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A strong  
unbroken bond



Pina Valente  
in collaboration with Bert Marinko

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A Pasquale  
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La tua interessante  
prefazione ha arricchito il  
libro.

con affetto.  
Pina

## **A strong unbroken bond**

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### The Emigrants

With their lifeless eyes, their hollow cheeks,  
pale, with a sorrowful and grave gesture,  
supporting their exhausted, heartbroken women,  
they climb aboard the ship  
as one climbs to the gallows.

And each clutches to his chest  
all he possesses on the earth.  
Some a scanty bundle, some a suffering  
baby, who clenches on  
to his neck, terrified by the immense waters.

They climb aboard in a long line, humble and silent,  
and on their dark and haggard faces  
still damp the sad weariness  
of the final farewells  
given to the mountains that they'll never see again . . .

– Edmondo De Amici



### And I'm Here

I die without dying  
and I want to stop this moment  
in front of the fireplace.  
And I'm here,  
to defend your memory . . .  
while the sun reappears in the dark alleys,  
in the silent solitude of a farewell.

– Maria Mollo





**In the Palm of Your Hand** 

If you look deeply  
in the palm of your hand,  
you'll see our parents  
and all generations  
of your ancestors  
All of them are alive  
at this time.  
Everyone is present in your body.  
You are the continuation  
of each of these people.

– Thich Nhat Hanh

## FOREWORD



*A Strong Unbroken Bond*, by Pina Valente, is a long journey back in time, of men women and children, in an emigration that takes them far away from their homeland, with a suitcase embraced by a lasso. Far from affections and ancient flavors, smells hidden in the heart. It is a collection of historical information, a painstaking search with a wealth of details, so that the past does not remain buried at the bottom of a trunk. The author does so with elegance and simplicity, with humility and love for her land, to which she feels a strong belonging and carries its roots within herself. A land kissed by the sun and illuminated by the stars; a land of yellow primroses, from the waving leaves of the olive trees to every caress of the light wind. Land of ancient villages, gentle hills and fairy woods overlooking the blue Tyrrhenian Sea. Land of ancient traditions, myths and legends that mix with reality. Land of evergreen pine forests and *melanzane 'mbuttunate*, limoncello and must in barrels . . . land of "caliente" blood. But, also of renunciations and sacrifices, of great exodus, bitter land, regretted and carried in the heart. Forever!

Maria Mollo, Writer and Poet  
Centola (SA), Italy  
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Italians have been the protagonists of a phenomenon, that of migration, which has marked more than one generation ready to leave behind the miseries of a very hard life to try to embrace a new dream.

If in the last decades of the nineteenth century emigration concerned mainly the northern regions of Italy, in the first two decades of the twentieth century the situation was reversed: the primacy passed to the southern regions, with the exodus from many towns of Cilento.

Referring to one of them, Ezio Martuscelli and Pina Valente write an interesting book: *When from the South of Italy People Emigrated En Masse to America. Case History of the Natale family of Centola (SA)*, which covers over one hundred years of emigration from our territory, focusing on the events of a family.

Starting from the sources found locally, the research also intended to involve Italian-American natives through the establishment of a network to make relatives known to each other and put them in contact. Therefore, the intent concerned multiple aspects: knowledge of a story that took place over a rather



vast period of time; the possibility of outlining for the Natale family themselves, a rich family tree that intended to intertwine the various forms of kinship, from the simplest of the original family; finally, the reconstruction by the authors of the entire intergenerational process of integration into American society and consolidation through subsequent generations.

Before going into the specifics of the story, it seems appropriate to try to understand what this study represents, or rather, what research methods underlie it, or again, if the relevance of the specific case can affect the migratory phenomenon to the Americas in a broader context.

It can be asserted that the richness of the documentation produced and the capillarity of the details, of which later, can constitute a significant scientific confirmation, or the historical reconstruction of a family that extensively can represent the universe of emigration stories.

Let's move on to the other element: what can this work be and within what research specificity can it be placed?

Let's first see what it is not. Certainly, it is not a novel, because the form is not strictly narrative, and then it takes place in the correctness and precision of the information, in the truth of how the facts manifested themselves, with a truly extensive support of documents. So, there is no creation or imagination to support a true story. Finally, it is not just data analysis, because the letters accompanying the reconstruction also leave room for emotions that cold statistical evidence alone could not have represented.

The title it refers to a "case history," of which literature is rich. In the book: *The Case Study in Social Research* (Carocci, 2021), Barbara Sena argues that such an approach has long been considered a "non-theme" in social research methodology. Taking a step back, we can detect the affirmation of the contribution of life stories, influenced by the Weberian lesson (Max Weber, *The Method of Social Historical Sciences*, Einaudi, 2003, or. 1922), which has clarified many misunderstandings, and above all, has shown how it is possible to refer to a type of approach that is common to history and sociology. Moreover, in the United States, sociological research in this sense was favored by the Chicago School, in which Park, above all, pointed out the importance of a methodology that was not essentially statistical, which posed questions related to empirical research with bibliographies and life stories. This involved integrated aspects, from historical to epistemological, applicative elements, which see the case study placed among the "mixed methods." (R.E. Park, *Human Migration and Marginal Man*, in S. Tabboni (ed.), *Proximity and distance. Models and Figures of the Foreigner as a Sociological Category*, FrancoAngeli, 1991, pp. 206–207).

I therefore opt for a hybrid form of life stories supported by documents. Not entirely autobiographical stories, because there is the hand of the authors in dealing with them: they do not rely only on the words of the protagonists, but contextualize them within a precise research methodology.



The biographical and autobiographical methods can be a fruitful point of convergence between scholars of different fields, in particular sociologists and historians, because the methodology of life stories meets historical problems on its way; and the unresolved and most debatable questions in one are the same as those that the other must also take into account. I quote in this sense: Franco Ferrarotti, *History and Life Stories*, Laterza, Bari 1981; edited by Roberto Cipriani, *The Methodology of Life Stories. From Autobiography to Life History*, Euroma-La Goliardica, Rome 1987; Laura Zanfrini, "The Use of Life Stories in Sociological Research, Studi di Sociologia, Ed. Vita e Pensiero, Anno 37, Fasc. 1, January-March 1999, pp. 55-76.

The history of families and individuals cannot be exhausted in the search for their genealogies and there are many sources that can shed glimpses of light on the events of individuals and their relationships, especially those of migrants and marginalized subjects.

Life stories are therefore a particularly fruitful field of research, and I believe that the work of Martuscelli and Valente is focused in this direction, without neglecting a comparison of truly extensive and significant documents and findings.

This story of emigration began in 1901 when Luciano Natale went to the United States: in 1907 his wife and three children joined him in New Jersey. Previously, he had called his four grandchildren: Bartolomeo, 1902; Joseph, 1903; Nicholas, 1906; Louis, 1921.

The first generation of the Natale's in the USA did menial manual labor jobs; subsequent generations, with higher levels of education and knowledge, were able to take decisive steps towards a higher condition. The professions become managerial and there are also some descendants of those first immigrants who carry out well-paid activities.

The origin, of what could be called a saga, is Nicola Natale and Agnese Stanziola, who were born around the middle of the eighteenth century. The evidence can be found in the birth, marriage and death certificates which attest to the family dynamics over the generations. All this until Luciano Natale, the first of the family to emigrate to the United States. The man who was born in 1866 had already married Marianna Basile in Centola and had three children. His family arrived only few years after him. Nicola's older brother was Raffaele, who had eight children; of these, four of them, Bartolomeo, Giuseppe, Nicola and Luigi joined their uncle.

The book focuses on these men, from Centola, and their descendants, who were all born and lived in the USA. From the American registers of immigrants, the stories of the four Natale's, grandchildren of the first emigrant, Luciano, and their descendants are reconstructed.

I leave to the reader the development of the interesting events, not without emphasizing the role of Julia Coppola (b. 1942), still in contact with



Pina Valente, co-author of the book, and great-granddaughter of Nicola Natale. Julia focuses on American life, starting with her grandparents Bartolomeo and Giulia; she also traces some significant portraits of his mother and father and the very serene life they lived. She also talks about her marriage and her children through frequent correspondence, not only with Pina, but also with the other Italian Natale's. The generations following that of Julia's, the children of the children, constitute current and very recent findings. Some of this fourth generation still go to Centola to visit the places of origin of their ancestors. There is also a fifth generation of Natale descendants in the USA, born after the year two thousand.

Also of interest is Giuseppe's great-grandson, Eric Martone, who studied Italian emigration in the United States, their integration and their condition. He said he was proud of his Italian roots. Significant is the passage reported in the volume: "One of the challenges that Italian immigrants often faced was that they were too Italian to be treated as completely American, but too American to believe that they were completely Italian." A sort of dramatic limbo.

Pina Valente went to the USA in 1995, bringing Cilento products to her relatives. She contacted many descendants of the Natale family and spent 45 wonderful days for her with American relatives.

In the United States, in the 1920s, there were 13 million immigrants out of a population of 92 million people, equal to 14%; then there were 26 million second-generation "Americans." Considering that US citizenship law was based on *jus soli*, it can be said that about 40% of the population was foreign.

Americans were concerned and divided by the arrival of these masses from the poorest countries of Europe. The critical issues were: xenophobia; fear of repercussions in the workplace; and concerns about the stability of the system which would not have held up for such a massive entry. On the other hand, there were those in favor: entrepreneurs until the early 1920s supported free immigration because it provided cheap labor; and the more progressive sectors saw immigrants as an enrichment for American society.

The United States, however, was the first to develop programs for the integration of immigrants into society. The work of the reception began from the moment of disembarkation: assistance to those who did not pass the health inspection; help to connect immigrants with relatives and fellow villagers who have already arrived in America; and information on immigration legislation. Such a high emigration led to the establishment in the main American cities of entire neighborhoods inhabited by Italians, who spoke in the various dialects of the countries of origin. One of the most serious issues was related to the health problem. Immigrant neighborhoods had become hotbeds of diseases such as dysentery, pneumonia and especially tuberculosis. The necessary treatments went beyond pharmacological ones: it was necessary for the sick to follow hygiene rules and to change their lifestyle at home to prevent infections. Particular attention was paid to children, due to the high infant mortality rates.



(Maddalena Tirabassi, *The Lighthouse of Beacon Street. Social Workers and Immigrants in the United States (1910-1939)* FrancoAngeli, 1990).

A few years ago, Domenico Chieffallo wandered in the houses of Cilento to find traces of abandonment but also the search for redemption. He has produced a series of publications on this phenomenon to highlight three interesting aspects: a) the story of the defeated, those who had no luck abroad; b) the story of the anonymous mass, which had managed to provide means of support for their families; and c) the story of those who made their fortune, the successful emigrants. In: *Under Distant Skies*, he investigated precisely the human and intellectual capacities of the latter and the favorable contextual circumstances.

I think I can assert that the Natale family over the years has managed to integrate into the new condition and to achieve a certain success in subsequent generations.

In conclusion, this work takes into consideration events close to the authors themselves, such as Pina Valente, with certainly an emotional involvement, but as the situation expands and unfolds within the pages. In particular, the complex dynamics that characterize this phenomenon are of interest, starting from the encounter between different cultures, with an approach that allows us to look at immigration not only as an event that has repercussions at the individual level, but also in its multi-generational components. Placing the Natale family at the center of attention means "going through time," allowing generations to develop and identify the elements that characterized the first Cilento who set foot on American soil.

The migratory passage has certainly implied rupture, separation, loss, strong detachment, uprooting, but also possibilities and opportunities for growth and development for subsequent generations. An interesting aspect, which the authors highlight, is the care of the bonds between those who leave and those who remain, those born far from their country of origin and those who are ready to host natives who want to search for their roots after so many years.

**Pasquale Martucci, Sociologist  
Battipaglia (SA), Italy  
February 7, 2023**