Abdon, “Il doppio soggetto migrante in *Lei, che sono io – Ella, que soy yo* di Clementina Sandra Ammendola,” *Oltreoceano* 1 (2007): 98-9.

by-side [...] recalls how identity can recreate itself in the coexistence of multiple languages, and that one language does not necessarily have to superimpose itself on another.”³⁶ This suggests the possibility of a truly double identity and sense of belonging, where Ammendola can be entirely both Argentine and Italian without giving up any part of either identity. Ammendola’s writing shows that she is both Argentine and Italian, but that both of these identities are accented.

The first chapters of the book recount Sandra’s childhood just north of Buenos Aires, focusing on moments that highlight the protagonist’s Italian accent. First, her Italian names lead to negative attention in school:

Clementina Sandra ha due nomi e un cognome italiani che le maestre e tutti gli insegnanti che ha avuto in Argentina faticavano a pronunciare correttamente: aggiungevano accenti ed intonazioni diverse, perché lo spagnolo non ha le consonanti doppie. Ammendola era *Amméndola*, *Améndola*, *Ad Mendola*, *Memdola* e diventava un gioco per gli altri bambini e ragazzi delle scuole.³⁷

Her name continues to remain accented when she immigrates to Italy as an adult, where many mistakenly assume that Sandra is a nickname and thus call her Alessandra.³⁸ In addition, Sandra faces discrimination for her father’s Southern Italian origins. As a child, she goes to the house of her friend Claudia, a girl born in the Northern Italian city of Brescia. When Sandra tells Claudia’s mother that she is Italian like them, and that her father is from Calabria, the woman replies using a derogatory term for Southern Italy: <<Quella non è l’Italia, fa parte della terronia.>>³⁹ Sandra does not understand the

³⁶ “La scelta di collocare le due lingue una accanto all’altra [...] ricorda come l’identità possa ricomporsi nella convivenza tra più lingue e che una non debba necessariamente sovrapporsi all’altra.” Silvia Camilotti, “La ‘doppia assenza,’” 238.

³⁷ Clementina Sandra Ammendola, *Lei che sono io*, 12.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 12-14.

meaning of “*terronia*,” but when she tells her parents of the exchange, they forbid any future visits to Claudia’s home.

While Ammendola’s text includes these episodes in which being of Italian heritage is depicted in a negative light, she more frequently describes moments in which Argentines of all different backgrounds interact with one another in positive ways. We see this in particular among children, such as when Ammendola mentions her parish church, where “*c’erano altre bambine figlie di italiani immigrati in Argentina*”⁴⁰ or her friends, who “*avevano i genitori che venivano da tutte le parti.*”⁴¹ Thus, in this first part of the narrative we see how Sandra’s Italian accent is an indicator of difference, but this generally does not prevent her from forming friendships with others or fitting into Argentine culture.

The second half of Ammendola’s narrative focuses on her life in Northern Italy, where (like Cora) her Argentine-accented Italian identity becomes more relevant to her life than it previously was. With her Italian passport, Ammendola is Italian by law. However, she highlights the limits of this Italian identity that is not accompanied by other Italian documents. For instance, she must take university courses and a driving exam because her Argentine college degree and driver’s license are not recognized in Italy.

The author returns frequently to the topic of documents when discussing her immigrant experience, while also recognizing her own privilege with respect to immigrants who do not have Italian citizenship. In one article, she calls Italo-Argentines like herself, “*Illegal immigrants whose documents are perfectly in order,*” who

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

experience “a *veiled inclusion* – veiled by legal documents.”⁴² In an interview, she also mentions her Argentine accent when speaking, which leads to Italians questioning her Italian citizenship: “when I went to renew my identity card I heard them say that I was probably mistaken, and that I needed to request a residency permit, due to my pronounced Argentine accent.”⁴³ In the same interview, she acknowledges that she is in “una situazione ‘privilegiata’ perché mio padre era italiano.”⁴⁴ Even after obtaining the necessary documentation to drive and find work in Italy, Ammendola will always speak Italian with an accent. However, she is more accepted than those without an Italian passport, or those with a stronger accent.

Ammendola’s narrative presents a circular movement between Italy and Argentina, that begins with her grandmother’s periodic visits to Argentina when she is a child. These visits are a source of pride: “Sandra si vantava nel dire ai suoi amici che non poteva giocare o andare a scuola perché doveva andare a prendere sua Nonna all’aeroporto, e pronunciava l’ultima parola molto lentamente.”⁴⁵ Moreover, the grandmother always brings gifts from Italy, and when she departs, takes Argentine products with her, including soil:

Sandra, che sono io, ogni volta regalava a sua Nonna una pianta fatta da lei [...] In realtà erano piante che si trovano anche in Italia, ma Sandra ci teneva molto a che la Nonna si portasse la sua terra, la terra del suo giardino, la terra che sporcava le ginocchia di Sandra e di Mauro, la terra che sosteneva molte vite, la terra argentina che rimaneva sempre molto lontana dalla Calabria.

⁴² Italics in original. Clementina Sandra Ammendola, “Return Immigration and Routes to Citizenship,” 396.

⁴³ “quando andavo a rinnovare la carta d’identità mi sentivo dire che probabilmente mi sbagliavo e che dovevo richiedere il permesso di soggiorno, per il mio marcato accento argentino.” Tiziana Carpinelli, “Clementina Sandra Ammendola: Il verso della clandestinità.”

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Clementina Sandra Ammendola, *Lei che sono io*, 26.

Sandra's gesture helps add an Argentine accent to Italy, just as her grandmother's visits maintain Sandra's Italian accent. In addition, as the grandmother's visits happen multiple times, they become a form of (albeit temporary) return migration. While the grandmother's surely does not consider herself Argentine, her multiple visits there do accent her. They also later facilitate Sandra's own immigration to Italy, as she grows up with some familiarity with Italian culture.

The grandmother's visits during Sandra's childhood end, but are replaced years later by Sandra's own trips to Argentina to spend time with friends and relatives. The last chapter of the narrative focuses on this final example of circularity, using phrases that mirror the language used to describe the grandmother's visits. The clearest example of this mirrored language: "Poi sua Nonna, dopo un mese, sentiva il bisogno di tornare al suo paese, alla sua casa, al suo letto,"⁴⁶ while more recently, "Clementina Sandra, che sono io, come una volta sua Nonna, dopo un mese, sente il bisogno di tornare al suo letto, alla sua casa, al suo nuovo paese, l'Italia."⁴⁷ When the grandmother departs: "L'aria era molto triste perché non si sapeva mai la prossima volta del loro incontro."⁴⁸ Finally, the narrative ends with: "Si va all'aeroporto, sempre con l'aria triste perché non si sa mai la prossima volta del loro incontro. Ma, di solito, c'è sempre un altro incontro e un altro ancora dice Sandra, che è lei, che sono io."⁴⁹ This repeated language reinforces the connections between past and present, and places Sandra in her grandmother's shoes, as the Italian who arrives and keeps Italian culture alive in her family. This final sentence also promises a continuation of this circularity in the future. In fact, in a conversation

⁴⁶ Ibid., 28.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 96.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 28.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 98.

with Ammendola in October 2013, I learned she had returned to Argentina in 2011 for work, but was open to perhaps returning to Italy again in the future, and in particular spending time in Calabria to learn more about her roots.⁵⁰ Thus, her life continues its binational movement between these two countries.

Ammendola returns to the concept of circularity in much of her writing, which reflects how she views issues of migration and identity. She prefers using the word “migration” because it, “produces the idea of movement, of *circularity*; in contrast to immigration which always supposes a centrality as a point of departure.”⁵¹ Moreover, in her view, “Cultural identity is nourished by the circularity of the groups which we belong to today and by our relationship to the past.”⁵² Albeit in the form of a children’s book, *Lei che sono io* demonstrates how a circular migration can allow for a circular identity, where each instance of return reinforces Ammendola’s sense of belonging to both countries. This focus on circularity minimizes any unhomeliness she might feel on each return to Italy or Argentina. Her Italian accent in Argentina – demonstrated by her name and her father’s Southern Italianness – and her Argentine accent in Italy – in her Argentine documents and her linguistic accent when speaking Italian – ultimately do not preclude this binational identity.

Non-places, Tourists, and Vagabonds in Antonio Dal Masetto’s Writing

Cora and Sandra are Argentines of Italian heritage who first set foot in Italy when they immigrate there. Dal Masetto’s Agata, instead, is an Italian who decides to visit Italy, decades after her emigration. Moreover, Agata’s return does not clarify her

⁵⁰ Personal interview with Clementina Sandra Ammendola, 14 Oct. 2013.

⁵¹ Clementina Sandra Ammendola, “Return Immigration and Routes to Citizenship,” 399.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 400.

Italianness, as it does for Cora and Sandra, but instead demonstrates how much her time living in Argentina has accented her. In this section, I will focus primarily on how Agata's return trip alters her sense of identity but will also briefly turn to Dal Masetto's other writing, where he widens his lens to demonstrate the possibility of an accented Italian-Argentine identity interacting with other identities. Given that these texts connect Italian-Argentine migration to larger migratory flows and to life in an increasingly globalized world, I draw on two concepts – non-places and the divide between tourists and vagabonds – that help me examine how Dal Masetto's characters relate to spaces and people.

The first pages of *La tierra incomparable* introduce us to a confident Agata, sure of her decision to travel to Italy and of her Italian identity. The novel begins: “Ese lunes – dos días después de cumplir los ochenta años – Agata se despertó y ahí estaba la idea.”⁵³ Agata immediately sets to work to fulfill the idea, to travel to Italy, announcing to her family: “Me voy a Italia.”⁵⁴ She calmly replies to their surprise and skepticism by repeating this declaration, and the final words of the first chapter are, “Yo voy.”⁵⁵ Agata's plan to one day return to Italy corresponds with her strong identification as Italian, and has been present “desde el momento en que [...] había desembarcado en el puerto de Buenos Aires [...] y había comenzado su destino de inmigrante.”⁵⁶ After having spent over half of her life in Argentina, Agata sees herself first as an Italian, and second as an immigrant, with no thought of an Argentine or Italian-Argentine identity.

⁵³ Antonio Dal Masetto. *La tierra incomparable*, 9.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

Before her departure, Agata attempts to record everything she remembers about Tarni, and enlists her granddaughter's help in drawing a map of the town.⁵⁷ This map includes everything from buildings and trees to statues and wells, as well as Agata's memory of each place. Agata's map attempts to set in stone the relationship she has with the many places in her hometown, due to her fear that "cuando se enfrentara con el pueblo, la nueva geografía [...] empezara a ocupar los espacios de su memoria, suprimiendo las imágenes que había conservado durante tantos años."⁵⁸ In other words, she realizes that Tarni has changed over the years but does not want this new Tarni to contaminate her memories of the place. She will soon realize that this attempt to keep past and present separate is just as impossible as the attempt to ignore how the decades spent in Argentina have changed her.

During Agata's trip, she spends time in airports, airplanes, cars, and trains – what anthropologist Marc Augé defines as non-places. Passing through these non-places leads to a crisis of identity. Augé contrasts the non-place to the anthropological place, the latter which he defines as "relational, historical, and concerned with identity" while a non-place is not concerned with these.⁵⁹ The non-place, Augé continues, "designates two complementary but distinct realities: spaces formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure), and the relations that individuals have with these spaces."⁶⁰ Moreover, the "traveller's space [is ...] the archetype of *non-place*."⁶¹ As Agata travels

⁵⁷ This granddaughter is likely the character who becomes one of the protagonists of *Cita en el Lago Maggiore*, further underlining the importance of Tarni to each generation of this family.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵⁹ Marc Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (Verso: New York, 2000), 77.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

through a number of non-places and then arrives in her home town, she begins to revise her relationship to Italy and its inhabitants.

The first prominent non-place that Agata enters is the airport in Buenos Aires, where her family drops her off. She immediately feels alone and a bit afraid, as she is faced with her “primer e inesperado obstáculo,” an escalator, which she has never ridden before.⁶² While the entryway to a non-place can be as simple as a door or the on-ramp of a freeway, the use of the escalator underlines this moment in which a boundary of sorts is crossed, and serves as a transitional space linking place and non-place. Agata recognizes that she is now on her own: “detrás de ella se había cerrado una barrera y que ahora sí estaba sola y desconectada de todo.”⁶³ She is already symbolically between countries at this point, even while still officially in Argentina.

The isolating experience of traveling to Rome in the non-place of the airplane leads to Agata doubting her own identity for the first time. She reflects on the fact that she and the other passengers are occupying the same space, and yet, “ahora cada uno estaba solo, perdido en una dimensión extraña.”⁶⁴ Augé writes that the non-place is, for those within it, a space of “solitude and similitude” in which each person is defined by “the role of passenger, customer or driver.”⁶⁵ Agata becomes just one of many, a discomfiting feeling that Augé calls “identity-loss.”⁶⁶ To combat this uncertainty, Agata feels the need to re-confirm her own identity, and does so by taking out her Italian passport: “sacó su pasaporte y lo abrió. Ver su nombre fue recuperar una señal donde

⁶² Antonio Dal Masetto. *La tierra incomparable*, 24.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁶⁵ Marc Augé, *Non-Places*, 103.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.

apoyarse. [...] El eco mental de su nombre [...] resonaba como una afirmación.”⁶⁷ At this point, still at the beginning of her trip, Agata believes that she is entirely Italian, and thus that her Italian passport completely reflects her identity. Later in her trip, it will become impossible for one document or place to do so.

While on the plane, Agata has hours to begin reflecting on her immigration to Argentina by boat, and drawing connections between that experience and the plane ride. Augé considers non-places indicators of supermodernity – that is, a recent development that is the result of fast transportation and communication, causing a compression of space and time.⁶⁸ However, elements of non-places can also be found in the past, although on a lesser scale. Agata’s boat crossing is, in some ways, a non-place. Because the trip takes many days, the passengers do get to know one another to an extent, but these people are still just temporarily brought together in this in-between space. In fact, the speed of a plane ride bothers Agata because it “privaba de la posibilidad de un regreso lento [...] Aquel viaje en barco [...] había durado veinte días. Después, la ausencia, cuarenta años. Y ahora bastaban unas pocas horas de avión para regresar de un salto al punto de partida.”⁶⁹

While on the airplane, Agata is not cut off from the rest of the world to the extent that she was on the boat. The radio on the airplane allows her to listen to music and hear the news in a number of different languages, and there is a monitor displaying the location of the airplane. Thus, the airplane serves as a link between Italy and Argentina, and between Agata and the rest of the world. While Agata does not use the term non-space, she recognizes that, “el avión era un lugar neutro, de tránsito, un paréntesis donde

⁶⁷ Antonio Dal Masetto. *La tierra incomparable*, 28.

⁶⁸ Marc Augé, *Non-Places*,

⁶⁹ Antonio Dal Masetto. *La tierra incomparable*, 29.

el tiempo había dejado de existir. [...] entre el punto de partida y el de llegada.”⁷⁰ In this space of transition, flying above the Atlantic Ocean, Agata remains a part of the two countries she has lived in, yet is also disconnected from them.

After landing in Rome, Agata wants to publicly demonstrate that she belongs in the country of her birth, but her over-exaggerated Italian identity instead calls that very belonging into question. When she interacts with the customs agent, “se dio cuenta de que eran las primeras palabras que iba a pronunciar en su país y en su idioma. Contestó con énfasis excesivo y el hombre le dirigió una mirada rápida y extrañada.”⁷¹ This is one of the first moments in which the discord between how Agata sees herself, how she acts, and how other perceive her, is apparent. In the non-places of the airplane and Fiumicino airport, Agata begins to notice that her Italian passport may not fully encompass her identity, and that she may not feel completely at home in her home country.

Agata’s arrival in Rome does not signal the end of her journey, and in the non-place of the train to Tarni she uses written text to help place herself in relation to the places she is passing through. Non-places are “defined partly by the words and texts they offer us,” and in Agata’s case, the signs of the towns she sees while on the train are only meaningful to her as an indication that she is moving closer to her destination.⁷² These “carteles con nombre familiares y otros desconocidos,” and everything she sees from the window – from roads and aqueducts to drying laundry, hills, and churches – all “formaban parte de la vigilia, de la espera.”⁷³ Interestingly, Agata’s use of text to orient herself continues even once she is in Tarni. In her hometown, texts help her jog her

⁷⁰ Ibid., 27-8.

⁷¹ Ibid., 35-6.

⁷² Marc Augé, *Non-Places*, 96.

⁷³ Antonio Dal Masetto. *La tierra incomparable*, 57.

memory, or understand some of the changes the town has undergone over the decades. First, as she approaches the station, “avanzando hacia ella, el cartel que decía Tarni,” which confirms her arrival.⁷⁴ Then, she reads recent obituaries, where the text helps her access her memories: “Creyó reconocer algún apellido y trató de hacer memoria.”⁷⁵ She even “reads” places that do not have signs, such as when she sees Mount Rosa: “lo nombró en voz alta [...] Agata volvió a nombrarlo.”⁷⁶ Reading, remembering, and naming all serve to reassure Agata and help her place herself within Tarni, as she begins to reconcile her memories of the town with her experiences there in the present.

Agata’s inability to feel at home in Tarni further unsettles her sense of self. Looking at the town, “le dio la impresión de que había llegado a otro lugar, uno que desconocía”⁷⁷ and what she sees “estaban igual y sin embargo no acababan de ser las mismas que antes.”⁷⁸ When Agata arrives to Tarni, she expects to feel at home. However, the changes to the town and its people make it difficult for her to feel she belongs. Agata’s sense of unhomeliness only increases when she goes to her former home: “hubiese querido no reconocerla, porque de alguna penosa manera no era su casa. Pero era.”⁷⁹ She finds the absence of the hickory tree on the property particularly emotional: “En tantas pérdidas posibles [...] aquel árbol era una de las pocas cosas que había seguido viviendo en ella como una imagen indestructible.”⁸⁰ The uprooted tree is a metaphor for Agata herself, who emigrated but whose roots remained in Tarni, especially in the house her father and grandfather built. And yet, when she returns she finds that the

⁷⁴ Ibid., 58.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 72.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 73.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 59.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 66.

⁷⁹ Antonio Dal Masetto. *La tierra incomparable*, 79.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 80.

tree, like her own roots, are no longer there. As she walks away from the house “Cruzaron el límite de la propiedad [...] y a Agata le vino la memoria la mañana de su partida. Le parecía que ahora, más que aquella vez, salía de esa casa para siempre.”⁸¹ In this moment, Agata acknowledges that her Italian roots are not as stable as she had initially assumed. The rest of the narrative recounts her process of reconnecting with Tarni and its inhabitants, while also saying farewell to a place she may never see again.

Throughout her time in Italy, Agata divides the non-Italians she sees into two groups – tourists and recent immigrants – and believes she has little in common with the first group. When she sees the summer homes of the rich, she thinks of the temporary inhabitants, the “gente que vivía en muchas partes [...] que no disponía en el curso de sus vidas de un solo regreso, de una sola posibilidad de regreso como le había tocado a ella.”⁸² Rather than feeling a connection to the owners of these houses who, like herself, have the opportunity to travel and have more than one home, Agata focuses on the fact that she has only been able to return to Italy once. Instead, she consistently feels empathy for the many immigrants she sees or hears about. During her brief stay in Rome before proceeding to Tarni, she sees groups of tourists and recent immigrants occupying the same public spaces. However, she spends little time thinking of the first group, instead focusing her thoughts on the African immigrants: “que esa gente estaba lejos de su país, que había perdido todo, que no tenía patria. Estas ideas suscitaban en ella un sentimiento de pena y de solidaridad. De alguna manera se sentía como ellos, atrapada, perdida en esa ciudad.”⁸³ The most emotional moment in which Agata compares herself to recent immigrants occurs on one of her final days in Tarni, when she sees an African man

⁸¹ Ibid., 85.

⁸² Antonio Dal Masetto. *La tierra incomparable*, 114.

⁸³ Ibid., 44.

selling items on the street. He is chased by several Italians and, in order to escape, jumps into the nearby lake and swims away. As she witnesses this scene, she thinks, “Un muchacho negro, venido desde lejos, [...] solo en una fría región del norte, entre montañas, expulsado del mundo, excluido de la solidaridad.”⁸⁴ On her final day in Tarni, her thoughts return to him: “¿Dónde estaría?”⁸⁵

The “gente que vivía en muchas partes” and the recent immigrants to Italy correspond to two types of people sociologist Zygmunt Bauman say are products of postmodern life: the tourist and the vagabond. He distinguishes between them: “The tourists travel because *they want to*; the vagabonds because *they have no other bearable choice*.”⁸⁶ The African immigrants Agata sees are vagabonds, as was Agata when she emigrated. In addition, tourists and vagabonds differ in their ability to feel at home. Bauman gives the example of a particular tourist who “has no home – but neither does she feel homeless. Wherever she is at the moment, she feels at ease.”⁸⁷ Vagabonds, however, never feel they are at home because “nowhere they stop are they likely to be welcome.”⁸⁸ Feeling at home, rather than having to do with geographical distance from the place you consider home, has to do with familiarity with and ability to navigate a space: “‘Near’ is a space inside which one can feel *chez soi*, at home. [...] ‘Far away’, on the other hand [...] means being [...] out of place and out of one’s element.”⁸⁹ Even when in her hometown, Agata certainly feels out of place, while she assumes that the “gente que vivía en muchas partes” feel perfectly at home in many places.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 238.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 249.

⁸⁶ Italics in original. Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (New York: Columbia University Press 1998), 93.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 91.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 92.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 13.

The novel includes a number of examples of recent Latin American immigration to Argentina, which highlights how migratory flows have changed since Agata's emigration and provide additional examples of how she relates to tourists and vagabonds. Agata learns about Marta, an Argentine who comes to Italy in search of work. After hearing this story, Agata, "Pensaba en su propia historia. El mundo estaba lleno de gente que había perdido su lugar."⁹⁰ Marta can be seen as the inverse of Agata, crossing the Atlantic Ocean in the opposite direction for economic reasons. Soon after, Agata meets an Italian couple in the process of adopting two young boys from Mexico. They are obviously tourists, who have the money and the capacity to successfully navigate the process of international adoption and then make the transatlantic trip to Mexico. Moreover, their adopted children, initially vagabonds, will become tourists like their adoptive parents, probably with the added bonus of eventually obtaining dual citizenship. However, when Agata learns about them, she only focuses on the downsides of this migration: "se los imaginó en el momento en que abandonarían el mundo que conocían y subirían a un avión con dos extraños, para ser trasplantados a otro mundo del que no sabían ni entenderían nada. Y otra vez pensó en la gente sin lugar."⁹¹ Agata identifies with the children, currently still vagabonds, rather than with their soon-to-be parents.

Agata clearly feels she has more in common with vagabonds than tourists, due to her years spent as an immigrant. This affinity for recent immigrants also places her at odds with a number of the Italians she talks to, further demonstrating her inability to feel at home in her hometown. When Agata mentions the immigrants she saw in Rome, one of her relatives expresses his opinion of them: "Hay que apilarlos como la basura y llevarlos

⁹⁰ Antonio Dal Masetto. *La tierra incomparable*, 188.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 191.

bien lejos para que no vuelvan más.”⁹² Agata becomes uncomfortable but wants to avoid a confrontation, so when asked her opinion of the situation, she only smiles and says “ No sé.”⁹³ Despite her long absence, her relatives are willing to accept her as one of them. By sharing her sympathy for immigrants, Agata risks demonstrating how different she is from them.

Agata’s conversations with Italians place the recent concern about immigrants within a larger historical context, where perceived differences between Northern and Southern Italians are shown to still exist. An elderly man, Toni, asks her “¿Se enteró de que vamos a separarnos del Sur?”⁹⁴ and then explains, “Los del norte dicen que están cansados de trabajar y producir y tener que compartir todo con los del sur.”⁹⁵ This view is expressed most clearly by the political party Lega Nord (Northern League), which wants Northern Italy to secede from the rest of the country, or to at least be granted more autonomy. The party is anti-immigrant, its members believing that the government should benefit (Northern) Italians. Unsure what to think of what she has heard, Agata returns to her hotel and asks a young woman who works there, Nadia, for her thoughts: “A la muchacha le brillaron los ojos de furia: – Son racistas. Y no lo digo porque mi madre sea meridional. Racistas y fascistas.”⁹⁶ Though her conversations with Italians, Agata realizes that there are widely differing opinions regarding who has the right to live in Italy or call themselves Italian. This national crisis of identity reflects Agata’s own uncertainty about who she best relates to: Italians, Argentines, or immigrants.

⁹² Ibid., 60.

⁹³ Ibid., 60.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 117.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 118.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 122.

Over the course of her life, Agata has made the transition from vagabond to tourist without realizing it. The fact that she is able to go to Italy for a visit, simply because she wants to, clearly shows this. She is, in fact, privileged. Bauman points out that terms such as in-betweenness, hybridization and, I would add, unhomeliness, are “language [that] presents privilege” and terms created by those who are “already emancipated.”⁹⁷ Agata is “able” to experience unhomeliness because she has had the opportunity to experience two different cultures and is not forced to choose just one or the other. Certainly the tourists she calls the “gente que vivía en muchas partes ” have an easier time of navigating between countries and cultures, but she too has successfully integrated herself into Argentine society without losing her Italian identity.

At the beginning of the narrative, Agata thinks of herself as an Italian and a vagabond, both which were true on the day she emigrated. However, returning to Tarni and interacting with its residents force her to concede that her decades in Argentina have accented her identity, making it at times difficult to relate to Italians and easy to feel empathy for, and solidarity with, recent immigrants to Italy. The fact that Agata cannot easily place herself within one category – Italian, Argentine, immigrant, native – is an unsettling experience for her, but also underlines the blurred boundaries between these categories.

On her final night in Tarni, Agata is able to find an inner balance among her identities, at least temporarily. As she walks the town’s streets, attempting to commit them to memory, she also says goodbye to the place a final time. She takes a seat and

⁹⁷ Bauman, 99. Bauman states he is drawing from Jonathan Friedman here.

looks at the flames of a fire, which represents how she sees the relationship between movement, identity, and sense of belonging:

El fuego era puro movimiento. [...] Rodeada por el silencio y la sombra de las montañas, suspendida en esa hora incierta, a Agata le parecía que ella y el fuego estaban lejos, en ninguna parte. Pero también, al mismo tiempo, se sentía en casa, reposando después de una larga ausencia [...] Y que siempre era bueno regresar a ese origen que el fuego le sugería. [...] Podía ver cómo culminaba otro ciclo, [...] Y también intuir cómo se iba conformando el ciclo nuevo que ya comenzaba, que se proyectaba en los días futuros, con su carga de confusiones y promesas.⁹⁸

Agata, who is unable to feel completely at home in either Argentina or Italy, feels a moment of peace in the non-place of the fire. Thus, rather than “identity-loss,” she experiences what I would call identity-gain.⁹⁹ This fire, which is always moving and changing, becomes a new center for Agata and the symbol of an identity very different from the one she held at the beginning of her return trip. Thus, Agata finds comfort within the circular accent represented by the fire, where she does not have to choose one identity or one country over the other but can choose both and neither at the same time. At the end of the novel, Agata accepts that she is in a sense without a home, suspended between both countries, but that she also belongs to both countries. The final words of the book affirm the importance these two places have for her, as she reflects on her return to Argentina: “Cuando estuviese de nuevo en la Argentina, junto a los suyos, y los días volviesen a sucederse a los días en la calma de aquel pueblo de llanura. Y ella tratara de recuperar desde allá la patria que por segunda vez había perdido acá.”¹⁰⁰

The final book in the trilogy, *Cita en el Lago Maggiore* provides an additional exploration of migration and identity in a globalized world. In this work, the son and the

⁹⁸ Antonio Dal Masetto. *La tierra incomparable*, 246-7.

⁹⁹ Marc Augé, *Non-Places*, 103.

¹⁰⁰ Antonio Dal Masetto. *La tierra incomparable*, 249-50.

granddaughter of Agata, who are referred to as *el padre* and *la hija*, travel to Tarni together. The work is a fictionalized account of Antonio Dal Masetto's trip to Italy with his daughter, Daniela. The daughter's connection with Tarni and with the past is different from her father's, thus proposing that Italy is no longer the frame of reference for many descendants of Italian immigrants in Argentina. These two characters' trip to Italy becomes a chance for them to redefine their relationship to Italy together. While *La tierra incomparable* focuses more on Agata's struggle to reconcile the past and the present, this work projects towards the future.

Argentine emigration is explicitly mentioned in this work, unlike in the other novels of the trilogy. In the first chapter, the reader learns that the daughter immigrated to Spain after Argentina's economic crisis in 2001, becoming one of, "muchos jóvenes [que] emigraban expulsados por la crisis económica."¹⁰¹ The father visits her and is surprised by just how many Argentines he finds there. He also draws explicit connections between past and present emigrations, wondering, "qué hubiesen pensado sus abuelos, bisabuelos, aquellos que habían partido de Europa en los barcos para ir a probar fortuna en América [...] qué hubiesen pensado de un país en el que se habían sacrificado tanto y que terminaba expulsando a sus nietos, bisnietos, tataranietos."¹⁰² The daughter's decision to immigrate to Spain, rather than Italy, suggests that she may not feel a strong connection to her father and grandmother's home country, and that her migration to Europe is not a return.

The final chapter of this novel allows for a reconciliation with the past and looks towards the future. These pages express the need for a new language that allows for a

¹⁰¹ Antonio Dal Masetto, *Cita en el Lago Maggiore*, 13.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 23.

different relationship between people and space. As father and daughter take a path into the woods, language breaks down and they, “Casi no hablaron [...] Solo muy de tanto en tanto [...] frases breves, aisladas. Y era como si el lenguaje en que eran proferidas esas pocas frases acabara de ser creado y resonara nuevo, inaugural.”¹⁰³ When they reach a waterfall, the father sits, thinking, “Un momento perfecto [...] ¿Cómo preservarlo?”¹⁰⁴ However it is the daughter who takes action, as she picks up two stones, climbs up the rocky wall where the waterfall is, and places them together in a small fissure, saying of the stones, “Una para vos, otra para mí.”¹⁰⁵ Her gesture, in her father’s opinion, is “natural [...] verdadero” and he again feels the need to say something to commemorate this moment, but worries that the words will be a “puerilidad.”¹⁰⁶ This paralysis of speech perhaps defines earlier generations, while the daughter introduces him to a different kind of language.

While he remains silent, she hands him her headphones and tells him to listen to music as he takes in the scenery. The moment he begins listening to the music, “hubo un cambio [...] La música [...] tomaba posesión del paisaje y él tomaba posesión junto con la música. Empezó a ver cada detalle de cuanto los rodeaba en el mismo estado de pureza de las pocas frases pronunciadas mientras venían bajando.”¹⁰⁷ Suddenly, he knows the right words to say: “–A partir de ahora esas dos piedras van a quedar allá arriba para siempre [...] Lo repitió [...] casi gritando [...] y luego de nuevo y de nuevo y de nuevo [...] Y finalmente una vez más, ahora en voz muy baja, susurrando, para sí mismo: –A

¹⁰³ Ibid., 201.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 202.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 203.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 203.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 204.

partir de ahora para siempre.”¹⁰⁸ The novel ends with these words, which attempt to imitate the pure language of music.

This scene affirms Italy as the origin for both characters, the stones symbolizing that a part of them will always remain there, while it also suggests the need to see the past with new eyes, using a new language. Music transcends linguistic differences and provides one way of interacting with space and with other people. This novel also moves beyond the connections between Italy and Argentina to show instead that migratory movements over multiple generations have resulted in a world in which individuals feel themselves identifying with multiple countries – in the case of the daughter, with Italy, Argentina, and Spain, in positive ways.

The introduction of another generation occurs in the short story, “Almendro,” when the narrator, a fictionalized version of Dal Masetto, is present at the birth of his grandson.¹⁰⁹ This little boy, born in Spain, is given an indigenous name, Nahuel (which is in fact Dal Masetto’s grandson’s name). Soon after Nahuel is born, in Mallorca, the protagonist speaks to him in a monologue that continues over several pages and tells of the migrations that mark his family tree and define his identity, while also stating that migration has always occurred between populations. He says, “Cada uno de nosotros ha venido de tantas partes, de tantas cosas. Somos uno y la suma de muchos.”¹¹⁰ The name Nahuel is part of this: “Un nombre que nada tiene que ver con los Alpes ni con la isla de tu padre [Mallorca] ni con la pampa ni con la ciudad [Buenos Aires] de tu madre, y sí con

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 205-6.

¹⁰⁹ Antonio Dal Masetto, “Almendro,” in *El padre y otras historias* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2002), 70-80.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 75.

el pueblo mapuche [...] También estás hecho de eso.”¹¹¹ Nahuel has a multicultural identity, as a member of both the Argentine and Italian diasporas born in Mallorca, and his name connects him with indigenous populations, even though he has no indigenous blood. He will surely grow up knowing his heritage and being encouraged to embrace Argentine and Italian culture. However, it is unclear whether he, like his mother, grandfather, and grandmother, will also “return” to Tarni and be able to develop a relationship with this place of origin. Dal Masetto’s books will at least ensure that the real Nahuel can grow up reading about the return trip made by each generation.

Inhabiting the Circular Accent

Cora, Sandra, and Agata are three women who can claim both Italian and Argentine identities, and their movements between Italy and Argentina induce them to more clearly define these identities for themselves. In Cora’s case, she finds a future for herself in Italy, while she is also able to continue working through the traumatic loss of her husband in Argentina. Sandra views her time in Italy as one chapter of her life that adds on to her childhood in Argentina, and she learns to be comfortable with these two languages and cultures. Agata only returns to Italy once, and this is enough for her to rethink her Italian and Argentine identities. Her son and granddaughter, like Cora’s daughter, have the possibility of returning multiple times and becoming familiar with the country of their ancestors. All of these narratives show some of the varied ways in which Italian-Argentines view the Italian and Argentine aspects of their identity, and the blurring between, or doubling of, these categories. In all cases, both a circularity and an

¹¹¹ Ibid., 75-6.

accent remain, and rather than concealing or ignoring this, the characters attempt to achieve a sense of belonging within the circular accent.

Ammendola's text, written for young children, focuses on the positive aspects of the circular accent, such as a familiarity with multiple languages and cultures. Pariani and Dal Masetto, instead, place more emphasis on moments of frustration and confusion as their characters migrate and return. In these two texts, silence, fire, and music, become symbols that suggest the absence of words as a means of inhabiting spaces of tension and creating moments of tranquility. Furthermore, they indicate that communication without words is just as important as dialogue and writing. None of these novels provide permanent ways of reconciling circularity and accents, but they do demonstrate that circular accents can prompt moments of reflection in the struggle to navigate between different languages and cultures.

The primary texts in this chapter differ from the ones I examined in previous chapters in their focus on a future that, while unknown, will surely allow for a proliferation and increased acceptance of circular accents. To return to the main concepts of previous chapters, these characters are ethnically inflected, are cultural and linguistic translators in their binational travels, and are keen to remember their family's histories. Furthermore, rather than depicting a permanent resolution, these narratives demonstrate that spaces of tension are spaces of productive engagement with questions of ethnicity, language and culture, memory, and identity, in a world increasingly inhabited by people like themselves.

Conclusion

An Italian-Argentine Destination Culture

This dissertation has focused on Italian and Argentine novels, written from the 1980s to today, which while set in different time periods, consistently demonstrate the instability of categories of race, ethnicity, language, memory, and identity. These works highlight the multilayered tensions between, for instance, Italian and Spanish, or between past and present. Furthermore, this literature also narrates the dialectical processes of homogenization that permitted Italians to assimilate fully in Argentine culture and have led, today, to a focus in the popular discourse in both countries on the similarities between Italians and Argentines rather than on their differences. Returning to my initial example of Pope Francis, he serves as a reminder of the past immigration of Italians to Argentina as well as an example of how Italian-Argentines today allow us to more clearly see the blurred borders between the categories I just mentioned.

I have used the concept of the circular accent to examine the characterization of Italian-Argentines in works of contemporary migration literature published in both countries. When viewed together, this literature indicates that an ever-increasing circularity over time between these two countries has allowed for accents to remain, or resurface, and perhaps never disappear. Most of the Italians who settled in Argentina from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century were solely focused on putting food

on the table and a roof over their heads, with little thought given to passing their Italian heritage to their children, and no ability to ever return to Italy. However in recent decades – due to changes in the economic and political climate as well as to new migratory flows that encompass other countries – individuals are more likely to embrace their Italian accent in Argentina and their Argentine one in Italy. The tension between the two countries and languages remains, and none of the characters I have examined manage to find a permanent and stable balance between their multiple loyalties. Still, those who come to accept the permanent instability of the circular accent, and who are willing to continue questioning and adjusting their sense of belonging appear to be the ones most suited to inhabiting today’s globalized world.

While circular accents have certainly increased for Italian-Argentines over time, future studies could examine works of contemporary Italian-Argentine migration literature that show exceptions to this trend. For instance, Lucilla Gallavresi’s *L’argentino* (2003) follows the protagonist, Severio, who arrives to Buenos Aires in 1874 as a child and spends the rest of his life migrating between Italy and Argentina.¹ He becomes known as Javier and his family jokingly calls him “l’argentino,” “the Argentine.” Javier’s life demonstrates how some Italian emigrants with money and social connections sent their children back to Italy for an education. His struggle to reconcile his binational identity differentiates him from many of his contemporaries, but echoes the experiences of many Italian-Argentines in recent decades. A comparison of this work with Laura Pariani’s *Dio non ama i bambini* (2007) would allow for a closer look at the impact of socio-economic status on the persistence of both circularity and an accent.

¹ Lucilla Gallavresi, *L’argentino* (Milan: Mursia, 2003).

I want to acknowledge that both a binational approach and the concept of a circular accent work particularly well in the case of Italy and Argentina. This is largely due to the non-hierarchical relationship between the two countries as well as to the existence of a variety of both similarities and differences between its residents. Questions of audience did affect my analysis, especially regarding the different relationship many Italian and Argentines have to the theme of migration, or to specific historical events such as the Dirty War. However, authors in both countries take similar approaches to questions of language, race, ethnicity, and identity, which facilitated the process of drawing comparisons between narratives.

It would be productive to take a similar approach with two countries and populations with a more conflicted history, whose residents are not viewed as having much in common today. For instance, a look at Somali-Italian literature would need to contend with Italy's colonial history in Somalia, as well as current issues of racism and Islamophobia, which would lead to a significantly different analysis of questions of race and language than what I have done in this dissertation. This type of study could focus on how contemporary authors in Italy such as Igiaba Scego, Kaha Mohamed Aden, and Shirin Ramzanali Fazel maintain an accent but highlight the circularity between Somali and Italians in order to demonstrate that these two nations are not as different as they may initially appear. One strength of the concept of the circular accent is its ability to account for differing degrees of circularity and accents, and for the interactions between the two.

I would like to conclude by suggesting that Italian-Argentine migration literature narrates a shared Italian-Argentine destination culture. Graziella Parati focuses on Italy, and on Italian migration literature, when she writes about a destination culture as “not

only the culture of the country toward which people migrate” but as “the result of a process of hybridization between local and incoming culture, and [it] is therefore a destination culture for native Italians as well.”² Following this, an Italian-Argentine destination culture brings together Italian and Argentine cultures and includes both native and non-native Italians and Argentines. Moreover, while Italy and Argentina are central in these narratives, they remain open to other spaces, cultures, and languages: “a destination culture is situated, but not geographically restricted.”³ This openness is also reflected in how Italian-Argentines self-identify, which may not be limited to one nation. Literature plays a crucial role in narrating a destination culture, by placing circularity and accents in dialogue with one another:

Created at the intersection of local traditions and incoming cultural practices, literature within a destination culture projects its hybrid components into a fluid present and an unpredictable future grounded on the crises of the articulations of sameness and difference. Literature, therefore, constitutes the location in which it is possible to construct an imagined destination culture.⁴

What kind of destination culture does Italian-Argentine migration literature imagine, and how does this intersect with other migration literatures and migratory flows? These works – whether set at the turn of the twentieth century, the mid-twentieth century, or in recent decades – imagine a future in which markers of difference will no longer be seen in a negative light. They show us how Italian immigrants and their children, who were initially seen as less desirable than Northern Europeans, assimilated and came to play an enormous role in Argentine history and in defining the limits of Argentine national identity. This corresponds with other texts that explicitly draw

² Graziella Parati, *Migration Italy: The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 17.

³ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 72-3.

connections between the treatment of Italians in the past and how other immigrant groups in Italy are viewed today. For instance, journalist Gian Antonio Stella writes: “There is no stereotype held against today’s immigrants that was not already, a century or only several years ago, held against us.”⁵ Then, when examining observations of immigrants’ “uncivilized” bathing and eating habits, Stella asks, “But would one of our *extracomunitari* [non-EU, or perhaps illegal, immigrants] today sleep on sheets changed every two weeks [...] in rotating shifts? And yet our grandparents slept like this, until a few decades ago.”⁶ This movement that Stella makes between past and present parallels what we have seen in a number of Italian-Argentine novels. Works like Stella’s, written in response to current migration into and out of Italy and Argentina, propose destination cultures that likely overlap in multiple ways with the Italian-Argentine destination culture we have seen in my primary texts. All of these works share a concern for understanding the past in order to imagine what the future may hold.

It remains to be seen if Italy and Argentina will come to accept these newest immigrants and allow them to integrate, or if Italian and Argentine emigrants will remain linked to their countries of origin. Establishing contemporary Italian-Argentine migration literature as a genre and examining the role of the Italian-Argentine characters through the presence of circular accents shows that the latest movement by Italian-Argentines and others is just the latest development in a continuously transforming network of global migratory flows. Moreover, by highlighting the hybridity and multiculturalism present in

⁵ “Non c’è stereotipo rinfacciato agli immigrati di oggi che non sia già stato rinfacciato, un secolo o solo pochi anni fa, a noi.” Gian Antonio Stella, *L'orda: quando gli albanesi eravamo noi* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2002), 11. The link between past Italian emigration and current Albanian immigration is already clear in the title.

⁶ “Ma dormirebbe uno dei nostri extracomunitari di oggi nelle lenzuola cambiate ogni due settimane [...] con la rotazione dei turni? Eppure così dormivano i nostri nonni, fino a pochi decenni fa.” *Ibid.*, 76.

both countries since the nineteenth century, these narratives suggest that categories such as Italian, Argentine, and white, will continue to become more inclusive to account for the inhabitants of these countries. Finally, in an increasingly globalized world, it is now possible for individuals and families to both settle in a new country and remain firmly connected to their country of origin, and for someone to be both Italian and Argentine, without one of these identities necessarily conflicting with the other.

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