

Silent Presences:  
Italian-American Women's Experiences in the Mahoning Valley, 1880-1930.

by  
Laura Cuppone

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Laura Cuppone

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Dr. Martha Pallante, Thesis Advisor Date

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Dr. Donna DeBlasio, Committee Member Date

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Dr. Anne York, Committee Member Date

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Peter J. Kasvinsky, Dean of School of Graduate Studies & Research Date

## Abstract

This thesis, relating the vicissitudes and experiences of Italian immigrant women in the Mahoning Valley, between 1880 and 1930, aims at giving them their rightful place in the history of Italian emigration. The three chapters that compose this project put light on three significant stages of the history of Italian immigrant women in this area: their arrivals, their entrances into the job world and, eventually, their adaptations into a completely new society. Throughout the chapters other important features of Italian immigration to the United States emerge. For example, the analysis of two different typologies of emigration – temporary and permanent migration – provides many other aspects that deeply shaped and affected the entire process of transplantation from Italy to the New World.

On the bases of local important sources, such as the articles in the Italian language newspaper, *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, oral histories, letters and the census data, from 1880 to 1930, I have reconstructed the everyday life of Italian women in the microcosm of the Mahoning Valley. Although the thesis has a strong local focus, it continuously offers comparisons between the “steeltown Youngstown” and the big North American metropolises, such as New York and Chicago. These comparisons highlight not only how the United States affected Italians, especially women, but also how Italian women, belonging to the first as well as to the second generation of immigrants, molded the United States. The voices and the histories of women mentioned in the following chapters demonstrate that Italian women played a key-role in the “project” of emigration.

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## Introduction

Italian immigrant women and women, in general, in the small areas as well as in the big cities of the United States were not only protagonists of their own migration but also a fundamental element in the project of emigration. Indeed, women also played important roles when they did not immigrated abroad, especially when they were agents of a temporary emigration, characterized mostly by men. Wives and daughters generally waited for their men in their homelands, but their waiting did not mean doing nothing. Because of the absence of their husbands, brothers and fathers, women assumed the traditional male roles in the management of the land as well as the properties.

In order to prove and show the significant contribution that women have made, it is necessary to analyze emigration as an investment which required strategies and tactics. Looking at the emigration as a strategic plan help the readers focus on the women's roles. Men and women were two complementary poles of the temporary migration plan: the men left and, after a good amount of savings and an undetermined number of years, sometime spaced out with returns to their villages, came back home. Meanwhile, all the money saved were sent to women at home, in their homeland. In their homeland, women not only continued farming their land but they also started representing their families in the juridical aspects. They managed the money, they went to the banks, and they went into the presence of the public notary. Women also had the duty to safeguard the moral and social integrity of the family members, especially their children. This means that, without women ready to take all the responsibilities, the male emigration would not have been successful. Women were not passive recipients of their husbands'

decisions to emigrate abroad, especially overseas; it was preplanned, prepared and the product of a plural decision.

If women's presence is important in temporary migration, it is possible to argue that was irreplaceable in permanent migration, when husbands called their wives to live permanently in the country of destination. At the moment of arrival, women were, in most of the cases, trained and accustomed to support their families. For example, the girls from Southern Italy had already worked as farm laborers or as dressmakers. From the more industrialized North, they had worked as laborers in the silk mills or in the cotton mills. Because the permanent migration, differently from temporary, pushed immigrant families to reach an American quality of life, women were forced to support the family economy.

Usually they did more than cook, clean and take care of the family members; they took care of boarders or worked as dressmakers at home. Some of them, forced by necessity, went to work as servants. Where the dynamics of the job market of the country of emigration allowed them to work in light industry, as in New York, they labored as makers of feathers and flowers, or as tobacco and clothing industry workers. Their supplemental income was, in many cases, more than necessary for the survival of the entire family. Given these preambles, it is impossible to relegate immigrant women behind the scene.

The three chapters that composes this thesis, combining elements of the macro-history with elements of micro-history, or local history, analyze three fundamental points of the Italian women emigration in the Mahoning Valley, between 1880 and 1930, such as their arrivals, their participation to the phenomenon of emigration -not only as mothers

and wives but also as workers- and, eventually, their integration into the American society, namely their acceptance of new ways of life. The first chapter, thanks to the analysis of important records, such as the census, and primary documents, and the letters from the archive of Lucia Bisceglia Lariccia's letters, presents a portrait of the Italian women of the Mahoning Valley who struggled daily with the care of their houses, their family members, and with the management of the money.

The second chapter dealt with the entrance of Italian women, especially women of the first generation, into the job world. It focused on the differences between the employment offered to Italian immigrant women in areas characterized by light and by clothing industries and the specific region of the Valley, where the strong presence of heavy industry did not leave many possibilities to the illiterate and non-English speaking women. The third chapter puts in evidence how Italian mothers were gradually Americanized and how their daughters, the second generation of Italian immigrants, thanks to the schools and the contacts with the job-world, signaled a passage from Italians to Americans.

The story of the Italian immigrant women in the Mahoning Valley, between the 1800 and the 1900, could not leave out a broad overview of the historiography about Italian emigration and emigration in general as well as could not leave out a brief history of Italian emigration abroad and specifically to the United States. For this reason, I decided to face these questions before the analysis of the main subject of this thesis.

The first studies related to theme of emigration to the U.S. focused on the assimilation of the emigrants into American culture and social patterns. As Oscar Handling did in his *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations That Made the*

*American People*, this first historiographic stream was absolutely negative about the potential assimilation of the immigrants in American culture and presented the ethnic minorities as outsiders of the society. In the same decade, other historians tried to describe the process of the migratory streams under the “melting pot” point of view. Namely, they affirmed that, sooner or later, American culture would have assimilated the home cultures of the immigrants, transforming the ethnic distinction in parts of the same culture.

During the 1960s, historians, such as Humbert Nelli, started studying the migratory phenomenon emphasizing the ethnic differences and the cultural survivals. According to this genre of historians, also known as cultural multipluralists, immigrants did not blend in with American culture and continued keeping their cultural peculiarities. In the second half of the 1970s, historians, like Thomas Kessner, continued affirming the idea of multiculturalism but, unlike the supporters of cultural multipluralism, they argued that immigrants maintained their cultural differences but not the culture of the homeland. According to this historiographic current, immigrants’ home culture changed and gained external elements. Nevertheless, immigrants tried to keep their identity using different means; Kessner identified as factor of cultural safeguard the religious faith.

Until the 1980s, historians focused exclusively on immigration to the big American cities and analyzed the problems related to assimilation and adaptation under the American point of view. Something changed when historians, such as Franca Iacovetta, Donna Gabaccia or Virginia Yans-MacLaughlin, tried to present immigrants, specifically Italian immigrants, in the job world. They opened the path to the study of emigration to working class studies and started analyzing migratory flows under the



immigrants' perspectives. Particularly Gabaccia, inserted the Italian immigrants in the "transnational history", a modern and still unexplored branch of history, and, for the first time, paid attention to the consequences of the emigrations in the immigrants' homeland. Currently, many historians are also revaluing female immigrants' experiences.

The ambitious goal of this thesis is to start a project, which hopefully will be widened in the future, that presents history of Italian women immigrants within a transnational point of view. I tried to give to the reader continuous references to Italian history and to contrast and compare the events that happened in the Valley with those that occurred in areas similar to Youngstown, such as Buffalo or Milwaukee, as well as in larger American metropolises, such as New York and Chicago. My first concern was, obviously, that of providing the right place in history to Italian immigrant women.

Trying to summarize the history of Italian emigration and especially to the United States presents many difficulties because Italian governments started registering systematically the Italian migratory fluxes only from 1876 on. Before this date, in the first half of the Eighteenth century, the Lombardo-Veneto Kingdom, particularly under the Austro-Hungarian administration, gave birth to a series of orderly enquiries about the number of immigrants in order to send this fluctuant army to the lands that needed drainages or the establishment of new cultivations, such as mulberry and rice growing. In 1805, the imperial French government undertook the first general census of Italian population, completely based on the number of persons per parishes. In this census appeared a section dedicated to absentees for military service; the census did not take into account absentees for emigration.

Because there was something wrong about the figures for the military draft, the French government discovered that there was a fluctuating male population that, for the majority, escaped the draft. Consequently, the chief officers were in charge of collecting data about the escaping multitudes. The kingdoms of the Restoration, because of the impossibility of finding capillary and organized methods to report and restrain the growing migratory fluxes, and second for the lack of interest in a phenomenon considered irrelevant, instead of perfecting the vestiges of the Napoleonic bureaucratic apparatus, ignored the entire issue of emigration. Nevertheless, Italians, considered a population of *poeti, santi* and *navigatori*, undertook the path of the sea well in before the 1800. It is sufficient to remember the great explorers between the fifteenth and sixteenths, such as Cristoforo Colombo, Amerigo Vespucci and Giovanni da Verrazzano, and the great artists and musicians who, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries embellished and entertained all the European royal courts.

Even though in the collective memory and in mainstream history, Italian emigration was compressed only in the period between 1870 and 1930, there was a considerable amount of Italian immigrants before the so-called *grande emigrazione*. In fact, before the Unification of Italy, crowds of Italians, pushed by contingent factors, such as the demographic growth and the scarcity of land, and by ideological factors, such as the belonging to revolutionary groups, opened the path to the big emigration and played the role of pioneers of emigration.

Who were they? It is possible to individuate three typologies of Italian immigrants in the period before the Unification: the political exiles, namely fervent republicans who escaped the persecution of the restored kingdoms- among them the famous Giuseppe

Garibaldi who reached New York in 1850 after the collapse of the Roman Republic- the crowds of peasants, coming mostly from the countries of the North of Italy and directed towards the close European nations and an indefinite bunch of vagabonds, shoe-shiner, pedlars and organ grinders. These latter were in the majority peasants who, afflicted by famines and crisis reinvented themselves. Among them there were also the beggars who shared with the “vagabond” immigrants the provenience from the rural society and that, strict anti-beggary laws issued by the European restored governments, forced to emigrate and to proof Yankees’ generosity. In the period between 1876 and 1945, it is possible to recognize three important phases of Italian emigration. Each stage, though presenting common features, was characterized by different causes, protagonists and consequences. Analyzing these stages, forcing a little bit the chronological limits, it can be demonstrated not only how Italian history influenced Italian emigration but also how Italian emigration and its exodus changed and reshaped the history of a peninsula that in 1800 was an inexperienced child. Obviously, the examination of the different Italian migratory fluxes is, for this project, a valid tool taking into account what positions Italian women had and to explain why they were more or less present in the Italian diaspora.

Between 1876 and 1900, 5,300,000 Italians left their homeland. This was the first important Italian exodus, whose data were collected the first official statistics, 1876, born as consequences of the creation, on December 31, 1871, of *the Censimento degli Italiani all’Esterio*. Why did these Italians undertake immigration? There was not only a cause but also a series of contingent crisis that need to be summarized. The last decades of the nineteenth century were, indeed, characterized by the agrarian crisis, catalyst of this big exodus, which hit not only Italy but also other European nations. In addition, a variety of

diseases attacked harvests and destroyed the last trace of hope towards agriculture. For example, pebrine strongly damaged the sericulture which was one of the most flourishing sectors of the Northern Italian agriculture. Later, the fillossera devastated wine-growing regions in Italy as well as in France. Rice-growing, typical of the areas of Piemonte, was affected by a pathology called *brusone*. Eventually, the olive fly (*Dacus oleae*) did not save the olive groves of Central and Southern Italy.

Not only external but also internal causes determined a deep crisis of Italian agriculture. In fact the abolition of the right of primogeniture, introduced by the Napoleonic code and kept by the Civil Code of 1865 of the Italian Kingdom, created an excessive fragmentation of the land and the impossibility of living on a small portion of land. In addition to these aspects, it is important to remember the growing power of the middle-class at the expense of the peasants. The sales of the church properties and the abolition of the common rights on the collection of woods or on the pasture lands weakened rural society and reinforced the landowners. Given the preambles of this stage of emigration, it is easy to portray an identikit of the Italian immigrants.

They were men, 81%, and young, 16 % were under the fourteen, and belonging, at the moment of the departure, to professions related to the rural world. The destinations of these immigrants were the European countries, France and Germany, and the extra-European, at first Argentina and Brazil and in third position the United States. The two thirds of these immigrants came from the Central and Northern Italy. In fact, peasants from these areas were more accustomed to temporary emigration to solve quickly the economic problems linked to the harvests or to the mountainous land, difficult to cultivate.

The second phase of Italian emigration is from 1900 until the opening of WWI. This is unanimously considered the “great emigration.” Indeed, during this period, emigrated 600,000 persons per year for a total of 9 million. 1913 represents the apex of this emigration which registered 870,000 expatriations. Paradoxically, the great emigration corresponded to the period of the industrialization of the Italian peninsula. Notwithstanding, the financial take-off of the *Giolittiana* era was not intense nor homogeneously diffused on the peninsula and was not able to absorb the large surplus of workforce rejected by the agricultural sector. The international job market, thanks to a technological improvement of communications and transportation, played an irreplaceable role in the modeling of the migratory fluxes.

The United States which offered many job opportunities in the building of railroads, cities and in the growing metallurgic industry absorbed the 45 % of the migratory flux. During this second phase, Italian government began to pay attention to this disproportioned phenomenon. In 1901, an institutional agency, the *Commissariato Generale dell’Emigrazione*, was born, which took the responsibilities for the administration and of regulation of the expatriations. The protagonists of the great emigration were young men coming from the countries of the South of Italy who chose as their favorite destination the United States of America.

The third phase was between the two world wars. The emigration of this period, although present and active, did not reach the peaks and numbers of the previous years. Indeed, there were a series of correlated events that strongly discouraged the migration. The countries of destinations, especially the United States, started policies of restriction and of selection of immigrants, among these Italians who poured in the big metropolises

of the East cost without control. In 1917, the U.S. government issued a law that required for every immigrant a literacy test, specifically they could not be illiterate. Illiteracy was in the first half of 1900 the norm, especially among peasants. The *Commissariato Generale dell'Emigrazione* in order to solve this problem provided courses of writing and reading for aspiring immigrants. In 1921, a stricter law then reinforced in 1924, decimated the arrivals of immigrants to the New World.

In 1921 the Quota Act established as maximal rate the number of 41,721 Italians per year, translated into a percentage corresponded to 3% of the Italians present in the United States in 1910. In 1924, the Quota Act set as maximum the percentage of 2% of the Italians present in the United States in 1890, namely at the beginning of the Italian emigration to the American continent. Emigration was also jeopardized by the Fascist dictatorship of Benito Mussolini. At first, Mussolini did not condemn emigration; on the contrary, in the occasion of International Conference on the Emigration, held in Rome in 1924, *Il Duce* described emigration as a marvelous source of richness. Obviously, his project was to *fascistizzare*, make fascist, Italian colonies spread across Europe as well as in the Americas. His pervasive propaganda for the creation of exemplar fascists abroad had as points of strength the attempt to destroy the regionalism of the colonies abroad and to push the adoption the concept of homeland and Italian nation.

After the conquest of Abyssinia and Ethiopia, Mussolini started using fascist rhetoric on the importance of a fascist emigration in order to send workforce in Africa and, overall, to send the Italian peasants of the North, especially from the Veneto to the new reclaimed land of the low Lazio. In order to put an end to the migration and, consequently, to the huge losses of young men, good for the draft, he and his ministers

started propaganda against the “infamous” emigration. Their concerns were clear: why should Italian government raise children that, once grown up, wanted to leave their Italy. The fascist motto “*Il Numero è Forza*”, the number means strength, clearly explain the importance for the Italian dictator to have a large population, useful to fight and to accomplish the project of the construction of an Italian empire. If on one side, Mussolini condemned emigration, on the other side, he created an emigration of political opponents who find shelter in France, which welcomed the 70% of the Italian immigrants of this period. In second after France, and in first position among the extra-European countries, was Argentina.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a complete overview of the phases of the history of Italian emigration see: Ercole Sori, *L'Emigrazione Italiana dell'Unità alla Seconda Guerra Mondiale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1979) and Zeffiro Ciuffoletti and Maurizio degli Innocenti, *L'Emigrazione nella Storia d'Italia, 1868/1975: Storia e Documenti* (Firenze: Vallecchi Editore, 1978).

### Women Who Waited: The Silent Presences

This chapter wants to put in evidence how Italian immigrant women were in this area not only protagonists of their own migration but also a fundamental element of the “project of emigration.” If one looks superficially at the data and at the percentage of Italian migratory fluxes between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, one discovers a very big gap in the sex ratio of the emigration. This first chapter aims to look at the sources, related to the Italian immigration to the Mahoning County, with a different eye, under a different perspective that definitively breaks with the traditionalist belief that women were only the passive receivers of someone else’s decision.

In fact, as the Census of the Mahoning County proves, Italian immigrant women were only a small portion of the entire Italian immigrant population in this area. The numerical ratio between men and women, circumscribed to this singular and determined area, perfectly mirrors that of the Italian migratory flux on larger national scale. In the years immediately following the Italian unification, 1876 to 1885, only 20,000 women to 112,000 men emigrated abroad. In the quinquennium 1896-1900 feminine migration added up to one-fourth of the departures.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, on June 1880, in Youngstown Township, there were four adult Italian women and sixteen adult Italian men.<sup>2</sup> Now the question is easy, how much does this data can tell about the Italian women’s presence in the county under study? The numerical scarcity of Italian women does not refute their involvement in the migration patterns. This chapter shows theirs was “a silent presence.”

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<sup>1</sup> Matteo Sanfilippo, *Tipologie dell’Emigrazione di Massa*, in *Storia dell’Emigrazione Italiana: Partenze*, ed. Piero Bevilacqua, and Andreina Clementi, and Emilio Franzina (Roma, Donzelli Editore, 2001), 1, 82.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1990).



First, it is important to distinguish between two typologies of emigration: temporary and permanent emigration. The temporary emigration is the emigration undertaken only by a member of the family nucleus, most of the time the husband or the father. The first goal of the temporary emigration was to solve or, at least, to improve the bad conditions of the Southern Italian rural villages, intensely afflicted by the so-called *crisi agraria*.<sup>3</sup> Italian peasants of the *Mezzogiorno*<sup>4</sup> were the first to pay the consequence of this agrarian crisis to escape *la miseria*<sup>5</sup> their only chance was emigration abroad, particularly to the United States. As Donna Gabaccia explains, at the end of the century, 1890-1900, families instead of trying to conquer their piece of land in the U.S., tried to maintain subsistence at home by sending their men abroad.<sup>6</sup>

This was true in particular for the Italians, victims of economies completely based on the subsistent production. In the Southern regions the land, *la terra*,<sup>7</sup> was not only the main source of profit but also the symbol and the guardian of the family traditions. In most of the cases, hereditary transmission was the cause of the excessive fragmentation of the land among the male heirs. This meant less land, many difficulties and a marked inclination of men to temporarily abandon their country in search of fortune. Obviously, in a male-oriented society such as the nineteenth and twentieth century Italy, men left for unknown and dangerous countries and women, considered the weakest link in a chain, remained at home. The plot was easy: the men left and after a good amount of savings

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<sup>3</sup> Agrarian crisis

<sup>4</sup> Regions of the southern Italy

<sup>5</sup> Poverty

<sup>6</sup> Donna Gabaccia, *From the Other Side: Women, Gender, and Immigrant Life in the U.S., 1820-1990*. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 32.

<sup>7</sup> The land

and an undetermined number of years, sometime spaced out by returns to their villages, came back home.

As the Census of the Mahoning County of 1880 and of 1900 shows, the majority of the Italians were “male boarders”, most of them married, who sojourned in other families’ houses. Where was Thomas Velch’s wife, while he was working in Youngstown as laborer and was sojourning at Samuel Ross’s house, an Italian worker at an anonymous furnace?<sup>8</sup> What were Tony Antonucci and Mariano Brauket’s spouses, while their husbands were working as railroad workers in Berlin, boarders of John Broion, and Italian day laborer?<sup>9</sup> They were waiting for their second Ulixes, but waiting does not mean doing nothing. Basically, women did not leave and did not follow their husbands because, without men in the family, they assumed the traditional male roles in the management of the land as well as the properties.

Particularly, in the areas of the North Italy’s plain or in the countries of the South of Italy the departures aimed at promotion and an improvement of the social status of the families inside the community of belonging, *nel paese*.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the Italian peasant saw in the opportunity of the emigration a sort of obligation to their own relatives at home. It is possible to affirm, along with Elizabeth Ewen, that emigration, although representatives an act of estrangement, had as its urgent incentive the family nucleus.<sup>11</sup> In brief words, emigration took on the characteristic of a project; it was basically a strategic plan, undertaken by all the members of the family. The temporary emigration implied, as

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<sup>8</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1990)

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States 1900*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> In the village

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars, Life and Culture on the Lower East Side, 1890-1925* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1985), 50.

well as the permanent, an active participation of the wives. Every component of the family must assume a specific task so that some leave and some stay at home.

Women not only continued farming their land but they also started representing their families under the juridical aspects. For the first time, because of the absence of the men, they managed the money sent by their husbands, they went to the banks, and they went into the presence of the public notary. Women also had the duty to safeguard the moral and social integrity of the family members, particularly of their children. The rare presence of the women in the Mahoning Valley should not surprise the readers. Behind the efforts and the privations of Tony or Mariano, there were two women at home who allowed them to emigrate.

Given these preambles, it is impossible to still think that women were passive recipients of their husbands' decisions. The emigration abroad, particularly to the United States, was planned, prepared and was the product of a plural decision. Without women ready to take all the responsibilities, the male emigration would not have been successful. Although the choice to emigrate, as happened in the Mahoning County, had Italian men as protagonists, the entire family, wives and children, influenced the move abroad and strongly affected its good result. Italian emigration, particularly in the "agrotown" environment, meant cooperation and collaboration and counted on a tenacious and symbiotic relation between the two poles of the migratory strategy: men abroad and women at home.

Was the predominant male emigration only the product of social and cultural pressure? Although it is impossible to deny a prejudice towards the abilities and capacities of nineteenth century Italian women, it is also superficial to attribute to this

cultural element the only cause of the absence of women in the Mahoning County. At the basis of the Italian emigration there were kinships and family ties. This is maybe the most peculiar characteristic of the Italian immigration to the big cities as well as to the specific and local rural and industrial areas of the New World. This strong link between family at home and family abroad can partially explain the accentuated imbalance of the sex ratio.

In fact, it is important to put in evidence that the presences of the first members of the family in the country of immigration were the catalysts, the propulsions to the emigration of their brothers, sons, cousins and *compatrioti*.<sup>12</sup> The first Italian immigrants became for their relatives a sort of job agents. For example, in the Mahoning Valley, Italians performed jobs related to the railroad construction or, later around 1900, they started working as laborers for the steel mills, the blast furnace, the iron works or the Sheet & Tube Company. These were exclusively men occupations. Naturally, the Italian immigrant, once he found a job in the steel mill or as railroad laborer, preferred to call his male relatives and his *paesani*,<sup>13</sup> able to cover these types of tough works.

All these Italian immigrants were the pivots of a family net capable of creating the “emigration for dragging;” namely, every member called the others and eventually reproduced parts of their family or village environment abroad. For example, in the Mahoning Valley, a good part of the boarders or lodgers was related. The information given by the census, such as last names, age, and dates of arrival to the United States, turn out to be a precious source for reconstructing the migratory epic in the area under study. Good part of the Italians present in the Mahoning County, between 1880 and 1910, seemed to respect the model “man called man”.

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<sup>12</sup> Godfathers

<sup>13</sup> Country fellows

For instance, in 1880 John,(29), and Michael Ratz,(27), boarded with Roman Peter, an Italian coal digger, in Youngstown Township.<sup>14</sup> In 1900, Mariano,(48), Jack,(22), and Joe Brauket, (18), were lodgers of John Broion in Berlin (Oh).<sup>15</sup> In the same city, John Yany, a railroad laborer, hosted in his house three members of his family, Peter, 19, and Talvan Spagnoli, 20, Joe, (12) and Tony Berlin, (30).<sup>16</sup> The situation seems not changed in 1910. Soney Sozio, a bricklayer at the mill, hosted in his house in Youngstown Township two young stone-masons whose last name was Joney.<sup>17</sup>

John and Michael Ratz, given their age, were most likely brothers or cousins. Furthermore, both of them were workers at the furnace. In the case of the Brauket family, it is probable that Mariano was the father of the three young boys. Their case really proves the theory of the “emigration for dragging.” Mariano emigrated to the United States., we do not know if he went to Berlin Township, in 1890; the younger Brauket, Joe, emigrated in 1897 and, eventually Jack reached the United States in 1899. Mariano, Jack and Joe were railroad laborers. It was not fortuitousness that all the other lodgers of Broion were railroad laborers as well as the Yanys, the Spagnolis and the Berlins. In the specific case of the Yanys, Thomas, 40, was the first to emigrate in 1891. Once he established connections and acquaintances with the area and the job world of the railroad, he called at first, John, (38), who arrived in 1897, and then Joe, (24), and Luigi, (26), arrived in 1899.

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<sup>14</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1990).

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States 1900*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1990).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1990).

It is impossible to exclude worries and concerns from the male side of the family about an eventual women's migration, but, on the other hand, it is honest to look at the situation from a different point of view. None of the women of the Yany family, although John was married, was present in the nucleus established in the Berlin Township. Was the women's presence profitable for the Yanys or for the Braukets? Did they really need women? What could their wives and sisters do? Their women were, obviously, for all the reasons explained above, more useful at home. Their women could not fill the same job positions of their husbands, fathers and brothers. If in 1900, the Berlin Township requested manpower for its railroad, in 1910, Youngstown Township, incorporated in Youngstown City, offered many positions for workers in the iron industry.

For example, Charlie Champ, a laborer in the iron mill, hosted six boarders, Frank and Alex Angratia and Joe, John, Jim and Rossan Masse. Once again, given the age of these boarders, all in their 30s, it is conjecturable that they were brothers or cousins. All of them were laborers at the iron mill. Charlie probably called them; probably they were his cousins, his *paesani* or *compari*. In sum, the Mahoning County did not offer many job opportunities for women; this is not a negligible detail to explain the lack of women in this area. What if Youngstown, instead of having been an important metallurgic center, had been famous for wool industries or for spinning and silk mills?

As Franco Ramella, Italian historian specialized in Italian emigration, argues, one of the variables which could play an important role in the choices of the Italian families to maintain at home or to send temporarily abroad the female component of the family, was the existence or the inexistence of job opportunities which women could easily access. In the different countries, destinations of the Italian immigrants, maybe women

could have found job suitable to them, but there were not channels putting Italian women in contact with the possible opportunities.<sup>18</sup> In Youngstown, because of the dominant presence of so-called male jobs, a female connection was completely absent. In fact, as the census clearly shows, there were not cases of Italian women who lived with other *paesane*, workers or relatives.

Yet Italy had already experienced, between nineteenth and twentieth century, a female emigration, particularly relevant at the national level. In fact, in 1905, 13,000 young Italian women, the *mondine*,<sup>19</sup> left temporarily their villages in the North of Italy to work in the rice field of the areas of Vercelli or Novara, in the region of *Piemonte*. In twenty years between 1882 and 1901, the female presence in the migratory fluxes to the cities was bigger than the male presence. These young single women left their rural villages not only to escape from the back-breaking work of the country but also to save money for their hope chest, the *corredo*. Usually, they were employed as servants, seamstresses, workers in the industries of the North, or, especially for the southern women, as season farm laborers.

Female emigration was not only limited to Italian regions but also to some European countries. At the beginning of the twentieth century, many Northern Italian women left for France, where they worked as waitresses, washerwomen and ironers. They went to Provence to work as harvesters of olives and to Egypt to work as wet nurses.<sup>20</sup> The spinning mills of Marseille were full of Italian girls. They usually came from the Northern region of Piemonte and from the Southern regions of Campania and

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<sup>18</sup> Franco Ramella, *Reti Sociali, Famiglie e Strategie Migratorie*, in *Storia dell'Emigrazione Italiana*, 1, 147.

<sup>19</sup> *Mondine* comes from the verb *mondare* that means to clean

<sup>20</sup> Bruna Bianchi, *Lavoro ed Emigrazione Femminile (1880-1915)*, in *Storia dell'Emigrazione Italiana*, 1, 260-264.

Calabria. As Ramella points out concerning the Italian girls' presence in Marseille, at the beginning, the local entrepreneurs, through the help of recruiters, set up this female migration, but, afterwards, the migratory fluxes became autonomous and, gradually, the girls themselves played the roles of recruiters.<sup>21</sup> They established that net of solidarity which reminds one a lot the net established by men in the Mahoning County.

### **Women Who Left: The Important Presences**

As already affirmed, the temporary migration was, in many cases, dependent on the possession of land. What happened when there was no land to take care of? Where the hereditary customs privileged the first-born in the acquisition of the land, the other sons, excluded from the line of succession, aimed to open new perspectives for their lives in another country in the New World. Although, for Italy, a good percentage of the immigrants, around the 80 per cent, returned at home, a minority of them decided to leave the country permanently. In this case, the men started calling all their families to reach them in the new country. At this point, women left and by their absence became a fundamental element of the emigration.

Also in the case of active protagonists of the emigration, women appeared, once again, the passive executor of their husbands' will. It is impossible to exclude, in some cases, an obligations exercised towards women, but, it is also wrong to generalize. The permanent migration, more than the temporary migration, saw women as active protagonists. Obviously, for some of the Italian wives it was absolutely difficult to leave their small villages, to leave their families; in brief words, to leave the entire world they had known until their departure abroad. This reticence was not only natural but also predictable.

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<sup>21</sup> Franco Ramella, *Reti Sociali, Famiglie e Strategie Migratorie*, 1,147.



Different motivations were behind the decision of the husband to call their spouse to the United States. It could be, particularly for the brand new couple, the necessity and the will to construct together and more quickly a better life; it could also be the intolerable loneliness of husbands. Sometimes, the reason for the *chiamata*<sup>22</sup> was the pressure of the wives themselves, eager to reach their husbands or some questions of honor, such as the duty of the husband to free his wife from a condition of poverty or servitude in Italy. Women were not always ready and happy to leave. In fact, they were afraid of the interruption of the family relations and of the absence of a solid net of female kinship, able to welcome and to drive them in the unknown environment. All these feelings and worries which surround the act of the *chiamata* and the moment of the departure are present in the letter, dated 15 August 1917, which Lucia Lariccia Bisceglia wrote to her husband, Giuseppe, already immigrated to Youngstown in 1901.<sup>23</sup>

In the letter Lucia explained to Giuseppe, called Gioso, the serious and important reasons which retarded her and Fiorentina Ritucci's, Giuseppe's niece, departure from Montelongo, a small village in the Southern region of Molise, province of Campobasso. Lucia was writing in the middle of the World War I and, because of the presence of the German U-boats, which often torpedoed transatlantic passenger liners, she could leave from Naples on board of the Giuseppe Verdi only after delays. Eventually, she arrived in the United States on October 26, 1917. Giuseppe obviously knew about the problems of the war and about the dangers of the trip in that situation, but some words in Lucia's letter showed a deep concern from Giuseppe towards his bride to be Lucia.

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<sup>22</sup> The call to the United States

<sup>23</sup> Lucia's Letter to Gioso about her Departure to U.S., August 15, 1917, *Lucia Lariccia Bisceglia in Correspondence, 1917-1937*, ed. Ben Lariccia, translated by Laura Cuppone.

In fact, after having clearly explained that Fiorentina and she had problems with the release of the passports and that the departure, planned for the 5<sup>th</sup> of August was delayed for security reasons, she wrote the following words: "...maybe you [Giuseppe] say that I want to delay [the departure], it is not true, it is not my fault, because you already know how the things are going on the sea, so dangerous, that is not important that I come late, but it is important that the travel is safe..."

Why is Lucia trying to justify herself? It is impossible to blame Giuseppe, because he could not wait to see Lucia but, at the same time, his approach reveals a fear that originated from the attitudes of some women towards the emigration. Giuseppe was witness of refusals of other Italian immigrants' wives to join their husbands.

The decision to call women was part of a complex project and depended on many significant factors and on the characteristics of the family nucleus: the presence of children and their ages. The emigration of the female component of the family occurred after the men had an overview of the area and in particular the possibilities and resources of the area. As in the case of Lucia, she followed her future husband in 1917, but Giuseppe and his brother Gennaro, were already in Youngstown since 1901. The story of Lucia and Giuseppe is the most common example of emigration in the Mahoning County. In most of the cases, the men played the role of explorers and, once sure of their position, called the other part of the family: wives and possible offspring. The arrival of women in the area allows us to gather precious information on the area's characteristic and the typology of Italian emigration.

The Mahoning County witnessed a "spaced out emigration." The first who has arrived, the husband or the fiancé, laid the foundations of the nucleus. Emigration, in fact,

as all the good projects, required a careful analysis of the territory; emigration was, first of all, an investment. The Mahoning area, undoubtedly, provided around 1890-1910 a lot of job opportunities. The majority of the Italian immigrants to this area presented the model of emigration already typified by Lucia and Giuseppe. Namely, the young man arrived before and, once he gained a respectable position, pushed by economic as well as sentimental reasons, called his loved one in the village. As soon as the future bride arrived to the U.S., they celebrated the marriage.

It is possible to assume that some of them were protagonists, as Lucia and Giuseppe were, of arranged marriages. This means that men, after having colonized their “piece of America”, wrote to relatives at home to “look for” a nice and honorable young *paesana*. It is also impossible to exclude that the couple met in the home country before the separation and that the man promised to find a position and to call his girlfriend. The time that elapsed between the man’s departure and the arrival of the woman for the marriage was variable. In the case of Youngstown, the range of time goes from four to seven years.

The same amount of time is noticeable in the couples already married with one or more children in Italy. It is necessary to put in evidence that, at the moment of the move, the majority of the Italian immigrant couples of the Mahoning Valley were young couples without children or couple with at least two children. For example, Filomena, (21), arrived in the United States in 1899 for her marriage with Antonio Keraggoliti, (31), arrived in the United States in 1896 to work as laborer. Antonio and Filomena, as indicated in the census, in June 1900, lived in the village of Lowellville, their small one year old son, Joseph, was born in Ohio. In the same village and in the same period, Santa,

(28), and her husband Joe Sapizziti, a laborer of 29, experienced an analogue situation. In fact, Santa arrived in the United States in 1898 to reach and marry Joe, who was already immigrated in 1894. They have in 1900 a one-year-old daughter, Angelina, born in Ohio.<sup>24</sup>

Like Filomena and Santa, Alessandrina Vitullo and Filomena Mancini reached their husbands, right after their marriage or to marry them in Ohio. Alessandrina in 1892 reached Antonio, who immigrated in 1883; at the moment of the census, June 1900, they have a small daughter and a small son, born in Ohio, and a house in Youngstown Township. Filomena Mancini, neighbor of Alessandrina, reached his husband, who immigrated in 1883, six years later, in 1889.<sup>25</sup> All these women, maybe, arrived in the United States ready to start their families and, at the same time, curious to see their husbands, probably for the first time. Although for married women the emigration took on different feelings and characteristics, it is possible to assume that the goals were more or less the same.

For instance, Anna Domasso, (37), followed her husband Mike, a laborer, in 1899, six years after Mike's arrival in the U.S. Anna, unlike the other women above mentioned, arrived with two daughters, the twelve-year-old Rosa and the nine-year-old Mary. In 1900, they were renting a house in the village of Lowellville. In the same village, Filomena Seco, (25), was living with her husband Frank, a laborer, and two small sons of five and one, born in Italy. She immigrated the same year of Filomena, in 1899. Frank was already in the United States in 1895. The village of Lowellville was also the destination of Katharina Morino, (44), who in 1890, together with her children, Mary and

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<sup>24</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States 1900*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1990).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Mike, at the moment of the census twenty four and sixteen- year- old, followed her husband John, a laborer arrived in 1886.<sup>26</sup>

Sometimes the interval of time between the men's departure and the re-union of the family was longer than the average of five or six years. For example, Rosa Fazio, (34), followed Paul to Lowellville after fifteen years of separation.<sup>27</sup> Mary Stillette finally followed her husband, a farm laborer, after nine years. In June 1900, they lived in Youngstown city.<sup>28</sup> This data clearly proves that the transfer of the entire family group, because of the involvement of money and efforts, was not homogeneous and did not have a pattern, useful and appropriate for every family. The father/husband laid the footings of a victorious experience. The fact that some of them waited more than others to call their women is not only ascribable to personal and private preferences but also to wise and mature reflections.

The permanent migration was for a while a temporary migration of the men who, in a second moment, called the stump of the family at home and started the permanent transfer of the nucleus. Before the *chiamata*, the men more or less regularly returned home. Carmine di Gennaro is a sharp example of the "circular emigration", namely an emigration that had a starting point in the necessity to improve the economic and social conditions in the *paese*<sup>29</sup> that was supported and helped by the *paesani* and that had as its own characteristic sporadic or frequent returns to the *paese*. In fact Carmine, emigrated in 1886, came back home in 1893 to marry Matilda and, during another trip back to the town, he conceived his first daughter. In 1898, Matilda and the small daughter finally

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<sup>26</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States 1900*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1990).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Village, country.

reached him. In the di Gennaro's house there was also Matilda's father who immigrated in 1889.<sup>30</sup> Matilda, like Lucia Lariccia, whose father and brother immigrated permanently to Brazil at the end of the nineteenth century, and like many other travel-mates, got used to the long and interminable separations from their fathers and from their husbands.

The logic of the spaced-out migration, unfortunately, planned also the separation between mother and children. Obeying the dynamic according to which the transfers should be successful and should avert a dangerous beginning, the migration occurred following programmed patterns. The first to emigrate were the "productive" components of the family, such as fathers and sons capable of working and of bringing profits. An organized control of the migratory flux allowed avoiding an unbalanced ratio between "breadwinners" and "consumers". The mothers not only were often forced to see their oldest sons leave their homes but they also left their smallest children to other relatives in the village to follow the piece of the family already emigrated. It is possible to affirm that emigration for Italians was not only an escape from the *miseria* but also a menace for the family affections. Women were the first to pay the consequences.

The Diana family of Youngstown Township presented a typical pattern of space-out arrivals. Filomena Diana, arrived in 1894, nine years after her husband, Costanziano, and took with her a small son and a small daughter. Her first son, Enrico, who was twenty-year-old in 1900, arrived in 1897.<sup>31</sup> The personal and private reflections and worries were not the only factors that influenced the reunion of Italian immigrant families

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<sup>30</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States 1900*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1990).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

abroad but there were also more important and historical events capable of changing drastically the entire migratory project. In fact, if the World War I delayed Lucia's boat trip towards America, the World War II was the element which delayed Jim Tropepe<sup>32</sup> and Phillip Coraccio's arrival in Youngstown.<sup>33</sup>

Phillip and Jim, emigrated respectively in 1947 and 1948, have many elements in common. They both were Italian immigrant steel workers in the Republic Steel Corporation; they both are the result of a space-out emigration which started with their fathers in 1910s and saw the complete reunion of the family nucleus after more than thirty years. Jim's father, after having emigrated in Brooklyn in 1911, came back home to take part to the World War I and then went back to America, this time straight to Youngstown to work in the Republic Steel Corporation. In 1925, Jim's father was again in Italy to get married; in 1926 Jim was born. Jim did not see his father until one of his returns, in 1929; in 1930 Jim's brother was born. Only after the pains and the destructions of the WWII, Jim, o obtained the necessary documents, and in possession of the U.S. citizenship, reached his father in January 1948. Some months later, his mother and brother joined them.

Philipp's father came to Youngstown in 1911/12 and, like Jim's father, went back and forth approximately every two years. The second member of the Coraccio family to leave home was his oldest brother, who joined the American army and, during the WWII, visited his family in Italy, giving them food and clothes. Philipp, at the age of seventeen,

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<sup>32</sup> Philipp Coraccio, interviewed by Frank Mancini, *Italian Immigration: Personal Experiences*, October 30, 1988. Oral History Digital Collection, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, Ohio.

<sup>33</sup> Jim Tropepe, interviewed by Frank Mancini, *Italian Immigrants: Personal Experiences*, October 12, 1988. Oral History Digital Collection, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, Ohio.

in 1947 came to Youngstown; his father got him a job in the Republic Steel Corporation and his mother and sister arrived some years later, in the early 1950s. In both cases, the first to emigrate did not have a clear idea of the situation, and especially Jim's father, who at first went to New York, did not know precisely where it was convenient to settle a new home. On the other hand, the uncertainty of the first periods abroad ended when the immigrants found a job.

An economic stability and the hope for the future characterized the Italian emigration to the "steel town" Youngstown. In fact, strongly influenced by the necessity of manpower, was a prolific region for permanent emigration. The presences of women arrived a few years after their husbands or together with them, are remarkable signal of Italian immigrants' will to put roots in this "promised land."



## **Italian Immigrant Women and the Job World**

### **An Overview:**

The successes and victories of Italian immigrants in this area are strongly related to the vast opportunities offered for workers, particularly unskilled, by heavy industry. The work was, undoubtedly, the reason of the arrivals of Italians and of the call by the immigrant men of their families and wives. The binomial between industries and Italian immigrants in the Mahoning Valley is indissoluble and it is easy to imagine crowds of Italians wearing their overalls getting out from the Youngstown Sheet & Tube plants in Campbell or in Brier Hill or from the plants, located in Warren and Niles, of the Republic Steel Corporation at the call of the siren, but what about Italian women? Did they support their family? What did they do? And, if they worked, when did they start working and why? How did their husbands and families react to their being workers? The answers to these questions are the subject matter of this chapter.

The structure and the quantity of the work occupation of Italian women outside the national borders were the products of two important and complementary factors: the morphology of the migratory fluxes and the dynamics of the job market of the country of emigration. These two factors strongly affected the opportunities offered to women by the Mahoning Valley. The scarce presence of Italian women in this area was connected indeed with the high percentage of male immigrants, called by the increasing request of male unskilled workers, who called male friends and male relatives from the *paese*. The good opportunities and the hope of improving their economic situation provided by the presence of works transformed the transatlantic single commuting workers into

permanent residents. Around 1900, the Mahoning Valley experienced an increase in the number of Italian women; these were women who followed their husbands or fiancés.

In the census they did not appear as heads of the family nuclei and in the majority of the cases in the column of job positions the enumerators indicated for women *none*. At a superficial glance, it is not only easy to conclude that Italian women did not work but also to impute the lack of Italian women workers to questions of traditions, honor and culture. These were not or, at least, were not the only causes of the absence of Italian women in the job world. At first it is important to define what does work mean. If work is indissoluble from the concept of income and stipend, Italian women did not work. On the other hand, if with the word work we indicate the contribution, not always monetary, given to the families, then Italian women not only worked but they also played an irreplaceable role in the home economy.

In Italy, or as Gabaccia would say in “the other side,” women were accustomed to hard work, not always as wage-earners. Before their arrival in the United States, they have always found a way to contribute to their family economy. For example, in southern Italy, although childbearing impeded the ability of mothers to work outside the home, women worked as day laborers in neighboring fields or raising and peddling eggs and chicken.<sup>1</sup> As Louise C. Odenrantz pointed out in her survey conducted in Manhattan, between 1911 and 1913, and based on more than one thousand interviews with Italian women, half of the interviewees who left Italy at the age of fourteen had already contributed to their own support in the homeland. Most of them had worked planting or plowing in their father’s farms or crocheting, sewing and making shoes in their houses.

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<sup>1</sup> Judith E. Smith, *Family Connections: A History of Italian & Jewish Immigrant Lives in Providence Rhode Island 1900-1940* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 44.

The geographical provenience of these girls strongly affected their work background. In fact, if a girl from Abruzzi or Sicilia wanted to earn money she had either to work as a farm laborer or become an apprentice with the village dressmaker. On the other hand, in the more industrialized North, in cities like Turin or Milan, women had a wider choice. In fact, among Odencrantz's interviewees, many had been already employed in the silk mills and cotton mills of the northern regions of the Italian peninsula.<sup>2</sup> This means that at the moment of arrival, Italian women were trained and accustomed to support their families. Without Italian women's ability of balancing the accounts, Italian families in New York's tenements or in the houses of Brier Hill would have not endured more than a month. Their ability was not limited to the obedient execution of a good Italian housewife's duties, such as cooking, cleaning, taking care of the youngest and oldest members of the family, repairing and sewing clothes for relatives; they did more than this.

The necessity to collaborate in the family economy, earning money, was a peculiarity of the permanent migration. In fact, the temporary migration had as economic advantage the gap between the American salary and the cost of life in Italy. The Italian immigrants could save a good amount of money, cutting down on expenses, and allowed their wives in Italy to take care of the house and the land without forcing them to find employment. On the other side, when immigrant men decided to call the family the situation was completely twisted. The immigrants not only had to collect money to buy tickets and to find a more appropriate residence for their family members but they had to adapt to American quality of life. Namely, their salary was no more sufficient for the

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<sup>2</sup> Louise C. Odencrantz, *Italian Women in Industry: A Study of the Conditions in New York City* (New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 1919), 27-30.

maintenance of the household, and finding a job became for all the family members, including wives, a pressing need more than a deliberated choice.

As Thomas Kessner and Louise Odencrantz pointed out in the specific case of New York, the economic well-being of the immigrant family was not only built on the salaries of the fathers, the breadwinners.<sup>3</sup> According to Odencrantz's survey, Italian women of New York, lived in households whose membership per family was 6.2 persons, and the number in any one household varied from two in twenty- three families, to ten or more in fifty. Families coming from Sicily and southern Italy were particularly large; they reached an average of 6.4 persons compared with 5.7 persons in the families from northern Italy.<sup>4</sup> Men alone were not able to maintain families of such size, and because of this earnings of more than one family member were required.

Circa 1890, in New York City it was possible to discern a model of occupation for Italian immigrant women. Because the model worked, it was perpetuated in the following decades. Beside the crowds of rag gatherers gradually an army of home workers, such as makers of feathers and flowers, as well as tobacco and clothing industry workers, emerged. The work in the house blossomed in this period in American society and the impressive migratory flux of the first decade of the twentieth century increased the demand for consumer goods. The work at home conquered the Big Apple and the characteristic residences of the immigrants, the tenement-houses, narrowed and insane, became the most peculiar work places for women in search of money.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Kessner, *The Golden Door: Italian and Jewish Immigrant Mobility in New York City 1880-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 71.

<sup>4</sup> Odencrantz, *Italian Women in Industry*, 16.

<sup>5</sup> Andreina De Clementi, *Madri e Figlie Nell'Emigrazione Americana*, in *Il Lavoro Delle Donne*, ed. Angela Goppi (Roma-Bari: Editori Laterza, 1996), 427.

At the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, New York dominated the clothing business all over the United States. New York produced 69.3 percent of female clothing and 38.4 percent of male clothing. As Kessner states, Jews, who emigrated in the same period as Italians but with the stable intention to remain, dominated this prolific industrial sector, whose work force was characterized for the 43 per cent by women.<sup>6</sup> Italian mothers and daughters, specialized in the art of sewing and embroidering in their homeland, easily entered the manufacturing trade that New York provided. Entering the job world did not mean having a stable and remunerative job. In fact, the stability of the work, already denied to men, was chimerical for women.

The clothing industry was based on seasonal rhythms; the fact that these industries closed for several months per year opened an enormous gap between the nominal and real salaries. In fact, also if women earned well-paid weekly wages, these wages were not enough in the annual calculation. Job insecurity, which Italians had already experienced in the unsteady economic as well political situation of the Italian kingdom, gripped Italian immigrant families as well as underprivileged American workers. It is possible to affirm, along with Odencrantz, that the importance was not the number of the wage-earners in a family but who they were, what they did and, overall, with which regularity they worked. The instability of the job market could be included in the causes that encouraged the mobilization of women and adolescents in the job world.

Italian immigrant women answered to the instability of their husbands' jobs by finding a job. The search for an occupation was strictly related to the characteristics and the morphology of the cities or areas that welcomed them. For example, in Chicago, an important center for seasonal and extra-urban laborer, the construction of railroads and

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<sup>6</sup> Kessner, *The Golden Door*, 32.

the opening of mines attracted thousands of immigrants. The problem was that, because of the characteristics of these jobs, the heads of the families were employed only for six months per year. For the remaining half of the year the responsibility of the subsistence was women's duty. Therefore, they dedicated their time to home finishing work or to the overexploited source of the sublease to *paesani* and other Italians.<sup>7</sup>

The necessity to supplement the breadwinner's wages was an actual situation that involved not only Chicago and New York but also other important American centers. Once ascertained, the participation of women in the family budget of the immigrant nucleus, it is necessary to look at the question of Italian immigrant women's employment under a different perspective, moving the attention to other horizons. What really matters is not what did Italian women, especially those of the immigrant generation, offer to the foreign environments, but what did American cities offered to them?

The opportunities of employment for women scattered in the mining areas and in the urban centers characterized by an industrial monoculture. The steel mills hired predominantly men; in 1920, in Pittsburgh, only 16.5 percent of immigrant women, Italians and Jews, worked outside the home, while in other American cities they reached 22.4 per cent.<sup>8</sup> Pittsburgh's situation was not unique. As Virginia Yans-McLaughlin pointed out, Buffalo, New York, a rapidly growing industrial center, with increased markets for consumer goods and domestic services, provided some employment for women and children but the area's concentration on heavy industry did not accommodate a fruitful circumstance for women seeking for jobs. Even if the demands for female

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<sup>7</sup> Andreina De Clementi, *Madri e Figlie*, 429.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 430.

employment were increasing in the first decade of the twentieth century, there was a much greater demand for unskilled immigrant men.<sup>9</sup>

Pittsburgh and Buffalo were similar to the situation in Milwaukee. There, heavy industries generated few job opportunities for women. Diane Vecchio affirms that in contrast to New England and New York, Milwaukee had no textile mills and only a tiny number of small garment factories. For this reason, only a small percentage of Italian women found paid employment outside the home.<sup>10</sup> The spectrum of choices in the job market of American cities basically shaped the roles and the occupations of immigrant women, not only Italian, for several decades. For example, Buffalo, although the proportion of employed women had expanded by 1930, maintained one of the lowest percentages of the nation's great cities. As Yans-McLaughlin stated, only the cities of Erie, in Pennsylvania, Youngstown, Scranton, and Pittsburgh, trailed behind.<sup>11</sup>

**In the Specific: Youngstown and Mahoning County.**

What did the “steeltown” Youngstown offer to Italian immigrant women?<sup>12</sup> Not too many opportunities. This did not mean that in the Mahoning Valley Italian women did not collaborate in the family budget. On the contrary, as the census shows, they found jobs, in most of the cases within the domestic walls, demonstrating that their being foreign, female, illiterate and unskilled did not take them away from rolling up their sleeves. Italian mothers of the first wave of immigrants, in Youngstown as well as in other areas

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<sup>9</sup> Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, *Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880-1930* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1977), 50.

<sup>10</sup> Diane Vecchio, *Gender, Domestic Values, and Italian Working Women in Milwaukee: Immigrant Midwives and Businesswomen*, in *Women, Gender and Transnational Lives: Italian Workers of the Worlds*, ed. Donna Gabaccia and Franca Iacovetta (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 163.

<sup>11</sup> Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, *Family and Community*, 51.

<sup>12</sup> For the history of Youngstown and its steelmills, see Sherry Lee Linkon and John Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.: Work and Memory in Youngstown* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2002).

of the United States, worked at home. Undoubtedly, the relegation of women to the home was a characteristic trait of Italian southern and peasant culture, the attributes of a culture that actually was not industrialized and was unaccustomed to the concept of work outside the home, far from the land and the activities of subsistence. Briefly, this was a culture which did not know female as well as male occupations outside the family and village sphere.

The fact that Italian immigrant mothers of this area did not work outside the home presents other and more interesting explanations. The first wave of immigrant women, indeed, was composed in the vast majority by brand-new brides or mothers with one or two small children. This meant that in the first five or six years after their arrival to the United States, they were busy with fundamental activities: childbearing and childcare. The maternal role was for the lower classes, to which the first generation of Italian immigrants belonged, more than pivotal for the good functioning of a family forced to live with a scarce and unstable wage. The family budget entirely depended on Italian mothers' smart strategies: the cut of the superfluous expenses, the increment of self-production, and the chase to supplemental wages.

An area as the Mahoning Valley left few alternatives for Italian women. As a result, in Youngstown, as well as in Buffalo or Milwaukee, women addressed their attention and abilities to the practice of the sublease. In fact, the most important source of income that they found was taking boarders and roomers who were, in the majority of the cases, *paesani* or relatives. The system of the sublease, or boarding house, had in the first thirty years of the twentieth century an unequalled diffusion. A survey of the American Senate of 1911 demonstrated that in the biggest cities 30 percent of immigrant families



practiced hospitality by payment; the northern Italians, who reached 56.6 percent of the boarding houses, seemed to be more inclined to take in boarders, in contrast to the southerners who were present in the survey constituted 27 percent of boarding families.<sup>13</sup>

The immigrant environment of American cities in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century and the first thirty years of the twentieth century was wide, segmented on ethnic basis and characterized by a strong concept of masculinity. In order to understand the practice of the boarding houses, it is necessary to look at the situation from the boarders' view. These Italian men arrived alone or with other male members of the family and of their village of provenience. All of them, with or without the intention to come back to Italy, were destined to live for a malleable period of time without their mothers and wives. The best perspective for them, once arrived in the United States, was to find an accommodation in some *paesanis'* house. This type of hospitality was really uncomfortable. The boarders, in fact, did not occupy a room but a bed and sometimes in common with other boarders.

The aim of keeping boarders was the same in Youngstown, Buffalo or New York, but, although the presence of many common characteristics, the Youngstown area presented some peculiarities that help edify the immigrant dynamics of the area. The Mahoning Valley's first generation immigrant women cleaned, cooked and washed for an average of four boarders, who were bachelors as well as married men with families in Italy. Obviously, this was a hard job that wasted and exploited women's physical strengths. Their work, their strength, and their endurance were the qualities that these women, burdened by family responsibilities, could offer.

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<sup>13</sup> Andreina De Clementi, *Madri e Figlie*, 432.

In Buffalo, in 1905, room fees alone brought to Italian immigrant nuclei the small but precious sum of \$ 3.50 a week. Unfortunately, also this supplemental income strongly depended on a heavy seasonal demand for laborers which would bring unattached immigrants to the city.<sup>14</sup> In the tenement houses of Elizabeth Street, in 1905 as well as in 1915, a typical Italian family kept fewer than two boarders, who contributed about 10 percent of the family income.<sup>15</sup> In the area of our interest, we do not have data related to the room fees but some evidence demonstrates that the boarding constituted an indispensable part of the family income. In fact, the census is populated by boarders, roomers and lodgers in 1880 as well as in 1910. At this point of the research, it is important to draw a sort of identikit of the boarding families.

The importance of the boarders as “contributors” to the expenses was significant also in the very first nuclei of Italian immigrant laborers to this area, namely in the immigrant groups without a woman and entirely composed by men. In 1880, the first Italians to appear in Youngstown Township were Michael Lawrence (29) married and Roman Morg (40) single, they both were laborers and boarders at Margaret Murphy’s boarding house. Michael and Roman did not find in Youngstown other *paesani* and, being the first Italians to arrive, did not have any relatives and friends; as a result, they were forced to board in an American family. In the same township, the twenty-five year old Italian worker in a furnace, John Giuale, found an accommodation in the house of the American blacksmith, Thomas Moon.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Virginia Yans-MacLaughlin, *Family and Community*, 165.

<sup>15</sup> Donna Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street: Housing and Social Change Among Italian Immigrants, 1880-1930* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 81.

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1990).

Soon after these first arrivals, the Mahoning Valley was gradually populated by Italians and the system of the *bordo* immediately involved Italian boarders and Italian families. The evidence demonstrates that Italian boarders, when there was the opportunity, chose to stay in other Italian families. For example, John and Michael Ratz, workers at a furnace, chose to stay in the house of the Italian coal digger, Peter Roman, who married an American woman from Pennsylvania, Lucy. Another worker in a furnace, Samuel Ross and his Italian wife Kate, hosted three Italians: Pat Ross (20), Samuel's brother, John Ross (24), maybe related to Samuel, and Thomas Velch (30).<sup>17</sup> The presence of Italian workers in a non-Italian nucleus is further evidence of the lack of Italian women in the area in 1880; a lack also attested by the interethnic marriage of Peter and Lucy.

The scarcity of Italian women, or better the large presence of temporary Italian immigrant men, would explain also the existence in Berlin Township, in June 1900, of two huge nuclei of Italian immigrants without any woman. In fact, both John Broion (56), day laborer, and John Yany (38), rail road laborer, were the heads of rented houses which hosted respectively nine and eight Italian male lodgers. Broion and Yany's lodgers were all railroad laborers. Their occupation as railroad laborers opens some important interpretation of this data. Broion and Yany not only were the boarding men but also the procurers of these immigrants' employment. The houses provided for all of them a sort of "safe harbor" in a foreign country. This interpretation is also reinforced by the fact that the enumerator labeled John Yany's lodgers as his "partners".

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<sup>17</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Population*, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1990).

After the change in course from the male predominated temporary migration to the family-oriented permanent migration that the area experienced, the boarders were always present in family with at least a female component. In 1900, in Lowellville village, Mary Samartina (21) and Christena Lombardo(42), wives of two saloon keepers, were struggling with a household composed of children in the middle of childhood and with boarders. Mary, arrived to the United States in 1888, seven years after her husband, took care of four children, all born in Ohio, of ranging in age from ten to two and of two Italian laborers, Venanzio di Liga (28) and Sam Valdero (18).

Also Christena arrived in 1888, only a year after her husband, took care of four children, two of these born in Pennsylvania, and hosted three Italian boarders: Antonio Anthony (31), Viatina Anthony (21) and John Sugar (35).<sup>18</sup> The Lombardo's nucleus is unique because among the boarders there was maybe a couple, Antonio and Viatina. Viatina arrived in 1897, eleven years after Antonio. Maybe Antonio, given the young age of Viatina, after having saved money and after having found a proper accommodation, searched for a bride in his village and called her. Both Mary and Christena have been living in the area for twelve years; this means that they were well accustomed to the new environment. It is also important to point out that their husbands were saloon keepers and that their boarders are indicated with the generic noun of "laborers". It is possible to conjecture that their renters were workers in the family saloons.

Pietro and Christena Lombardo, owners of their house, offered room and board to their workers; Mike and Mary Samartino, renters of their house, not only offered room and board to their workers but they also used the room fees to pay the lease or to save

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<sup>18</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States 1900*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1990).

money with the intention to eventually buy their own house. The keeping of boarders as a supplemental source to save money to buy a house was evident if we look carefully at the structure of the boarding family. In fact, if Pietro and Mike were saloonkeepers and their jobs were not exposed to instability and shakiness, there were many other Italians who, indicated in the census as laborers, experienced unemployment for some months per year. This situation reached drastic consequences if, in the household, there were small children and if the family did not own their house.

Santa Sapizziti (28), Filomena Kerragolity (21), Rosa Fazio (34) and Raffaella Masso (34) did not have time to settle in the foreign environment; as soon as they arrived they started keeping boarders. These women, residents of Lowellville in 1900, had in common more than their nationality. All of them arrived in 1898 to reach their husbands. All of them, except for Rosa, had children, born in Ohio, of an age ranging from one to eleven. These women lived in rented houses, they were illiterate and did not speak English and their husbands were laborers, maybe unskilled.<sup>19</sup> The situation of the boarding household it is not different in Youngstown Township in 1900. Here Peppina Sorrento (25), Antonietta Perpetuo (39) and Adelina Marinelli (27) like their country fellows in Lowellville divided their days between family and boarders.

Peppina, wife of a laborer, arrived in 1893; she took care of a small one year-old son, Stephen, and of three laborers. Antonietta, with five daughters and a son of school age, boarded seven laborers. Once again, an explanation of keeping boarders was the necessity to amortize the rent because of the scarce wages of the family heads. Adelina,

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<sup>19</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States 1900*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1990).

arrived in 1898, took care of a small son of eight months and of three laborers. Also Adelina rented her house but her husband, Pasquale (27), was not as the other husbands a generic laborer; he was a stone cutter. It is possible to conjecture that Pasquale worked only for some months and that, given his intention to buy a house, the Marinellis saw in the *bordo* the most accessible and easy source of gain.<sup>20</sup>

A glimpse of the other Italian families that did not resort to the board as monetary resource shows a wider panorama of the Italians in this area. In June 1880, a forty-six year old furnace hand, Jose Rose, established his family nucleus in Youngstown Township. He did not have boarders; in his house there were two sons who, like their father, were furnace hand: James (26) and John (25). In this case, Jose's wife, the forty-four year old Maria, did not take care of strangers but of her sons. James and John were workers in the middle of their youth; they were solid arms capable of contributing to the family budget.<sup>21</sup> Similar to the Roses' conditions were those of the Coluccis who in June of 1900 settled in the city of Youngstown.

Frances Colucci (51) arrived in the United States in 1874, two years after her husband, who was a "constructor." Three sons lived with them: the oldest of twenty-four was a barber, another son of eighteen was a bartender and the youngest of sixteen was a foreman with the railroads. Frances also had a daughter of fifteen at home and another small son at school.<sup>22</sup> In the Colucci family the workers were four; the three sons could contribute to the family's expenses and collaborate with their parents. Furthermore,

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<sup>20</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, Twelfth Census of the United States 1900, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1990).

<sup>21</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1990).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Frances could count on her daughter's help in doing the housework and in taking care of the youngest son. Like Francis, also Katharina Morino (44), arrived in the United States in 1890 to follow his husband John, a fifty-year-old laborer, was not forced by economic problems to resort to boarding. In fact, also a member of the household, the sixteen-year-old Mike, Katharina's son, worked; he was a butcher. Katharina was helped in the family management by her twenty-four year old daughter, Mary, who did not work but stayed at home.<sup>23</sup>

The presence of more than one wage-earner in the immigrant nucleus was fundamental in correlation of the choice of keeping boarders. In Youngstown City, in 1900, the Guerriero family could count on three wages. Angelo (53), head of the family, arrived in 1877, was a railroad laborer. His son Stephen (25) was a boiler worker and Louis (14) was, in spite of his youth, a daily laborer. Rosie Guerriero (45) who followed her husband in 1880 did not have the urgency to keep boarders. Without the incomes of their sons, she might have resorted to boarding because her husband had a seasonal job. Thanks to the presence of Stephen and Louis, Angelo and Rosie's daughters, Mary (25), Lena (18) and Lucy (16) were at home without the necessity to work.<sup>24</sup>

Rosie's neighbor, Elizabeth Angoni (30) who arrived in 1882 to reach her husband John (30), an iron worker, experienced a similar situation. Indeed, John was not the only breadwinner of the household, there was also Silvestro (16), who worked as

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<sup>23</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States 1900*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1990).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1990).

clerk in a shoe store.<sup>25</sup> Ten years later, on Federal Street, Youngstown, Katie Barber (42), emigrated in 1872, before her husband Ross, counted on the wages of their sons: Joseph (22), a clerk in a wholesale store and Frank (18), a machinist in a steel mill.<sup>26</sup> Katie and Ross had four other children and if we consider that Ross had odd jobs, it is also possible to conjecture that Joseph and Frank's salaries were more than fundamental for the family's maintenance. On the same street, Ralph and Joseph Veraker helped their family working in an ice-cream store. Their father, Thomas (47), worked for the street boiler and their mother, Katie, took care of eight children.<sup>27</sup>

This evidence shows that Italian immigrant families, resident in the Mahoning County around 1900-10 and immigrated around fifteen and twenty years before, needed the wages of their children as soon as they reached the right age to work. What is really important to put in evidence is the high percentage of employment of sons. It is possible to affirm that sons and not daughters were a source of wellbeing. These young boys in the middle of adolescence or in their twenties gave the family that stability that their father was not able to offer; they added to their father's salary their wages, contributing to the survival of their family members, including their sisters who did not have any sort of relevance in the family's economic contribution. Basically, an Italian immigrant mother in her forties was blessed to have young sons who saved her from the fatigues of boarding.

A young mother of small children, newly immigrated to the area, avoided the board only if her husband had a highly skilled and stable occupation. Luisa Chirichiano

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<sup>27</sup> Bureau Of Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States 1900*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1990).



(29) arrived to the Mahoning County together with her husband, Antonio (32), and with three small sons. In Ohio they had another small son, Albert. Although they were new immigrants to the area, they did not host roomers. Antonio, in fact, had a stable job; he was a worker for the macaroni factory.<sup>28</sup> Assunta (26) and Vincenzo (34) Cerretta emigrated together in 1895. Before settling in the area, the Cerrettas wandered a little bit. Indeed, their first daughter was born in Ohio, the second son in New York, the third daughter in Pennsylvania and the last son in Ohio. The explanation of this roaming was the search for a stable job. Antonio, eventually, became a mill laborer and allowed his wife to avoid keeping boarders.<sup>29</sup>

The absence of boarders was directly proportional to the high level of occupation of the head of the family, namely the husband. The stability offered by Italian immigrant men and by their employment played in the lack of boarders a role more important than the date of arrival and the property of the house. In fact, there are some examples of families that, although owners of their house and immigrated for twenty years, resorted to the supplemental source of the board. This was the case of Jos Fisher (50) and his wife, Rosa (39), emigrated together in 1881. Three sons in ten children lived with them. Jos and his son Frank (18) were laborers. The Fishers owned their house. The property of the house and the presence of two bread winners did not free Rosa from the commitment of

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<sup>28</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States 1900*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1990).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

the board. Rosa, indeed, took care of five boarders.<sup>30</sup> Jos and Frank were generic laborers, whose job was dependent on the offers of the job market.

In both the cases of families depending on the stability and quality of the heads' jobs and of families depending on the presence of sons capable of finding a job, it is possible to conclude that the relegation of women at home as "keepers of boarders" was strictly related to the male component of the nucleus. On one side, if for married Italian immigrant women the practice of keeping boarders could be temporary and was perceived as a supplemental income, for immigrant women without men, the boarders became the only remedy for survival. This was the case of Luisa Lionello, a widow of thirty-five (35). Luisa arrived in the United States in 1888 and in 1900 she was resident of Youngstown, who was left to raise five daughters in the middle of their adolescence. The first daughter, Giovanna (14), was the only one born in Italy, the others, respectively eleven, nine, seven and three years old, were all born in Ohio.<sup>31</sup>

Luisa who arrived in the "land of dollars" at the age of twenty-three along with her small daughter, following her husband, did not find a flourishing life because she was left a widow. A situation that, undoubtedly, was difficult to face in Italy as well as in Youngstown, but being foreign and female, without relatives and friends, in an environment where men were the richness for a family made widowhood quite unbearable. Luisa recycled her abilities as boarding house keeper. Luisa did not have other chances or other prospects. Luisa could not count on the jobs of her offspring, because she had five daughters who, sooner or later, should have been married. For the first time in the census of Mahoning County, the enumerator used the definition of

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<sup>30</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, Twelfth Census of the United States 1900, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1990).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

“boarding house keeper”, a definition that did not compare for the other married women who took boarders. Luisa’s boarders are not indicated in the census, dating back to June 14, 1900; an absence that is ascribable to the lack during the summer of Italian immigrants in the area.

Mary Carosella (55), resident in 1910 on East Boardman Street, Youngstown, arrived in the United States in 1890. Mary was another widow whose profession was that of “keeper roomers”. The big difference between Mary and Luisa is that Mary had only a son living with her: Michael, (20), a laborer in an iron mill. Mary kept four roomers, all laborers in the iron mill, maybe Michael’s co-workers.<sup>32</sup> Mary had a big advantage in respect to Luisa; she could count on two incomes: the board fees and Michael’s salary. Pretty similar was the situation of Rosa Cherl, a fifty-three year old widow, immigrated to the United States in 1905. Her first son (26) was a railroad laborer, the second (18) a railroad repair laborer, her daughter (17) did not work; Rosa also had a twelve-year-old son and a nine-year-old daughter. She kept nine boarders, all laborers for the rail road.<sup>33</sup>

The strong link between manhood, namely the presence of men in the family nuclei, and the resort to boarding is proved also by the job occupations of the boarders. It is sufficient to look carefully at the situation of two streets in Youngstown in April of 1910. On East Wood Street, Filomena [Yuse], (25), arrived in the United States in 1908 and married Frank (35), a laborer in the Valley mill, kept five boarders, all laborers in the

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<sup>32</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1990).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

Valley mill.<sup>34</sup> On East Front Street, Lizzie Brut, (28), emigrated in 1900 and married Salvatore, a laborer in an iron mill, kept sixteen laborers, all laborers in an iron mill. On the same street, Lena Katzaire (27), emigrated in 1901, kept nine steel mill workers. Her husband, Ralph, (30), was a laborer in a steel mill.<sup>35</sup> As already shown, Mary Carosella and Rosa Cherl hosted in their houses laborers who worked in the same job environment as their sons. Were men, especially husbands, procurers of boarders for their wives? What role did women play in the choice of keeping boarders?

Keeping boarders for an Italian immigrant woman not only meant sacrifice and sweat but also heavy moral and social implications. The boarder was, undoubtedly, an important source for the family budget, but at the same time was an interfering presence in the household, especially if he was not a relative. In a household with five or more roomers, the overcrowding made the rest difficult and increased the daily sacrifices of the immigrant families. In some cases, wives were forced by their husbands to take these discomforts. This was the case of Rosa Cavalleri, an Italian woman emigrated to Missouri from a small village in Lombardy, Bugiarno, in 1884 to follow her violent first husband, Santino. In her autobiography, Rosa told how, after the birth of her first son and after the departure of her husband to Missouri, she was called to reach him.

...coming into the *osteria* one Sunday, were some of those men who had gone to America with Santino. I stopped playing with my baby and went and called Mamma Lena from the wine cellar. "Those men in the iron mines in Missouri need women to do cooking and washing," said one of them. "Three men have sent back for their wives, and two for some girls to marry. Santino says for you to send Rosa. He sent the money and the ticket."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1990).

<sup>36</sup> Mary Hall Ets, *Rosa: The Life of an Italian Immigrant*, (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 106.

From the moment of the entrance of those men in the *osteria*, Rosa's adventure in America started. Rosa was only an unanimated object of transaction between her mother, Mamma Lena, and her husband. Mamma Lena decided to send Rosa to America and to keep with her little Francesco, Rosa's son. In a couple of weeks from the call, Rosa went along with a few *paesane* toward her American destiny, forced to cook and clean for more than twelve Italian workers in Missouri's iron mines, without speaking a word of English, without her family but encouraged by her aunt Maria's words before her departure: "But Rosa don't be sad...It is wonderful to go to America even if you don't want to go to Santino. You will get smart in America. And in America you will not be so poor."<sup>37</sup>

How many women were there in Youngstown who experienced situations similar to Rosa's? Though it is impossible to measure Italian women's attitude towards the system of boarding, it is possible to have an idea of the common perception of the Italian of the area towards *i bordanti*.

An article appeared in the Italian newspaper *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, on June 25, 1921 and entitled "The boarders disturb" more than clarifies the situation:

The boarders and other tenants, even if they are your relatives and friends, always give troubles in the families. They make your women work more and, generally, they cause quarrels. With your children growing up and especially the girls and the teenagers, the boarders are a big risk. They can have a bad illness or teach to your children bad thing. It is already difficult enough to raise your children without boarders in your house to give you other trouble. Many disasters happened to the girls of a family who is currently bringing a suit against the boarders who lived with it. Sometimes the boarders are shabby and dirty. They do not own the house and often they cause troubles that do not cover the money they pay for the rent.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Mary Hall Ets, *Rosa: The Life of an Italian Immigrant*, 162.

<sup>38</sup> "I Bordanti Disturbano," trans. by Laura Cuppone, in *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, June 25, 1921, Youngstown, Ohio.

The tone of this article expresses concern and worries especially towards the female members of the family, forced to work more or forced to stand particular attentions by the boarders.

Among the endless tragedies of the sublease there were sex crimes and sexual harassment towards girls and children. In the mining districts of the United States, as well as Canada or Europe, the protracted work exclusively based on the strength and the isolation of the workplaces was a deterrent for rough and violent behaviors. Being boarders in a country fellow's house could loosen up the tension offering a reassuring environment and the opportunity of a conversation in the mother language or, on the contrary, accentuate the discomfort which often caused chagrin and fights.<sup>39</sup>

The article shows that still during the 1920s the boarding system was common in this area and that the problems related to the presence of the boarders in the household were an important issue that afflicted many families. The conclusion of the article is a sort of appeal to the country-fellows to avoid the disasters generated by the roomers and to smartly select them. "You may have a house big enough to host other persons but if you keep boarders you must check who are the persons that you host in your house." Anyway, the boarding system was, especially in the Mahoning County, not only an occasion to gain supplemental income hosting unknown and possibly dangerous boarders, but also an occasion to help relatives and friends to start their new life in America.

The composition of the household with boarders was, in fact, strongly modeled according to kinship ties. These ties were fundamental both in emigration and in settlement. Many Italian women in the Mahoning Valley kept boarders who were

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<sup>39</sup> Bruna Bianchi, *Lavoro ed Emigrazione Femminile*, in *Storia dell'Emigrazione Italiana*, 1: 269-270.

relatives, especially brothers and brothers-in-law, called to work in this flourishing area. In June 1900, in the village of Lowellville Frank, (32), and Filippa Laroch, (19), had only a boarder, Charles Laroch, (37), whose age suggests that he was Frank's brother. In the same period and village, Paul, (40), and Rosa Fazio, (34), had among their three boarders a Fazio, (42), who could be Paul's brother.<sup>40</sup> In Youngstown Township, Thomas, (26), and Rosina Lograsso, (24), hosted Rosina's father, brother and cousin.<sup>41</sup> Is it possible, especially in the case of Rosina, to define the boarding system as an imposition?

In the case of boarders/relatives one should consider boarding as support and help given to the other family members. Emigration was a well-organized project: the man found the job, called his wife, his brothers and, eventually, the old parents to settle his own nucleus. Wives played the important role to manage the household, mainly composed of male components, and make the house a sort of safe haven for other family members. Once again, women collaborated to the migratory plan in a decisive way. Keeping relatives as boarders was a common feature of the emigration in this Valley until the 1920s.

For instance, in April 1910, on Valley street, Youngstown, the Cala family, composed of John, (32), a carpenter, of his wife, Francis, (26), and of four small children, was enlarged by the arrival of John's relatives, who emigrated in 1904. In John's house, there were three young brothers, Joseph, (21), a carpenter, Salvatore, (19), a laborer at the

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<sup>40</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States 1900*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1990).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

concrete works, Philipp, (12), and two sisters, Mary, (16), and Francis, (15).<sup>42</sup> It is possible to affirm that the active kin networks, already present and functioning in the villages of provenience, were transported to the New World, with a different shape but with the same aim of creating a valid supporting social pattern.

The duty of the first immigrants was to introduce the others to the new social and economic environment in order to make the emigration of the entire family really successful. In fact, the Italian idea of family went beyond the husband, wife and children's nucleus and included brothers, sisters, old parents and godfathers or godmothers. The *compari* and the *commari*, coming from the same *paese*, insofar *paesani*, through the religious bond entered the family nucleus covering the role of relatives. The necessity of family bonds for the first generation of Italian immigrants was more evident when the members of a family not only decided to live sharing the same house but also to leave in the proximity, namely in the same neighborhood or street.

This was the case of the over mentioned Lograssos; Thomas and Rosina not only hosted their relatives but they lived close to another Lograsso nucleus. In June 1900, in the village of Washingtonville, there were two Napolitano nuclei. Carmine, (55), a coal miner, and Anthony, (24), a coal miner too, were the heads of these two nuclei. Given the ages of Carmine and Anthony and the dates of immigration to the United States, it is possible to assume that they were father and son. The Napolitanos were protagonists of a "spaced-out" emigration: Carmine emigrated in 1888, Anthony in 1889, at the age of thirteen, and, eventually, Carmine's wife, Lucy, emigrated in 1891. Carmine and

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<sup>42</sup> U.S. Of Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1990).



Anthony found job as coal miners and once Anthony reached the right age he got married to another Italian immigrant, Catherine, (17), and decided to move into another house, close to his parents.<sup>43</sup>

Living in the same household, or living close to relatives' house, was undoubtedly an advantage for both the hosts and the guests. In fact, the family kinship, under the form of the boarding system, was a sort of mutual aid. Italian immigrant women at the moment of the detachment from their family lost the support and the help of the other women of the family, such as mothers and sisters, who were, especially during pregnancy and maternity, an irreplaceable source. The call of the other relatives, first the male components and then the female ones, was also for the pioneers of emigration a valid aid. The presence of Lucy Napolitano could have been for the young Catherine essential. The success of emigration was guaranteed not only from the supplemental income of the board fees but also from the help given by other family members.

This was the case of Filomena Mancini, (26), arrived to the United States in 1889, six years after her husband. The composition of the household was mixed; Filomena took care of two small daughters, seven non-relative boarders, two cousins, a brother -in-law, her brother and a mother- in-law. Her mother- in-law, although she was seventy years-old, could have been for Filomena, too busy in the management of the household, a valid support for her daughters' care.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, as Virginia Yans- McLaughlin pointed out for Buffalo, in the decision to keep boarders and to enlarge the household several considerations were operating: on one side, the necessities to provide a shelter and a job

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<sup>43</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States 1900*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1990)

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

for an unemployed or recently emigrated relative, and on the other side, the creation of a capillary system of cooperation which mirrored the situation of the village in Italy.

The system of the boarding house was a help not only for the first generation of Italian immigrants but also for the second generation, namely the offspring of the Italian immigrants, already born in Ohio or emigrated during childhood. Italian households in the Mahoning Valley continued to be big and overcrowded also when the children grew up and got married. Italian mothers, in their fifties or sixties, continued to be the “unofficial heads” of the family. Hosting sons or daughters with their wives and husbands was another way to save the integrity and to improve the conditions of the nucleus. The emigration to America, painful and complicated, not only had to be successful at the moment of arrival but, like every good investment, must assure to the family good economic conditions and support through the years.

The practice of hosting boarders and of living under the same roof, typical of Italian families, was both a short-term solution and a long-distance assurance. The typology “living altogether under the same roof” took the characteristics of households where there were father, mother and the unmarried children in their twenties or thirties or of huge households where also in-laws and grandchildren found their living space. In 1900, in Youngstown Township, Giocondo, (51), a blacksmith and Fortunata, (69) Puccini hosted in their house a thirty-one year old divorced daughter, Katie Hoffman, a housekeeper, along with her children: George, (12), and Anna, (10).. Under the same roof, there were also a son, John (24), who was a stenographer, a daughter, Mary (22), with her husband, a railroad engineer, Myers Madison, and her small daughter, and Fortunata’s first marriage’s son, James Mei, a forty-five year old painter. Despite the

presence of all these family members, the Puccinis had enough rooms to keep a boarder: the railroad flagman, Shay Jerry, (22).<sup>45</sup>

Similar to the Puccinis' situation was that of the Yaunells in Lowellville Village in 1920. Martha Yaunell, a sixty year-old widow, emigrated in 1895 and naturalized in 1905, hosted in her house an unemployed fourteen year-old son, a nineteen year-old daughter, operator in the Telephone Co., a twenty year-old daughter, her husband and her small son. There were also four boarders: a sheer man, like Martha's son in-law, and three merchants in a grocery store. Italian parents reproduced in the United States the prototype of co-habitation, typical of the farms of Italian country villages. The Puccinis and the Yaunells helped their children offering temporary shelters and, maybe, giving their daughters and daughters-in-law a support with childrearing.

### **Not only Keepers of Boarders**

Although the predominant occupation of Italian women was that of keeping boarders, there were also other professions that present a more variegated scenario of female emigration to the Valley. Italian women of the first generation of immigrants were dressmakers or maids. The first occupation allowed women to work without denying their valid presence at home. They could continue to perform their duties as housewives, mothers and wives, collaborating in the family budget without exposing themselves to a foreign environment and putting the art of the embroidery and of sewing to good use. Indeed, many Italian girls, coming from peasant families, went to learn sewing to some

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<sup>45</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States 1900*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1990).

master tailors in their villages. This was, in the small villages, populated only by peasants, a distinctive quality.

The first dressmaker who appeared in the census for the Mahoning Valley is Assunta, (22), who in April 1910 lived with his husband Thomas, a carpenter, on South Watt Street. Assunta emigrated in 1909 to reach her husband, already emigrated in 1907.<sup>46</sup> Similar to Assunta's situation was that of Speranza Rich, (36), and of Angelina Misseno, (29). Speranza, in April 1910, was a resident of East Federal Street with her husband, a fireman for the railroad. She emigrated in 1907 to reach her husband already emigrated in 1890.<sup>47</sup> Angelina, who in January 1920 was a resident of Youngstown City, arrived in the United States in 1914 to follow her husband, a cement finisher.<sup>48</sup> Assunta, Speranza and Angelina had more in common than their profession. In fact, all of them arrived to follow their husbands who had jobs subject to a period of unemployment, strictly related to weather conditions, as in the case of the railroad laborers, or to the job market.

Furthermore, all of them were mothers of small children: Assunta had a small daughter; Speranza had two sons and Angelina a son. All of them not only worked at home as dressmakers but they also kept two boarders each. Assunta was the only one who could not speak English but, as in the same area Speranza and Angelina, she was literate in her mother language. These three women were educated in their homeland and had also the opportunity to learn a craft that helped them to contribute to the family budget. Their confinement in their houses' walls had family and economic motivations:

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<sup>46</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1990).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., Govt. print. Off.1921-23).

they could not be away from home for many hours and the big advantage of having in their hands a craft avoided the necessity to keep more than two boarders.

What happened if the women immigrants were not trained as dressmakers? Among the few alternatives there was the possibility to work as *serva*, servant in other families. The role of the servants and the social implications of this humble job are still a burning issue among historians. In fact, there is a school of thought according to which the idiosyncrasy towards domestic service was a peculiar trait of Italian immigrant women. According to the census of the United States of 1900, this job was performed by 60.5 percent of the Irish women, 61.9 percent of the Scandinavians, 42.6 percent of the Germans, 20.6 percent of Russians and Poles and only 11.6 percent of Italians. The census of the Mahoning County from 1880 to 1930 mirrored precisely this data.

In order to explain this anomaly, some historians drew on the baggage of cultural attitudes and characteristics of Italian, and especially southern, society. For instance, Virginia Yans- McLaughlin, in her awesome analysis of Italians in Buffalo, points out that women seeking year-round salaries had the opportunity to become domestics but they preferred to take in boarders because the men rarely permitted their wives to work as maids. The Italian ideal, according to this historian, was to keep women at home. For this reason, in Buffalo, Italian wives rejected factory and domestic work choosing not to work outside the home unsupervised by relatives and friends.<sup>49</sup> At first glance, Italian women of the Mahoning Valley seemed to reproduce the typology of their Buffalo fellows. Who were the Italian domestic servants of the Valley?

The first servant who appears in the census was the fifteen year-old Annie White. Annie, arrived in 1900 in the United States and lived in Lowellville Village with her

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<sup>49</sup> Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, *Family and Community*, 53, 170, 203 and 209.

brother, Massimo White, (24), and her sister in-law, Concetta, (21), who emigrated respectively in 1888 and 1891.<sup>50</sup> In 1910, the nineteen year-old Mary Disabatto, arrived in 1908, lived with her brother in-law, Jones, proprietor of a saloon, and her sister Angelina, both emigrated in 1895, on East Federal Street.<sup>51</sup> On East Wood Street, in April of the same year, the eighteen year-old Lundina Vitullo lived with her uncle Luciano Latissa, a baker, and her aunt Antonia, who emigrated respectively in 1889 and in 1892.<sup>52</sup> Concetta, Mary and Lundina had in common important traits: they were young, brand new immigrants and illiterate. They were not able to speak English. What could they do, alone and without their parents or a husband?

A little bit different was the situation of Mary Frapino. Mary, a thirty-seven year old widow, who in 1910 lived with a small son and a small daughter on Boardman Street and was indicated in the census as “housekeeper in a private family.”<sup>53</sup> In January 1920, a young twenty year-old widow Mary Pitto and her nineteen year-old sister Kathrin worked as servants for the Y.M.C.A. They both lived with their parents, who emigrated at the end of the nineteenth century, to Coitsville Township.<sup>54</sup> In 1930, in Norwood Street, the fifty-two year-old Mary Doria, married and emigrated in 1902, worked as servant for Dominick Roberto, a merchant in a grocery store and for his wife Mary.<sup>55</sup> Mary Frapino

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<sup>50</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States 1900*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1990).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., Govt. print. Off.1921-23).

<sup>55</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930* Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (College Park, Md., National Archives and Records Administration, 2002).

and Mary Pitto were widows and it is presumable that without their husbands' salary they did not have other choices.

Therefore, if we accept the theory according to which domestic service was avoided for reasons of honor or because of Italian male chauvinism, we should consider the families of these Italian maids dissolute or very open-minded. As always generalizations and stereotypes do not help reconstructing a valid and clear picture. It is, in fact, possible to cast doubts not only on the reclusion of the women at home, in Italy as well as in the United States, but also on the excessive importance given to the safeguard of Italian women's sexuality by fathers and husbands. First, Italian women in the regions of the southern Italy used to move and to emigrate locally for harvesting of grapes, olives and grain but also for the gleaning. On these occasions, they worked besides men in "promiscuity".

In addition, from the 1880s on, in the period of the urbanization of the Italian peninsula, there was a large influx of women into cities where they not only worked as dressmakers but also as servants. Was not this dangerous for them? The practice of keeping boarders, as indicated in the over mentioned article from *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, was as perilous as domestic service for women. The census of Mahoning County of 1930 showing a high percentage of Italian women employees, precisely the daughters of the first generation of Italian immigrants, suggests that male chauvinism, even if a significant trait of all the Mediterranean cultures, is not a valid explanation. For all these reasons the causes of the abstention of Italian women from the domestic service should be found elsewhere.

The ethnic composition of American domestic service indicated that the most represented in this field were the minorities belonging to a definite typology of migration with a balanced ratio between males and females and with a relevant proportion of single women. In fact, these were the immigrants who more than the others were employed as servants. Obviously, arriving in a foreign country without families, already difficult for men, was more than complicated for women who in order to satisfy quickly elementary needs, resorted to domestic service. In addition, employment as a maid with a private family was also a chance to solve the problem of the lack of a shelter. Although its stuffiness, its long hours of work and the absence of privacy, domestic service was well accepted by the first generation of Swedish women. Young Irish women immigrants, for instance, possessed an advantage because they were Anglophones and saw in domestic service a sort of channel for social mobility. These northern Europeans had already experienced domestic service at home and had already calculated the delayed marriages.

All these preambles were not in the horizon of Italian women. Italian women passed immediately from the Italian rural environment into the American metropolises with their families, as daughters or as wives. In some areas, like the Mahoning Valley, single women were rare and most of them, also if young and unmarried, had the shelter and the protection within their kinship networks and did not look for domestic service. The only example of a single woman living alone in the Valley was Catharina Spatella, (37), emigrated in 1902, who in 1910 lived on Boardman Street. Catharina was completely alone and illiterate; she could speak English and in the steel town



Youngstown she found the honorable job of housekeeper. Unfortunately the census does not indicate if she worked for a private family.<sup>56</sup>

Other factors should be put into account. Italian families, advantaged by their settlement within a community system, exercised on their traditions and models of life an important vigilance. The marriages of their daughters were fundamental goals which did not admit delays.<sup>57</sup> Besides these cultural explanations there were also some economic issues. Between 1870 and 1914, the incipient mechanization of domestic technologies had significantly diminished the requests for maids. Italian women reached the United States in this period and their presence would have only interfered with the logic of the immigrant workforce: every community grabbed some professions and the northern Europeans dominated domestic service. Because of the scarce presence of single Italian women and of the too small proportion of Italian servants, the chain of “relative calls relative” never started for Italians in this sector of female occupation.<sup>58</sup>

Italian women of the first immigrant generation in the Mahoning Valley had other interesting occupations which were outside from the traditional pattern. In 1910, on East Commerce Street, Maria Magnis, (28), lived with her husband and her husband’s brother; they arrived in the United States in 1909. Nearby there were also Maria Benignis and her husband, arrived in 1909 too. The members of these families were all, including the two

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<sup>56</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1990).

<sup>57</sup> The relationship between marriage and domestic service is well explained by some statistics which go back to the years prior the big Italian emigration. Between 1822 and 1862, the 18 percent of the servants, emigrated from the country to the city, delayed their marriage after the age of thirty and only the half of the all servants in the cities got married before the age of twenty-four. Angiolina Arru, “Uomini e Donne Nel Mercato del Lavoro Servile,” in *Il Lavoro delle Donne*, 262.

<sup>58</sup> A. De Clementi, “Madri e Figlie nell’Emigrazione americana,” in *Il Lavoro delle Donne* 434-436.

Marias, molders of statues.<sup>59</sup> In Smith Township, in 1910, Julia Cardinal, (38), whose husband did not appear in the census, emigrated in 1890, worked as kiln drawer in a pottery. Her first two sons worked in a pottery as batter out. She was owner of her house.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1990).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

### **Italian Mothers of American Daughters**

Integration, or better adaptation, into a completely new and different environment was one of the most important steps which made Italian women in the first wave of immigration to the United States a little bit more American and which transformed their daughters, who arrived in their adolescence or were born in the United States, into Americans. In fact, as Elizabeth Ewen points out, if the older generation had difficulties accepting new models and habits, for their daughters the acceptance of New World's dictates was easier because it was facilitated by daily contact with every facet of American society. If on one side, mothers perpetuated and maintained all the moral and social values they learned in Italy, daughters could not draw on the same system of values because these were no longer valid in the American society.

Movie theatres, dance halls and amusement parks, especially in the biggest American cities, were at the same time a menace for old Italian traditions and the first step for the young generations toward emancipation. For Italian immigrants, it is necessary to talk about family bonds. Emancipation of Italian immigrant daughters was not only from a male-oriented culture but also from family. For example, Jewish mothers, as well as Italian mothers, were worried about the strange and foreign environment and tried to keep their daughters away from the temptations of what they perceived a promiscuous society. The difference among these two cultures was that Italian mothers, stricter than Jewish mothers, not only prohibited their daughters from attending dance halls but they also imposed a ban on every type of social relation that took place outside parental and family surveillance.

Mothers' world and daughters' aspirations obviously clashed. Italian girls, who emigrated in their childhood, were not, as their mothers, product of small country villages' cultures; they did not, as their mothers did, grow up with the only goal to raise children and to keep their "honor" unbroken; with or without their parents' approval, by obedient submission or by violent rejection, they were no more Italians. On the other side, they struggled in a sort of "no-cultural identity land", because they were not totally Americans but on their way to the Americanization. First, the school and second, the job-environment pushed them to absorb different ways of life and, inevitably, moved them away from their grandmothers and mothers' advice and education. This tough and painful battle between being Italian and being American characterized the process of integration for mothers and daughters in New York as well as in Youngstown.

In order to catch the real meaning of the cultural and social integration of Italian immigrant women in the Valley, it is necessary to raise and ask some questions: What did Italian women do in their free time? Did they have free time? What were the places and the typologies of their leisure? How did Italian men react to their wives and daughters' escape from their duties? The answers to these questions are useful not only to detect the actual adaptation of Italian women in the Mahoning Valley, disclosing elements of their traditions and reaction to another culture, but also to have an understanding of what the Valley offered to them. How did the Valley change Italian women's mentality and Italian men's attitudes toward their female relatives? And, overall, how did Italian women change and shape the Mahoning Valley's history?

For women who did not work outside the home, the neighborhood was the place of relations and of contact with others par excellence. The local neighborhoods, Brier

Hillnas well as Smoky Hollow, were the most important and immediate dimension of economic and social activity beyond the family. As Samuel L. Baily noted for New York and Buenos Aires between 1870 and 1914, the local neighborhood was the principal focus of Italian immigrants' lives outside the family walls. In fact, the streets provided the scenario in which everyone, women included, could interact with each other. Even if living quarters were usually composed and restricted to family members, the streets, with their markets, cafés, stores and public institutions were the stages on which people, recognized and known, passed their existences. Especially women workers only in the home, always busy with children and boarders, found the "public" counterpart of their lives in the neighborhood.

Italian neighborhoods were geographic spaces, economic and social spaces. The neighbors often worked in the neighborhood where they lived and where they did their shopping. They recognized and acknowledged business and other acquaintances with whom they socialized. A butcher shop, a grocery store and, overall, parishes significantly contributed to the residents' sense of belonging in a certain environment. It is possible to affirm that Italian neighborhoods and more generally Italian enclaves, in the biggest cities as well as in the Valley, replaced the concept of belonging to regions or villages that they left behind. Although the on-going attempt by Italians to reproduce the environment of their village through social and family ties was an important feature of the "little Italys" all over the United States, it is important to observe that their transplant into American society presented new situations impossible to find in Italy.

Actually, these new situations, economic as well as social, were the starting points for the creation of two Italians: the Italian-Americans and the "left behind." The Italian

emigration was, undoubtedly, the agent of an Italian diaspora. While Italians in America went through the process of integration into a “cosmopolitan” and “ethnic mixed” society based on capitalism, Italians in Italy experienced the difficulties of the creation of an Italian state and, after twenty years of Fascism, the challenges of building a democratic republic. History cannot be based on hypothesis but it is a licit to question what might have been happened to the Italian immigrant women if they had not immigrated to America. Would they have been more or less emancipated? Would they have had the same opportunities?

It is not easy to give precise and certain answers to these interrogatives but a deep analysis of Italian women in the area under study can provide elements for further clarifications. First, Italian immigrants, women included, had to establish relationships with other ethnic groups, not only Americans but also Greeks, Jews, Scandinavians, and Poles among others. In fact, the neighborhood offered Italian women contacts with other women who did not have the same origins and culture, and with whom Italian women could not share the same memories, such as the village, the traditions or the small church of their youth, but they could share with them their sense of foreignness and being female.

Sometimes, as in the case of Angelina Gioso, (37), they were forced by economic conditions to enter into contact with the members of other ethnic groups. Angelina, emigrated in 1898 together with her husband, a laborer in an iron mill, in 1910, lived on South Watt Street and kept eight roomers: three Italian workers in an iron mill, three Greek waiters and a Hungarian barkeeper.<sup>1</sup> If we take into account the fact that Angelina

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<sup>1</sup>U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1990)

could not speak English, it is possible to imagine how Angelina was able and strong to adapt herself to a strange country and to stranger boarders. Obviously, for the daughters of the first wave of immigrants process of Americanization was not so strange because they attended schools and entered the job world; two dimensions where they not only gained a cultural education, especially of English, but also learnt to relate to people with other cultures.

As for employment outside the home, the Italian mothers did not have many opportunities; their illiteracy and the language barrier, along with their commitments towards family members, caused their alienation from the job world. Their supplemental wages, deriving from jobs performed at home, were useful for the family, for the purchase of a house and for the improvement of the family's life. Certainly, their jobs were not part of the acquisition of emancipation. Italian mothers did not work for themselves, for their own intellectual and social wellbeing; they always worked for their husbands and children's wellbeing. The new environment did not change the mothers' expectations, but affected their daughters.

In the big American cities as well as in the Valley, the contacts with a more open-minded society, more inclined to the principles of individuality and to some irreplaceable values, such as education, freedom in the management of incomes and in matrimonial choices, represented for these young Italian-Americans the fuse that generated the blaze. In the Mahoning Valley, young Italian girls, in the 1910s and especially in the 1920s, thanks to their jobs discovered their importance as individuals more than as mothers-to-be. Indeed, as the census shows, a good percentage of girls in the Italian nuclei, as soon

as they reached the right age, went to work, joining their brothers in the dimension of wage-earners.

The increase of the female presence in the workforce was the result of a series of events and conditions occurred in the 1920s. The halt of European immigration to the United States, ratified by the National Origins of Quota Act of the 1924, destroyed the Italian temporary emigration, characterized by a strong presence of men and by continuous returns of immigrants in Italy. After the closing of the gates to America, Italians had two choices: go back to Italy forever or move permanently to the United States giving to their lives a more stable structure. Afterwards, the migratory flux to the United States feminized and, between 1925 and 1930, Italian women reached 68 percent among Italian immigrants.

In the last quinquennium of the 1920s, the growing number of Italian immigrant women and the economic instability, which in 1929 culminated with the stock market crash, facilitated the entrance of women in the job world, especially into the white-collar sector. The Great Depression, or better, its symptoms, hit particularly the heavy industry, almost totally based on the male workforce. Meanwhile, the children of Italian Immigrants, daughters included, forced by the American laws to go to school until the age of sixteen, reached a respectable level of instruction that allowed them to aspire to better employments. What did the daughters of Italian immigrants do? What type of employments did they perform?

If from 1880 to circa 1910, Italian parents of the Mahoning Valley preferred to resort to their sons as supplemental wage earners, during the 1920s, they promoted their sons as well as their daughters' entrance into the job world. This change is ascribable to



economic and cultural causes. On the cultural side, their daughters' employment was not impeded because it was not considered shame and, on the economic side, the halt of immigration reduced the presence of immigrants on the market creating needs. In fact, single immigrant men, in search of room and board, were fundamental sources of income before 1910.

The census of 1930, providing data on the 1920s, does not present any traces of boarders, who, on the contrary, were strongly present before. Furthermore, the signs of an economic recession, made the white collar employment appealing; Italian parents saw in the white collar occupations a safe haven for their daughters because of the economic crisis that started to affect heavy industry. On the other side, their young daughters, rescued from illiteracy, could not wait to become Americans, to have their independence and to promote their social mobility through more than a good marriage. All these preambles were at the base of the transformation of Italian-American ways of life in the years preceding WWII. The census data exactly mirrored this big social shift.

By January 1920, in Youngstown, the number of Italian wives and daughters employed visibly increased. The situation and the economic independence of wives was tangible. For example, on Oak Street, Bermina Kata, (59), wife of a streetcar conductor, emigrated in 1890 worked as a retail merchant in a grocery store on her account. Bermina also took in two boarders: a laborer in a foundry and a laborer in a steel mill.<sup>2</sup> On North Watt Street, Maria Liberry, (33), emigrated in 1903 and as head of the family, was a tailor in a private shop, Neno Clothing. Maria, whose husband was not mentioned in the

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., Govt. print. Off.1921-23).

census, took care of five small children and of her mother, Maria Mastriani, (70), who emigrated with her in 1903.<sup>3</sup>

In the same period, in Division Street, two Italian women, Mary, (46), and Luisa, (40), similarly to Bermina, worked as retail merchants in a grocery store. Bermina and Luisa immigrated in 1890, and Mary in 1889.<sup>4</sup> Mary's husband was an oil cloth maker in a store, while Luisa's husband was a laborer in a steel mill. These three women, literate and capable of working on their account, have an element in common: they were young at the moment of their immigration to America. Bermina was a young twenty nine year old woman; Mary was a fifteen year old adolescence and Luisa only a child of ten. This meant that these three women were Americans; they had a good command of English and absorbed the culture.

What is really surprising are the activities of two Italian women who immigrated, along with their husbands, some time before 1920. Mary [Pretopiopa], (37), and Antoinette Labruzzo, (20). Mary, wife of a laborer in a steel company and resident on Albert Street, arrived in 1913 and worked as laborer in the electric power department.<sup>5</sup> On Evergreen Avenue, Antoinette, wife of a printer in a printing shop, newly arrived in 1920, worked as shoemaker in a shoe shop.<sup>6</sup> They are significant examples of the gradual emancipation of Italian immigrant women. Indeed, in Mary's situation it is possible to glimpse a precise project of here emigration, namely both Mary and her husband were ready to work. Mary, similarly her husband, played in the investment of the emigration, although her being mother of nine children, the role of active bread-winner. Antoinette,

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<sup>3</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., Govt. print. Off.1921-23).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

mother of a small son and a small daughter, like her husband, had a craft; she was a shoemaker and a skilled artisan.

For what concerns Italian women of the second generation and born in Ohio, there was a predictable facilitation in performing higher employment. In fact, among the employed Italian-American wives of Youngstown in 1920, there were Josephina Duastande, (29), and Annie Ross, (24). Josephina, head of her family, composed of a small son and a small daughter, was an “operator for clothing.” Annie, wife of a salesman in a steel mill, was a stenographer at the General Fireproofing Company.<sup>7</sup> In the analysis of this situation, it is important to underline the expansion of the job market in the Mahoning Valley. This opening for women’s employment had two contributors: the increase of light industry and of the tertiary in Youngstown, not prevalently based on heavy industry, and the presence of literate and English speaker Italian immigrant women, ready to fill the jobs available.

If the binomial job market/educated Italian women lightly transformed the Italian motherhood model, it created a totally new type of Italian daughterhood model. Most of the Italian daughters, without differences between those born in Italy or in the United States, found employment as workers or as clerks. Only one in twelve employed daughters in Youngstown in 1920, Jemma, (16), had a humble employment; she worked in general homework as day laborer. Only one in twelve, Jennie, (21), worked at home; Jennie, first of nine children, worked as laundress at home.<sup>8</sup> Given Jemma’s age and Jennie’s recent arrival in 1912, it is possible to assume that Jemma left the school too

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<sup>7</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920*, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., Govt. print. Off.1921-23).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

soon and Jennie, arrived at the age of thirteen, did not have much opportunities to complete or to start her education.

Three Italian-American daughters, worked as clerks in a grocery store: Elinon Ford, (19), Katie Tucci, (19), and Ellen Conti, (16). Elinon and Katie's employment was strictly related to that of their fathers; in fact, Mr. Ford, who emigrated in 1880, was a merchant in a grocery store, possibly the same grocery store in which Elinon worked. [Pasquale] Tucci, who emigrated in 1910, was the owner of a grocery store where, surely, worked Katie.<sup>9</sup> If we consider that Elinon's brothers, James, (23), and John, (32), worked respectively as mechanic in a garage and as salesman in an automobile company, it is easy to hypothesize the attempt of Italian fathers to retain daughters at home or, at least, under their supervision in the family business.

Within the presence in the Italian nuclei of Youngstown of more than an employed daughter confirms that this was a trend and that parents did not consider it inappropriate for a girl to work and to collect money not only to help the family but also to save money for dowry and future weddings. In the Petroni family, residents of Summit Avenue, there were two young employed daughters: Rose, (18), a pressman at the General Fireproofing and the younger Marrie, (16), a laborer in the office of t General Fireproofing.<sup>10</sup> On Vine Street, the Sperras had five daughters; the oldest, Grace, (21), and Annie, (19), worked respectively as worker at the Rubber Works and as clerk in an unidentified office.<sup>11</sup>The Petronis and the Sperras, favoring their daughters' entrance in the job market improved their economic conditions; in fact both of them were owners of

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<sup>9</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (Washington, D.C., Govt. print. Off.1921-23).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

their houses. If they had followed the rules of honor of the male-oriented Italian society, they would have deprived themselves and their daughters of a better life.

Coming from a peasant culture, the Italian parents considered their daughters' occupations a merit and a pride. After all, they did not work as servants or as farmers for others; they were workers in the industrial sector or better, white-collar workers, an aspiration that had weight in Italy as late as the 1970s. This trend started in the 1910s continued during the 1920s. The census for Mahoning County of the 1930 is a clear snapshot of the acquisition by Italian-American daughters of Youngstown of all the necessary skills necessary for higher professions and to higher status position of social weight. The profession of salesladies and clerks continued to be one of the most diffuse.

For instance, Catherine Cristo, (24), daughter of Michael, (64), a packer in the fruit industry, and of Jenny, (47), both emigrated in 1869, was a saleslady in a department store.<sup>12</sup> Not too far from Redondo Road where Catherine lived. On Crandall Street there was the Satte family. Frank Satte, (50), a boiler maker, and Ernestina, (48), who emigrated respectively in 1890 and in 1898, had two daughters: Loretta, (19), who worked as saleslady in a grocery store and Florena, (25), who worked as teacher in the public school.<sup>13</sup> On Ford Avenue, Carmel Daily, now a widow, emigrated in 1909, and had four children: two sons and two daughters. The sons were respectively a fireman and a mechanic; her daughters, Philomena, (25), and Elisabeth, (23), were a copyist for the court house and a clerk in a department store.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930* Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (College Park, Md., National Archives and Records Administration, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

The majority of the occupations of Italian-American daughters were in the sector of the tertiary industry and, as the census illustrates for the city of Youngstown, they usually performed secretarial and white-collar employment. Among the Italian-American working daughters of Youngstown in 1930, only one did a manual labor; this girl Stella Lallo, (24), daughter of John, a laborer in a steel mill, and of Madilina, (49), was a worker in a laundry. The Lallo's house, located on Fox Street, was worth \$ 3,000; a value that is a little bit under the average value of the houses in Youngstown in 1930. For example, the house of Domenik Montoni, an Italian-American lawyer, was worth \$ 20,000 while the average value of the house of a laborer in a steel mill was circa \$ 5,000.

Was the quality of the employments of the daughters proportioned to the entire family's well-being, or to the fathers' position? The data indicates a positive correlation. For example, the 22-year-old Herrietta Vecchione, a bookkeeper in a machine repair shop, was the daughter of a skilled laborer; her father, Dominik, who emigrated along with his wife in 1900, was a rougher in a steel mill. The value of the Vecchiones' house was \$ 7,500.<sup>15</sup> The case of the Marinellis, residents on Lauderdale Street, shows even greater relationship between the social positions of the family and the daughters' employment. Nicholas Marinelli, (60), a building contractor, and Cecilia, (53), emigrated respectively in 1900 and in 1903. They had seven daughters and two sons. The first three daughters were teachers: Jane, (30), born in Italy, was a teacher in a high school, Mary, (22), and Nellie, (21), both born in Ohio, were teacher in a public school. The value of the Marinellis' house amounted to \$10,000.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930* Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (College Park, Md., National Archives and Records Administration, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

All these young women had some features in common: they were born in the United States, or emigrated in their childhood, their families were well-off, and, overall, they were not married. The marriage, more than a family's decision, was a dividing line for entrance in the job world for the Italian-American daughters of Youngstown. For example, in the Cristo family, Catherine, single, worked as saleslady but her sister, Mary, (23), married to John Pecchia, and mother of two small sons, did not work outside the home. On Redondo Road, Thomas Caras, (31), a Greek-American laborer in a steel mill, and Lucia, a twenty-three-year old Italian-American, hosted in their house several members of Lucia's family: her mother Adelaide, emigrated in 1903, her two younger single brothers, born in Ohio, respectively worker in the steel construction and carpenter, and a young Angelina Iatta, (18). Angelina was registered as daughter-in-law of Thomas but her age and the presence of a question mark in the census suggest that maybe she was Lucia's sister. Angelina was a "maid" in hospital.<sup>17</sup>

In both cases, the married sisters did not work. Once again, one of the most significant obstacles to the presence of Italian, and specifically, Italian-American daughters in the job world was marriage and motherhood. Therefore, the causes of their unemployment rest in more than in cultural explanations, and have practical reasons: the necessity of raising children and of being present at home. Actually, on Norwood Street, Daniel Filmucci, (61), a gardener in a private family, emigrated in 1903, and Philomena, his wife, (58), who emigrated in 1906, hosted in their home their second daughter, Annetta Carabell, (28) married, whose husband did not appear in the census, and who

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<sup>17</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930* Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (College Park, Md., National Archives and Records Administration, 2002).

was a secretary in the Loan Bank. Annetta, born in Italy, did not have any children.<sup>18</sup> This element suggests that more than the being a wife, it was being mother which menaced the possibly of working.

In the same period on Federal Street, Theresa [Popio], (45), illiterate and emigrated in 1917, lived with five daughters, of ranging in age from 21 to 7. The first daughter Mary O'Connor, divorced, was the only one to work; she was an elevator girl in a department store. This family, formed of women, was one of the few nuclei to rent the house. Once again, it is possible to affirm that the absence of men was an obstacle, a problem but, at the same time, it is possible to notice small signs of change in the Italian-American community of Youngstown. The divorced Mary, indeed, could work and her sisters, who were more than fourteen year old, because they did not appear as workers, maybe studied.<sup>19</sup>

The big cultural and social shift that occurred in Youngstown or better in the Mahoning Valley's Italian communities found space in the pages of the Italian language newspaper, *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*. This newspaper portrayed a progressive and gradual Italian women's emancipation in the area. Obviously, the articles appeared from 1920 to 1933 and that in those same years in Italy the fascist ideology, to which the *Cittadino Italo-Americano* seemed adhere, proposed as Italian and patriotic value, the affirmation of the virility. In spite of these cultural as well political implications, the newspaper presented articles that shed put light on the actual situation of Italian women in the Mahoning Valley and on the slow but tenacious path forward the acquisition of the individual independence by Italian-American daughters.

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<sup>18</sup> U.S. Bureau Of Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930* Population, General Report Statistics by Subjects, (College Park, Md., National Archives and Records Administration, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.



For instance, the job advertisements clearly targeted the younger audience of the *giovINETTE*. The Operators' Training Department of the Central Union Telephone Company, located at 116 W. Rayen Avenue, on June 12, 1920, searched for young girls, from eighteen to twenty-seven, to train and to employ in its enterprise. The advertisement spoke clearly:

Young Girls, there are good opportunities for you, what are you waiting for? Do you want good salaries and good opportunities for promotions? Do you want a job capable offering you a balanced free time? Do you want to take care of your health? Do you want comforts and conveniences in profusion? Do you want to be in company with other young girls? Do you want protection against illnesses and incidents? Do you want an interesting job? The telephone operators enjoy these benefits. Mothers love this job for their daughters' interest, and daughters love this job for its opportunities and for its cleanliness.<sup>20</sup>

The message of this advertisement mirrored the Italian-American families' aspirations. The Central Union Telephone Company knew very well whose were the heartstrings to touch; mothers, a further proof of their decisional power at home, liked the practical and "moral" cleanliness of this type of employment, and, on the other side, the *giovINETTE* looked at these positions as a social and individual promotion in American society.

American society, like it or not, showed Italians issues which were not yet present in 1920s Italy. For example, on the 3 April, 1920, on the first page of the newspaper there was an article about the protection of woman. The article reported the bill submitted to the Congress by the deputy of Arkansas, Philipp Campbell. This bill wanted to establish an office exclusively for women within the Department of Labor. The aim of this office, directed by a woman, was to promote women workers' well-being, raising their salaries and improving the working conditions. The article talked about women's exploitation at work and about the uselessness of the right of vote without the attainment of equal

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<sup>20</sup> "GiovINETTE," in *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 12 June 1920.

opportunities in the job world.<sup>21</sup> Obviously, it is impossible to know how Italians reacted to this American women's emancipation and it is impossible to think that all Italian men could easily accept these social changes but, surely, Italian women in Youngstown and all over the United States were exposed to these important issues well in advance of their relatives left behind in Italy.

The articles from the *Cittadino Italo-Americano* and the census data show that the members of the Italian-American community of the Mahoning Valley put a lot of stress and importance on education and literacy. On January 2, 1923, at Central High School, in the old Rayen School, at the corner between Wick Avenue and Wood Street, began an evening public school teaching write and speak English. All the persons interested paid \$ 3.00 for twelve classes, and the textbooks. The classes took place twice a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 7:30 to 9:00 PM, under the supervision of Miss Clark, appositely sent by Columbus.<sup>22</sup> The importance of these evening courses is testified by the recurrence through the first months of 1923 in advertisements. On an article dating back to the February of 1923, the *Cittadino Italo-Americano* added other important information about the school:

Currently there are only three classes. The elementary class is for men and women who do not know English. Here one learns writing, reading and speaking English. In addition to the Elementary class there are also an intermediate and an advance course, where one not only learns reading, writing and speaking the pure English, but also learns a little bit of the United States' history and other useful information about the achievement of the citizenship. Experienced teachers are in charge of the teaching and all the work is under the supervision of Miss Lillian Clark, sent from Columbus to this end. The director (a woman) as well as the teachers would be glad to have the visit of any foreign citizen during any evening class.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> "Protezione della Donna," in *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 3 April, 1920.

<sup>22</sup> "Scuola d'Inglese," *ibid.*, 9 December, 1922

<sup>23</sup> "Corsi di Inglese," *ibid.*, 24 February 1923

The aim of these evening classes, opened to men as well as women, was clear: obtain American citizenship. On October 1, 1923, evening classes of English and citizenship were offered free at the Christ Mission Settlement at 330 East Boardman Street through the winter on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays at 7:30 PM.<sup>24</sup> It is possible to affirm that the emigration laws and the bureaucratic procedures to obtain citizenship were a catalyst for acculturation and acquisition of language skills. Furthermore, as the advertisement shows, immigrants of the first generation, the recipients of these messages, could not limit their learning of the language to the elementary level but they should speak the “pure” English and know about history.

There were also English courses addressed only to the female public. On September 28, 1929, an announcement in the Italian newspaper reported:

The International Institute for the teaching of English which operates in behalf of Y.W.C.A also this year will start the same courses for the teaching of the language spoken in this big nation. These schools are only for women and will start from the next 1<sup>st</sup> of October. It is useless say that they are free and that all the Italian ladies and misses can attend them. Here there are the different sections, the streets, the time and the day.<sup>25</sup>

The courses offered by the Y.W.C.A were situated in six buildings: Neilson House, on Manning and Crescent Avenues, Truscon Steel Office, Franklin Center, on Franklin Avenue, Poland School, on Poland & Shirley Avenue, Ohio Works, in the Ohio Works Office and on 25 North Walnut Street. All these sections provided different hours. The capillarity and the wide spectrum of hours offered to Italian women of the community indicate that in 1929 there were Italian female-oriented associations and that Italian women were eager to learn.

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<sup>24</sup> “Corsi di Inglese,” in *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 29 September, 1923.

<sup>25</sup> “The International Institute Y.W.C.A,” *ibid.* 28 September 1929.

On September 22, 1922, the U.S. government issued an act according to which the wives of men who gained the United States' citizenship after 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1922 were considered aliens. Before that date, many Italian men who obtained the citizenship had automatically allowed their wives, who remained in Italy without reaching the United States, to be naturalized. This law, the Married Women's Independent Nationality Act, also known as the Cable Act, forced women, even if married to a naturalized man, to act separately from their husbands to obtain citizenship. On one hand this law, recognized women as immigrants on the other it made immigration, especially for Italian wives, more complex. Italian immigration started in the majority of the cases as temporary and male-oriented. Prior to the act, when the naturalized husbands called their wives, women and children reached the United States and were easily and automatically naturalized. They acquired their husbands' immigration status.

The *Italian-American Citizen* strongly criticized this measure. It judged absurd the fact that, according to this act, women could not acquire their husbands' naturalization but it also stated if an American woman married a foreign man and lived on foreign soil for as much as two years, she lost her citizenship. Furthermore if a woman married a man who did not have the right to become American citizen, for example an Asian, one could not be naturalized until she remained married. The accusations against this law filled many columns of the newspaper:

It was and it is our opinion that in America the study of the laws is faulty, lacking the footings of the Right. In other occasions, facing academically this subject, without aiming to a specific specialist, we must endure, but not undergo, the attacks of persons who know about Right as the subscriber knows about Chinese language. These attacks did not make us change our mind. More time passes and more we remain firm in our position, following the merit of the experimental school, namely drawing knowledge by experience. The specific case that we discuss today is the absurdity of the law concerning the women's citizenship in America. We wish it

could be only one law. This is the same jumble which does not form anything but is the outcome of the person who did them without juridical experience and without the base of Right.<sup>26</sup>

This jumble of laws, which jeopardized the naturalization of wives, meant two important things: women were no more considered a subordinate part of emigration and they, like their men, should study and learn English to ask for citizenship. What did effect had this law on the Mahoning Valley's Italian women? Were they able to reinvent themselves and to become an irreplaceable presence in the community?

Undoubtedly, the Valley had its own Italian "heroines". One of the most important examples was the career of Miss Angelina Carabelli. She was, indeed, the organizer and promoter of the evening schools for women at the Y.W.C.A. Angelina graduated from the South High School of Youngstown and during her studies also attended some courses offered by the high school's Library. After the graduation from high school, she became Italian secretary of the Y.W.C.A, an office that she held for two years. In December 1925, the consular agent in Youngstown, Dr. Attilio Rosapepe, hired Angelina in his office as secretary. After this experience, Angelina won a contest, held in Washington, D.C., to become Assistant Librarian of the Bureau of Entomology in the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In Washington, Angelina Carabelli became Vice-Chairman of the Young Women's Council of the National Woman's Party. She also took active part in the feminist movement, supporting the World Conference for the Codification of International Laws which would not bear any discrimination against women.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> "La Cittadinanza della Donna in America," in *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 1 December 1923.

<sup>27</sup> "Onore al Merito," *ibid.*, 29 May 1926, "Il ritorno in Famiglia per le Vacanze della Signorina Angelina Carabelli," *ibid.*, 11 September 1926. "Miss Angelina J. Carabelli", *ibid.*, 10 May 1930.

Angelina Carabelli was not the only rising star of the Valley. In fact, in 1929, the 21-year-old Gemma Amadio, daughter of Cesare Amadio, director of the foreign department in the Dollar Bank of Struthers, obtained a diploma from Temple University of Philadelphia, a diploma that opened for Gemma the gates of the Women's Medical College, where she would have complete the studies of Medicine. The article in *Il Cittadino* suggested that Mr. Amadio had also the joy of seeing his second daughter who becoming a teacher in the public schools.<sup>28</sup> The Italian newspaper, obviously, highlighted not only their intelligence, that for a woman was not expected, but also the fact that they upheld Italy's good name. Actually, these women succeeded even if they were female and foreign.

For instance, in an article of January 1929, *Il Cittadino* praised the "rising star...educated, beautiful and intelligent" Anna Mastroianni, daughter of the banker Francesco. Anna, who for several years worked as cashier in her father's bank, had the merit of having improved the bank's conditions. Her fervor and commitment gained a particular value. As the article points out, Anna, although educated in America, spoke Italian fluently, and consequently, her presence in the bank was really useful for the Italians of the area, "glad to explain their desires in their own language".<sup>29</sup> Actually, the bilingualism was beneficial also for Angelina Carabelli who in the U.S. Department of Agriculture was a translator from Italian, Latin and Spanish.

Italian daughters of the Mahoning Valley stand out not only for their bilingualism but also for their capacity of reaching the same level as other American students. For example, the fifteen-year-old Maria D'Ovidio, daughter of Lionello D'Ovidio and

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<sup>28</sup> "Italiani che si Fanno Onore," in *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 7 September 1929.

<sup>29</sup> "Anna Mastroianni," *ibid.*, 12 January 1929.

resident at 114 North Lane Avenue, arrived in the United States at the age of seven, won the Lincoln contest and was awarded a medal by the *Telegram*. The pride, openly displayed by *Il Cittadino*, consisted not only in the fact that Maria, attending the third year of high school, won the competition but also because “she reported a literary victory over those that were born in this country (United States) and had more opportunities to learn.”<sup>30</sup>

The same tone is present in another article in the Italian newspaper. In April 1929, five students at East High School of Youngstown won a contest, held in Columbus. Four of these students were Italians and three of them girls: Filomena Zappi, Elena Delli Quadri and Elvira Tartano. This victory was the Italian community of Youngstown was doubly significant because it not only upheld Youngstown’s name but also the concept of *patria*. The comment expressed on this victory was the following, “This is a big victory for our too much despised race. We should thank and congratulate with the four winner kids who will make our enemies bite their nails.”<sup>31</sup>

Youngstown boasted among its Italian daughters not only scholars and students but also a good number of artists in the field of music. In October 1921, an article from the newspaper reminded the Italian community of the Valley that the young Giovannina Maturo, after graduation from high school, was admitted to the Conservatory of Cincinnati, Ohio to become a pianist.<sup>32</sup> In June 1927, Elisabetta Agnone, resident of 38 Lucius Avenue, obtained the most important part in the Festival of Music, held in Toledo, Ohio. Elisabetta just graduated from a conservatory was ready to continue

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<sup>30</sup> “Una Signorina Italian Che Si Fa Onore,” in *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 16 March 1929.

<sup>31</sup> “Studenti Italiani Si Fanno Onore,” *ibid.*, 20 April 1929

<sup>32</sup> “Giovannina Maturo,” *ibid.*, 29 October 1921

specializing in music under the supervision of the Chauncy from the Conservatory of Chicago.<sup>33</sup>

In August 1929, Vera Ragaini, a pianist from Youngstown, successfully performed in New York<sup>34</sup> and, the year after, the pianist Aurora Ragaini, perhaps Vera's sister, obtained a big triumph performing the *Madrigale* by Monteverdi in the Town Hall of New York.<sup>35</sup> In 1930, the contralto Rosa Petrarca, having earlier abandoned singing, resumed and collected a big success thanks to the interpretation of some Spanish songs at WBKN. Once again, patriotism was at the base of the article; in fact *Il Cittadino* wished: "while awarding you, Donna Rosa, we want to recognize Italy which has occupied, occupies and will occupy the first position in the arts and sciences."<sup>36</sup>

Who were Angelina, Maria, Anna, Vera and the others? It is difficult to put these Italian prodigies in the same group as unskilled peasant Italians who reached the Valley at the end of the 1800 and the beginning of the 1900. In fact, they were, undoubtedly, the results of a successful Italian emigration. The careers and the artistic merits of these girls can explain why millions of Italians went across the ocean in search of a better life. At the same time, it is also impossible to affirm that these rising and promising Italian women were not members of the proletariat. They were exponents of the middle-class and of all the values, social and patriotic, related to the ideal of "successful emigrants." From the bourgeois viewpoint it is also possible to explain the presence in the Mahoning Valley of a myriad of female lodges and associations.

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<sup>33</sup> "Una Musicista Italiana di Gran Talento," in *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 18 June 1927.

<sup>34</sup> "I Progressi della Pianista Vera Ragaini," *ibid.*, 24 August 1929

<sup>35</sup> "Il Suo Primo Gran Concerto," *ibid.*, 9 March 1930

<sup>36</sup> "Rosa Petrarca," *ibid.*, 12 July 1930



Mutual-benefit associations had coexisted since the first arrivals of immigrants to the United States and abroad. All Immigrants, not only Italians, once immigrated tried to reproduce the kinship network, which they have left behind in their homelands, creating these associations of *mutuo soccorso*. In Buenos Aires, in New York, or in smaller cities, such as Providence, Buffalo or Youngstown, especially Italians associated among *paesani* in order to respond to primal necessities. In fact, immigrants preferred to create their own forms of insurance rather than buy life insurance offered by the Protestant-controlled insurance companies. The primary aim of every *mutuo soccorso* was to provide money for burials and funerals, or for moment of sickness and unemployment. Therefore the *Landsmanshaft* of Eastern Europe's immigrants as well as the association of friends, relatives and *paesani* of Italians provided burial plots and paid expenses in case of death, illnesses and unemployment.<sup>37</sup>

These types of mutual-aid associations started changing their aims during the 1920s and 1930s, namely when the second generations of immigrants began taking part in the social life of their neighborhood, city or county. This shift is fully recognizable in the Mahoning Valley. In fact, the male as well as the female associations of this area did not pursue the goals of the traditional associations of *mutuo soccorso* but re-shaped these associations as social and philanthropic clubs. Obviously, the children of Italian immigrants, especially those who joined the middle-class, did not need economic support but re-invented themselves as custodians of Italian culture and language and, especially in concomitance with the birth of fascist ideals of nation, as patriots overseas.

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<sup>37</sup> For an overview about the mutual-benefit associations see: Elizabeth Ewen, 112-115, Judith E. Smith, 125-165, Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, 244-247, Samuel L. Baily, 116-119.

Women were particularly able to enter the Valley's social scene with a full slate of this type of initiatives and activities. Between 1920 and 1930, Youngstown assisted at the birth of several female lodges. They were born as an imitation of the male associations, such as the Sons of Italy, or, as in the case of the *Loggia Casa Savoia*, as rib of the male lodge, *Duca degli Abruzzi*, founded in 1907. The Lodge of Casa Savoia was born in April 1920 thanks to the initiative of Rosina Papagno and Concetta Rossi, residents of Youngstown. The aims of this new female society was specifically patriotic, the chose of the name in honor of the Italian monarchy and the motto- *Fede, Patria* and *Armonia*- were proof of the strong sense of belonging to the Italian nation.<sup>38</sup> Youngstown, according to the tone of the articles concerning the birth of this lodge, welcomed this new entity.

*Il Cittadino* opened one of its articles on this lodge with : “an old proverb says that woman has long hair and thin brain, actually this axiom is not always true: in fact, our Italian ladies of Youngstown, inspired by the highest feeling of patriotism, after two reunions demonstrated that they have got beautiful hair and developed brain.”<sup>39</sup> In addition, *Il Cittadino* glossed the article praising the Casa Savoia's ladies because they did what men many times were not able to do.<sup>40</sup> The meaning and the importance of the birth of an Italian women's lodge, as expressed in many articles, was the fact that it could demonstrate to Americans that also Italians had female organizations in their community.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> “Ordine delle Figlie d'Italia,” in *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 27 March 1920-

<sup>39</sup> “Nuova Loggia dell'Ordine Figlie d'Italia,” *ibid.*, 24 April 1920.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>41</sup> “Per le Figlie d'Italia,” *ibid.*, 3 July 1920

The lodge of Casa Savoia triggered a sort of race in the Valley to create Italian women's associations. In December 1921, another branch of the O.F.D.I (Ordine delle Figlie d'Italia) was born after a ceremony held in the social hall of the male lodge of S. Antonio. The name chosen for this new lodge, Porta Pia, reminded their awareness of a patriotic event of the Italian Risorgimento. The Loggia Porta Pia had many elements in common with Casa Savoia but rooted its presence and array of actions in the neighborhood of Brier Hill. At the ceremony of the initiation of the lodge there was also the Worshipful Master of Casa Savoia, Mrs Carabelli. The initiators of the lodge of Porta Pia were two men: Mr. Barile and Mr. Longo.<sup>42</sup>

In 1921, the Valley gained other two Italian female lodges. In April 1921, as many times announced by *Il Cittadino*, in Niles was women of Italian descent founded the Lodge Jolanda di Savoia, named after a member of the Italian royal family. The journalist described this long-awaited association:

Once again a pearl is added to the Big Diadem that the Italians, residents in the United States, build in order to surround the dignified head of our dear Homeland: Italy. Also our good ladies of Niles, like the ladies of many other cities, of this state and of other states, wanted to join the big order that by now, because of the omnipotence given to the number of brothers and sisters overpasses every other order existent in the world.<sup>43</sup>

According to *Il Cittadino*, the ceremony for the birth of the lodge of Niles was magnificent and unforgettable, obviously, full of patriotism and emotions. The organizers of this ceremony, held at the McKinley Memorial, were the Worshipful Master of the Lodge Principessa Jolanda, Mrs. Campana, and her husband, the professor Giuseppe Campana. For this solemn ceremony, the *Maestro* Carmine Ferraro wrote appropriate

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<sup>42</sup> "La Bella Festa d'Iniziazione della Loggia Femminile "Porta Pia," in *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* ,24 December 1921.

<sup>43</sup> "Loggia Jolanda di Savoia," *ibid.*,30 Aprile 1921

songs (*Canzonette*) whose interpreter was the famous contralto, Rosa Petrarca.<sup>44</sup> In September 1921, the city of Girard responded to this local necessity to have female organizations by founding the lodge of Maria Cristina di Savoia. The big banquet, supervised and organized by two committees, took place in the hall of the Broadway Auditorium while the solemn ceremony of the initiation of the lodge took place at the North Avenue School.

Also at the initiation of the Maria Cristina di Savoia there were the inevitable musical bands which played famous Italian songs among the commotion of the *gentil sesso* and the presence of the other female associations of the area and several male lodges, such as the Colaianni, the S. Antonio, the Vittorio Veneto, the Trento and Trieste, Roma Intangibile and the Camillo Benson di Cavour.<sup>45</sup> If these typologies of female lodge referred to the deep desire of Italians far from their homeland to defend and, maybe, recovered their national identity,<sup>46</sup> there were also other female associations which were strongly related to the local parishes and to the religious or catholic sentiments that characterized Italian immigrant women more than men.

In fact from 1927 on, in the Italian neighborhood of Smoky Hollow operated the Mount Carmel Club Girls, strongly assembled with the parish, Our Lady of Mount Carmel. On the other hand, in Brier Hill, there was the Young Ladies of St. Anthony, which had as reference the parish of St. Anthony. The foundation and creation of new Italian societies in the Valley characterized the entire decade, 1920-1930. In addition to

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<sup>44</sup> "La Grande Festa della Loggia Jolanda," in *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 7 Maggio 1921 "I Meritevoli della Gran Festa di Niles," *ibid.*, 7 Maggio 1921.

<sup>45</sup> "Loggia Maria Cristina di Savoia O.F.D'I." *ibid.*, 10 September 1921 and "L'Iniziazione della Loggia Maria Cristina di Savoia (*sic.*)," 1 October 1921.

<sup>46</sup> According to *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* the brave *signore* of these patriotic lodges were able to put just after God the *Patria* (Homeland).

patriotic and religious associations, it is necessary to add the Lodge of Beatrice Cenci in Akron, founded in 1924,<sup>47</sup> the Lodge of the Junior Daughters O.F.D.I., founded in 1925 and born as young counterpart of the Casa Savoia,<sup>48</sup> the lodge Bella Italia in Warren, founded in July 1927,<sup>49</sup> and the Nuova Società Duca degli Abruzzi, born on September 1927 as independent female society from the male counterpart.<sup>50</sup>

What did these associations do? How did they interact in the Valley's social pattern? They were mostly busy with the organization of events of entertainment. For example, the lodge of Casa Savoia, most active between 1921 and 1925, organized one of the most important events of the autumn, namely a big ball usually held in the hall of the Duca degli Abruzzi, in November.<sup>51</sup> The members of Casa Savoia were also interested to the promotion of artistic events. In November 1922, they promoted a concert at which many Italian artists of the area, *maestri*, singers, like Rosa Petrarca and dancers, such as Teresa Giovanelli performed for this successful occasion.<sup>52</sup>

On September 1925, they promoted the production of *Giulietta e Romeo* by the Duse Dramatic Company whose cost was \$ 1.00 and \$ 1.50 for the reserved seats. *Il Cittadino* urged Italians to participate not only to help the Casa Savoia but also “for the sense of *Italianità* which benefits a lot our Colony's prestige towards the foreigners.”<sup>53</sup> Balls and concerts also represented the most important events for the other lodges. Obviously, these affairs were an occasion for Italians in the area to participate to the public life and, as it are possible to understand by the newspaper's comments, to

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<sup>47</sup> “Loggia Beatrice Cenci N. 1167,” in *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 6 September 1924

<sup>48</sup> “La nuova Loggia Femminile Junior Daughters O.F.D.I.,” *ibid.*, 3 January 1925.

<sup>49</sup> “Solenne Iniziazione della Nuova Loggia Femminile “Bella Italia” di Warren, Ohio all’Ordine dei Figli d’Italia,” *ibid.*, 23 July 1927.

<sup>50</sup> “La Nuova Società Femminile Duca degli Abruzzi,” *ibid.*, 17 September 1927.

<sup>51</sup> “Grande Ballo della Loggia Femminile Casa Savoia,” *ibid.*, 16 September 1922.

<sup>52</sup> “Concerto Promosso dalla Loggia Femminile Casa Savoia No.1039 O.F.D’I,” *ibid.*, 4 November 1922.

<sup>53</sup> “Duse Dramatic Company al Park Theatre il 23 Settembre,” *ibid.*, 19 Settembre 1925.

demonstrate to Americans that Italians were not, or were no more, rough and uneducated. Rosa Petrarca, Mrs. Campana, Mrs. Papagna were the symbol of a refine and well-educated Italians who were able to appreciate arts and culture.

These events were also a good opportunity for Italian women of the area, mothers as well as daughters, to have a social life. Women, although excluded from politics and job world, could have relevant positions in these associations, and young girls could build relationships and be vital forces in the public life of their neighborhood. A clear example of this advantage for the members of the association and for the improvement of the community were the series of balls and card parties organized, between 1927 and 1928, by the Mount Carmel Club Girls, under the supervision of Father Vito Franco, in order to collect money for the building of a parish school.

In January 1927, they promoted a card party in the auditorium of the church, Our Lady of Mount Carmel on Summit Avenue. The article about this event announced the games: 500 and Bridge.<sup>54</sup> In November 1927, they promoted two important balls, held in the hall of the society Duca degli Abbruzzi, on 316 Summit Avenue. *Il Cittadino* commented in this way “to both the parties, promoted for a laudable aim of *Italianità*, of humanity and of social progress, we wish a splendid success.”<sup>55</sup> The Mount Carmel Club was also promoter of a recital, in which the youth of Youngstown and the entire community, took part. For instance, in March 1930, in the small theatre attached to the

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<sup>54</sup> “La Card Party del Mt. Carmel Club Girls,” in *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 14 January 1927

<sup>55</sup> The first ball was announced in this way in the article: “There will be a big crowd. This is the first ball of the year and certainly the *gioviette* are anxiously waiting the first entertainment of the year. “Feste Coloniali a Pro della Scuola Parrocchiale Italiana, *ibid.*, “29 October 1927.

church, took part in a production in English, entitled “Bless His Little Heart”, whose aims were moral and educative and its goal was still the construction of the school.<sup>56</sup>

In the Valley there were also female clubs that had as their aim charity and that, for some elements, were reminiscent the characteristics of the traditional mutual-benefit associations. By 1920, a group of outstanding women, Mrs. Montani, Mrs. Rendinel, Mrs. Colucci, Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Marco, collected money for the victims of a terrible earthquake in Italy.<sup>57</sup> In 1929, Mrs. Carmela Rendinell, one of the promoters of the previous collection and wife of a famous area lawyer, gave birth to an Italian Women’s Club. The goal of this club, much like the American temperance movement, was to give aid to the persons who suffered and taught morality.

The ladies belonging to this club, as the newspaper pointed out, thanks to their education and financial resources, could help the wretched mother, the abandoned orphan and “amoral” girls.<sup>58</sup> In December 1930, Mrs. Rendinell and the other pious ladies collected money in occasion with the Holy Christmas. The Italian Women Association<sup>59</sup> had a list of needy Italian families and tried to call the attention of other wealthy Italians of the community. The birth of this association in 1929 and its activity were a sign of the devastating effects of the Great Depression. The commitment of Italian women in the Valley to the construction of a school or in charity, undoubtedly presents a wider scenario

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<sup>56</sup> “Una Recita nel Piccolo Teatro Annesso alla Chiesa Mt. Carnel,” in *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* 15 March 1930.

<sup>57</sup> In the article is not specified which cities were hit by the earthquake but it is possible to conjecture that it referred to the Earthquake which happened in Sicily in 1820. “Una Nobile Iniziativa,” *ibid.*, 9 October 1920.

<sup>58</sup> These are the words used to describe this noble initiative: “How must be pride our Italian Colony – Surely, today it (the Colony) knows that it is not a foreign element that must help our fellows. It is the element of our race that, without propaganda and ostentation, helps the suffering brother.” “Italian Women’s Club,” *ibid.*, 1 June 1929.

<sup>59</sup> The newspaper uses now the name of Italian Women Association but probably it was referring to the Italian Women’s Club of 1929.

and puts Italian women's activities not only in the organization of ball and spaghetti dinner, *spaghetate*.<sup>60</sup>

A demonstration of a more serious commitment of the female lodges was the support to the committee created to collect money to send to the Consul of Massachusetts for the defense of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. The ladies of Casa Savoia were one of the most important contributors to this important cause, often discussed on the columns of *Il Cittadino*. They were able, donating \$ 11.00 , along with the donations from other Italian male lodges – Loggia Operaia of Struthers, Loggia Vittorio Emanuele II of Girard, the Loggia Vittorio Veneto and Loggia Colombo of Youngstown- to send a check for 110.00 \$.<sup>61</sup>

Italian women of the Mahoning Valley did not seem very interested in politics. Although from the columns of the Italian newspaper, there was approbation for the

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<sup>60</sup> One of the most successful spaghetti dinners of the area was organized by the Società Femminile Duca degli Abruzzi in May 1929. The irony of the journalist gave the readers the sense of fun of these events: "Those *brave signore* do not rest and think about what can be useful and at the same time entertaining to their Society. This time, they left the legs rest: dancing too often weakens. It is necessary something reinforcing so that at the next ball we can be in strength. It is necessary to think to the stomach. A good dinner laughing and joking is the best good time." "Una Spaghetata," in *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano* .,4 May 1929. The lodge of Casa Savoia responded in the summer of 1929 with another spaghetti dinner which took place at the Pioneer Pavilion at Mill Creek Park, "Spaghetti Dinner," *ibid.*,13 July 1929.

<sup>61</sup> Pro Sacco e Vanzetti, 14 October 1922. This commitment to the cause of Sacco and Vanzetti is important not only because demonstrates, once again, the solid intervention of Italians in supporting their country fellows but also the link between the most famous Italian anarchists of the United States and Youngstown. In fact, Vanzetti after his return to the United States from Monterrey, where he went in 1917, along with Sacco and other Italian anarchists, in order to avoid the military draft at the burst of the WWI, stayed for several months in Youngstown. Also Sacco seemed stay for a while in Ohio to visit his brother-in-law. Here in Youngstown, with the help and support of another Italian anarchist, Carlo Valdinoci, Vanzetti took the alias of Negrini and was employed in a steel mill, quite possibly the Youngstown Sheet & Tube. In addition, in Youngstown Valdinoci and one of his anarchist mate, Scussel, also workers at the Youngstown Sheet & Tube, started, in 1918-1919, to prepare some anarchist attacks and bombings. In Youngstown, where he was leaving from his return from Mexico, Valdinoci took contacts two alliances, Carlo Lodi and Carlo Rossini, and with the Gruppo Anarchico of Youngstown. In this Anarchist Group, basically composed by the militants of the anarchist leader Galleani, there was a certain Arduino Tremonti who helped his mates to found job in the over-mentioned steel mill. In Youngstown, Valdinoci and his collaborators, among them there was a woman, Gabriella Antolini, organized the Youngstown conspiracy. Paul Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), 105-125.



women of Youngstown that prepared a campaign for the Republican Party,<sup>62</sup> Italian women were not involved or really encouraged to pursue a political commitment and career. Anyway, in April 1920, Mrs. Rose Moriarity was involved in the organization of a Republican Club for women. She hoped to organize these clubs in several states – Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota- for a number of 400 cities.<sup>63</sup> Unfortunately, the newspaper does not report about the outcome of this political project but it is certain that from 1920 until 1927 Italian women did not organize political clubs.

An article of October 1927, reported an important meeting that sixty Italian women had in the hall of the society Duca degli Abbruzzi. The meeting, supervised by the Worship Master of Porta Pia, Noemi Ficocelli, was held in order to support the mayoral candidacy of the Catholic judge, Joe Heffernan. His Catholicism, as highlighted in the article, was more than significant for the support of the Italian community of Youngstown. The Italian women voters, defined by the journalist “one hundred percent Catholics” listened to the discourse of Heffernan’s wife and decided unanimously, after several questions, to support Heffernan’s candidacy. The originality and peculiarity of this event among Italian women is strongly emphasized. In fact this first meeting was defined a happy experiment because saw Italian women, “generally wayward of politics,” for the first time provided with a political consciousness.<sup>64</sup>

How did Italian men react to this women’s independence? Some articles of the Italian newspaper welcomed their participation in the public life and also in political

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<sup>62</sup> In the article the journalist underlined the importance of female example which was considered the triumph of the right functioning of the nation. “Donne Che Si Organizzano,” in *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 7 February 1920.

<sup>63</sup> “Iniziativa Donnesca,” *ibid.*, 10 April 1920.

<sup>64</sup> “Una Importante Riunione delle Donne Cattoliche a Favore della Candidature del Giudice Joe Heffernan a Sindaco della Città di Youngstown,” *ibid.*, 22 October 1927.

involvement. On the other side, some articles, especially the humor page, masked by irony and the derision there was concern about women's emancipation. For example, after the birth of the lodge of Casa Savoia, an article on this page, entitled in the Neapolitan dialect, *Le Società de Femmene* (The Society of Females), the invented protagonist Carmenella, because she became a member of the society, did not have time for the housework and for her husband. Her poor husband was forced to help her at home. In the article, the symbol of women's emancipation is expressed by the sentence: "*Amiche Mie Carissime, dicette Carmenella é tiempe di leveracele sta caspeta e vunnella*" (My dear friends, said Carmenella, it is time to take of this skirt).<sup>65</sup>

In November 1920, another poem on the humor page ridiculed the actual ability of Italian women to vote or to choose the right president, or better the president that their husbands suggested that they support. The poem is a sort of sketch in which two *commari* met at the ballot box for the election of Cox or Harding. They did not remember the name of their candidate because they could not write English and formed a long line because of their confusion. The advice of the writer of this poem was "Iate affa 'a cazetta" (Go sewing the sock).<sup>66</sup> The comment of the Italian newspaper about the possible candidacy in the Republican Party of a woman, Lucy Page Caston, was really male-oriented. In fact, this lady is not described for her political program but for her particular ugliness and for her resemblance to the Befana.<sup>67</sup>

If politics was not a woman's business, what should have women do instead? It seems, from the columns of the *Italian-American Citizen*, that Italian women should acquire all the characteristics of a modern mother and wife. In fact, like it or not, the

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<sup>65</sup> "Le Società de Femmene," in *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 3 July 1920.

<sup>66</sup> "Le Donne Hanno Votato, 6 November 1920 and Iate Affa 'a Cazetta," *ibid.*, 20 November 1920.

<sup>67</sup> "Una Donna Candidata alla Presidenza," *ibid.*, 17 January 1920.

times changed and Italian women started not only obtaining an enviable culture but also independence. In addition, as Virginia Yans-McLaughlin shows, during the more prosperous 1920s, a working wife or daughter did not present a sort of menace for men and for their Italian masculinity because they found themselves in more secure positions.<sup>68</sup>

The cultural shift that occurred in Buffalo also happened in Youngstown. Firstly, it is important to underline that Italian women were no longer those who did not speak English and who were illiterate in their own language. Women formed a significant portion of the audience of the Italian newspaper: proof was the birth of a column, *La Pagina delle Signore* (Ladies' page), completely dedicated to them on which there were spot advertisement targeted at ladies and the serial publication of romantic novels, such as *Il Padrone delle Ferriere* (The Owner of the Iron Mill). It is in the columns dedicated to women that is possible to discern which were the American dictates for Italian women.

*Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, for instance, instructed Italian women on procedures for safe, and sanitary pregnancy and childbirth. The newspaper suggested, in the section entitled *Per la Cura della Salute delle Madri e dei Loro Bambini* (For the care of the health of the mothers and of their children), to get rest after the delivery, explaining that fatigue and stress jeopardized the health conditions of babies. These articles tried to teach that housework was not indicated before the delivery and that a woman who was going to give birth should be helped and supported. The newspaper encouraged expectant mothers to buy a dowry for the baby; it meticulously indicated how many pairs of dresses, slips and napkins were necessary. In cases of illnesses of the babies, the newspaper

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<sup>68</sup> Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, *Family and Community*, 242.

encouraged mother to call immediately the physician. It recommended a brand of milk, Borden's Eagle milk, which was important for the healthy growth of the children.<sup>69</sup>

The prevention of some Italian traditional ways of raising children was also clear. The newspaper suggested to avoid feeding the babies too much and to take care of the babies' teeth and of their weight. The advertisement and the columns of the newspaper were not only aimed at Italian women as mothers but also to Italian women as modern housewives and attractive ladies. Advice on fashion, diet and utilities for the houses filled the newspaper.

Once the children grew up, according to the newspaper, the mothers should send them to kindergarden. Here, the newspaper explains, children learn how to be neat and act appropriately, taking examples from their classmates. In addition, children can have the opportunity to stay with other children, in fact "children want always stay in company as the little birds." In this way, mothers could have more time to dedicate to the housework and they were not forced to send their children to play on the streets, which were dangerous for them.<sup>70</sup> These were big changes for all mothers who, in Italy, were accustomed to taking their babies with them in the country or left them alone or with the supervision of the older brothers and sisters, namely children of eight or nine.

Over time, the concept of housewife also changed. The comforts of an urban life and the development of the technology in the domestic field not only freed women from heavy and unbearable work but presented the idea of traditional housewife as wrong and passé. New ways of life entered Italian women's houses throughout advertisement. For instance, the East Ohio Gas Company in order to catch Italian women's attention showed

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<sup>69</sup> "Per la Cura della Salute delle Madri e dei Loro Bambini," in *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 20 January 1923 and 27 January 1923.

<sup>70</sup> "Mandate i Vostri Figli all' Asilo Infantile," *ibid.*, 15 October 1921.

two images, one in which a woman and her small daughter carried heavy blocks of wood and one in which, thanks to the presence in the living room, of a gas fireplace, mother and daughter comfortably lay down on the sofa enjoyed the heat of their fireplace. The company advertised the gas fireplace as a very comfortable system for the modern housewife.<sup>71</sup>

In another advertisement the Myers Laundry & Dry Cleaning Company, located at 647 Market Street, invited women to use the laundry because “the idea of the modern woman is to do at home everything except for rude works. She (woman) is too much busy for her family.”<sup>72</sup> The columns also tried to give examples and advice on how a modern woman should dressed. An article, entitled “The Female Fashion,” openly suggested Italian women to abandon black as the color of their dresses and put on lighter dresses in a wider spectrum of colors, such as sky-blue, silver, and lilac. It also suggested using more comfortable fabrics, such as linen, silk and satin.

The newspaper presented as benefit of this new type of clothing the lightness and the freshness, especially appropriate for summer. The change from a black dress to colorful, to laces, decorations and light foulards was not so easy for Italian women. In fact, the words of the newspaper tried to be convincing:

The strong inclination to dress in black resists among many women during the summer, which is already among us. If it is laudable to choose a dress not only for its elegance but also for its endurance the women will understand that dressing always in black it is like dressing a uniform. If its is allowed to spend something more for the clothing, it is in the summer because it is impossible to resist to the seductions of fresh linen dresses....embroidered in living tones, from the “taffetas glace” to the light and brilliant organdies...<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> “Meraviglia della Comodità Moderna,” in *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 13 April 1929

<sup>72</sup> “Nuova Idea per le Donne,” *ibid.*, 27 March 1920.

<sup>73</sup> “La Moda Femminile,” *ibid.*, 1 October 1921.

Modern women, women of 1920s, should spend more for their dresses but also on their beauty. Articles against the excessive slimness, imposed by the fashion of the 1920s, demonstrated how Italian women, especially girls, were receptive about the care of the body and the concept of beauty. The advertisement of the Venetian Beauty Salon, located at 116 East Federal, opened the sentence: “Our fine Italian ladies are not back in respect to the other races (*sic.*) both for fashion and for all the cares necessary for the *bel sesso* (the beautiful gender).” At the Venetian Salon, Italian women could find super-modern machines for the permanent wave<sup>74</sup> and for the loss of weight.

The Italian-American woman had a completely different life in respect to the women left behind. In Italy, in the 1920s, except for very rich ladies or few exponents of the middle-class, women went to the lake or to the public fountains to wash their dresses; they did not know what a hairdresser was and, sometimes, did not have the shampoo. Obviously, it is impossible to generalize, but, generally, Italian women of the 1920s, once married, did not put so much stress on their appearance, the society did not require this for a married woman.

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<sup>74</sup> In the article, written in Italian, the term permanent wave was not translated because, obviously, there was not at that time the Italian word for this technology that is *permanente*. “Venetian Beauty Salon,” in *Il Cittadino Italo-Americano*, 22 June 1929.

## Conclusion

Many times, during the writing of this thesis, as a modern Italian immigrant woman to the United States, I was surprised by the strength of will that the women protagonists of my project, showed under the difficult circumstances of emigration and of their adaptation to a foreign environment, such as the Mahoning Valley. Many times, I wondered what would have happened to these women if they did not emigrate. Could they have had the same opportunities in Italy? Could they have had the chance of studying, working, or simply, learning writing and speaking? I know that it is impossible and maybe incorrect trying to reconstruct historical events but a quick glance at the “history which never happened” can give the reader an idea of the deep differences that characterized Italian immigrants and the left behind.

In this thesis, especially in the third chapter, emerged a description of Italian women and girls who not only took care of family members, houses and managed incomes, but who also reached higher positions in white-collar world: sales clerks, secretaries, teachers and doctors. While they were trying to find their Promised Land in the United States, in big metropolises as well as at the shadow of Youngstown’s steel mills, what was happening to their cousins, to their godmothers, to their friends in Italy, between 1880 and 1930? Italian women in the United States, as I have explained, passed through a slow and difficult path towards the emancipation and independence. The tools of this emancipation were education and entrance in the job world.

The Italian women left behind had a completely different experience: the right and the possibility to study was for them, as for men belonging to the lower classes, a mirage and the employment open to them was scarce and unskilled. After the Unification

of Italy (1861), the newborn Italian Kingdom could not handle the difficulties coming from the regionalism and the fragmentation of the peninsula, but also the most important social plague: illiteracy. In fact, in 1861, 74 % of men and 84% of women were illiterate. The illiteracy reached the apex in the South of Italy, reaching the 95 %. This was the situation Italy was trying to face and, hopefully, to solve at the end of the nineteenth century. Women, as the data shows, were the first to pay the consequences of a weak instructional system.

The Casati law, issued in 1859 in the Kingdom of Sardinia and then adopted in 1861 on the Italian peninsula, imposed mandatory attendance in elementary schools until the second grade. Some years later, the Coppini law (1877), raised the attendance of the elementary schools to the third year. The problem was that these laws did not indicate punishments for the non-fulfillment; consequently, these regulations were generally disregarded. In 1923, the Gentile Reform tried to improve the general conditions of the school-system but it focused on high schools and universities, revealing the elite concept of education, according to which only members of wealthy families could and had the right to study.

During WWI, similar to what happened in the United States, women replaced men in the job-world but this was only a short parenthesis dictated by contingent necessity. The slow path towards emancipation, characterized by the Sacchi law (1919), which allowed women to perform, like men, every type of employment, was completely demolished by Fascism and its ideology based on virility. The race toward demographic growth, symbol of strength and of *italianita'*, considered women only as wives and



mothers. According to fascist propaganda, women, intellectually inferior to men, were useful for the nation at home and not at work.

Work was considered dangerous for women for two important reasons: it made women, men, and it was a menace for male employment. Fascist laws reduced to 10 % the hiring of women in the public and private employment and, in order to discourage the entrance of women in the high school and in the universities raised the fees for women students. Emancipation for women in the United States was not easy and episodes of male chauvinism, in the public as well as in private sphere, occurred. On the other hand, American women could study and learn writing and reading. When the men called their families, all the components of the nucleus undertook a process of integration into the new society that inevitably forced them to acquire new ways of life and to abandon some aspects of their culture.

Is not this the real Italian diaspora? The Italian diaspora, in fact, had some characteristic elements that I hope will be put into account in the next studies and research about history of Italian emigration. I think that future historians of Italian emigration should open the way for what Gabaccia defined a trans-national history. This means that Italian historians of emigration should abolish the unilateral idea according to which Italian immigrants were only peasants and Southerners, and, American historians of emigration should integrate into the history of emigration to elements of Italian history. In fact, I am convinced that it is impossible to explain the exodus of the Italian immigration to the America without present its protagonists' historical and cultural background.

Another big step in the study of the Italian diaspora is to consider what the consequences of emigration on those left behind were. How did Italians react to the transformations of their Italian-American relatives and friends? How did Italians who came back home reshape and contributed to change the culture of their villages? Between 1870 and 1970, 27 millions of Italians left their homeland. Currently in the United States 16,000 of persons have Italian origins. What this data can reveal about emigration? These are all important starting points for a history of emigration that, after reviewing the previous research on assimilation and adaptation, should surpassed their own limitation and find a common ground in trans-national studies. A new type of research capable of using the contributions of the ethnic studies and of women's studies will raise many other questions and intellectual debates but also many other viewpoints.

Nowadays, Italy has transformed itself from a country of emigrants into a country of immigration. Italy became *l'America* for many Africans and people coming from Eastern European countries and for the regions of the Balkans. In addition, in the last decades Italy has experienced a species of modern emigration, whose protagonists are professors, students or researchers; this type of emigration, to which I modestly belong, is called *La Fuga Dei Cervelli (Brain drain)*. These current events should push Italian historians to write about what we were so that we can understand what we currently are and what we are going to be in the future.

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