

**Sixth European Social Science History Conference  
Amsterdam, 22 – 25 March 2006**

**Raffaella Sarti**

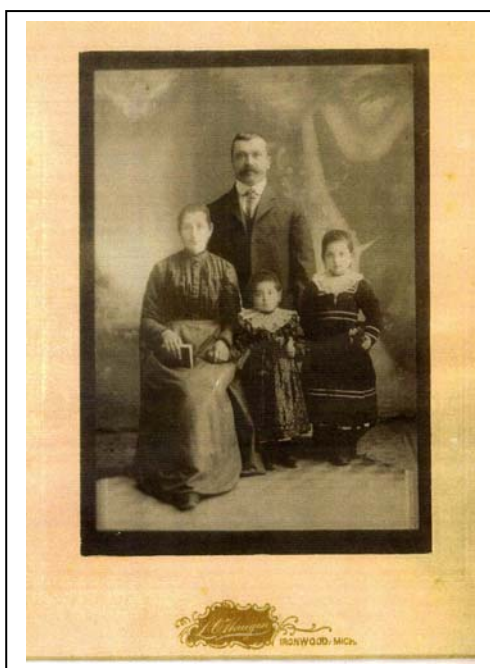
(Università di Urbino, Italy – CRH-EHESS, Paris, France)<sup>1</sup>

**Family ties over borders:  
international families of slaves and migrant domestic workers  
Past and present in a comparative perspective**

**Draft**

**Please do not quote without the author's permission**

**1. Being a united family across the Atlantic**



This picture was taken at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (possibly in 1906) and shows my great-grandfather, my great-grandmother, my grandmother (the elder child, born in 1900) and her sister<sup>2</sup>. As stated in the writing below the image, the photograph was taken by L. O. Hauger, a photographer from Ironwood (Michigan). A 1912 city directory of Ironwood still mentions an Oscar Hauger, photographer<sup>3</sup>. Yet my great-grandmother and her daughters had not moved from their

---

<sup>1</sup> E-mail: [r.sarti@uniurb.it](mailto:r.sarti@uniurb.it).

<sup>2</sup> The original photo is kept by my aunt Fulvia Berrera, who lives in Bressanone/Brixen, Italy.

<sup>3</sup> [Http://mattsonworks.com/1912\\_IronwoodH.html](http://mattsonworks.com/1912_IronwoodH.html) (“HAUGEN, OSCAR --- Photographer, 108 S Lowell, res 217 E Ayer”).

village in the Italian Alps<sup>4</sup> at that time, nor did they move so far away later in their lives<sup>5</sup>. The only family member who went to the US was my great-grandfather, Cesare Andreis, who worked some years there as a miner<sup>6</sup>. Indeed, if one looks carefully at the photo, it is clear that it is a photo montage. Through this photographic technique, at that time relatively new, a family of migrants like that of my great-grandparents re-constructed a unity which had been split by migration: the technique allowed them to put in touch, so to say, the two borders of the Atlantic, to stitch up the wound caused by migration and to produce a representation of their family as a united group: clearly a highly important operation from the symbolic and psychological point of view.

## 2. I am here, but I am there<sup>7</sup>

As Rachel Parreñas writes, quoting Glick-Schiller, “in this age of globalization, migrants no longer inhabit an enclosed space, as their daily practices are situated simultaneously in both sending and receiving communities of migration (...) As such, they can now be conceived of as ‘transmigrants’ meaning ‘immigrants whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationships to more than one nation-state’ (Glick-Schiller et al., 1995: 48). This category moves us beyond the long-standing binary construction of settlement in migration studies that is split between migrants (temporary settlers) and immigrants (permanent settlers)”<sup>8</sup>.

Modern techniques – telephones, e-mails, chat-lines, webcams, satellite TVs, etc. – are indeed crucial to allow someone to carry on with their daily life whilst being simultaneously part of both sending and receiving communities of migration. As shown by the picture of my great-grandparents’ family, migrants (or at least some of them<sup>9</sup>) were quick to understand the potential of modern techniques. In this paper, however, I will argue that family members were able to keep in touch and sometimes even to follow the daily life of their kin far away even in the past with far less developed technical support.

I don’t want to state, obviously, that there is no difference between the past and the present, but only to show that channels of communication which allowed people to know what happened to their kin far away and to influence their decision and their lives did exist. While sociologists and social

---

<sup>4</sup> At that time the village (Bozzana, in Trentino) was under Austrian rule. It would become part of Italy after the First World War.

<sup>5</sup> My grandmother, Alessandra Andreis, would move to Bressanone-Brixen, Italy, in the 1930s. Her mother and sister remained in their village all their lives.

<sup>6</sup> Many inhabitants listed in the 1912 directory were miners, too. Ironwood, indeed, is located in the Gogebic Mineral Range. “The iron mines in this range were among the deepest underground iron mines developed in the country. In 1906 the Norrie mine was considered the greatest iron mine in the world. The last operation, the Peterson mine, closed in 1967”, see [http://mattsonworks.com/index.html?row1col2=1888\\_Mining\\_companies.html](http://mattsonworks.com/index.html?row1col2=1888_Mining_companies.html).

<sup>7</sup> Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, Ernestine Avila, “‘I am here, but I’m there. The meanings of Latino Transnational Motherhood’”, *Gender and Society*, XI, 1997, pp. 548-571; Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Doméstica. Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence*, Berkeley, Lo Angeles, London, university of California Press, 2001, pp. 22-27.

<sup>8</sup> Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization. Women, Migration and Domestic Work*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2001, p. 28, quoting Nina Glick-Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Szanton-Blanc, “From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration”, *Anthropological Quarterly*, 68, 1995, 48-63.

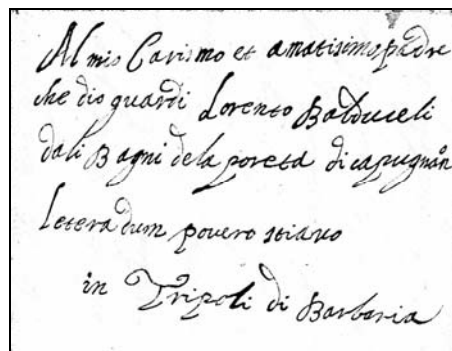
<sup>9</sup> I know of only one other similar photo montage, that owned by the family of Vincent Plescia. The Plescia family migrated from Sicily to Chicago. I am grateful to Vincent Plescia for the information. It would be interesting to know whether the use of this kind of photo montages was common (I am not an historian of migrations, but for the moment I have not found studies on this kind of photo montages).

scientists may emphasise the novelty of the present (and may be very surprised by the content of this and other papers presented in our sessions on international families), historians are conscious that in the past there were members of the same family who lived in different countries and were able to stay in touch. Yet with my paper I would like to contribute to widening the historical knowledge of these people and their cultural role, focusing precisely on their ability to stay in contact with their relatives over the border. Clearly, this does not mean that they were always able to do so (or interested in doing so).

It might be an exaggeration to say that in early modern times they were “really trans-national”; yet it also would be an exaggeration to argue that there was nothing similar to trans-national families.

### 3. “To my dearest and most loved father”

Extraordinary letters addressed to relatives and friends by Roman legionnaires stationed in the remotest parts of the Roman Empire have survived, and this gives us an idea of how emotions and information could be communicated over space such a long time ago<sup>10</sup>. The letters I am going to analyse are not as old but similarly extraordinary, I think.



“To my dearest and most loved father whom God protect Lorenzo Balduceli from the Bagni dela Poretta di Capugnano letter by a poor slave in Tripoli, in the land of the Berbers”. This is the address on a letter sent on 11<sup>th</sup> October 1674 to his father by Pietro Balducelli, who at that time, as explained in the address, was a slave in Libya.

In 1671, Pietro had left his village, Bagni della Porretta, on the mountains of peninsular Italy (Apennines) in search of fortune. He had settled in Livorno (in Tuscany) where he had worked as a tailor for a while. Thereafter he had enlisted on a Tuscan war ship and had taken part in several enterprises against the Muslims, being eventually captured and enslaved. In the letter he sent to his father, he informed him of his disgrace: “my [dear]est father hello, I am informing you with this letter of my disgrace” (“[Cari]simo mio padre Salve vengo con questo ad avisarvi dela mia disgratia”). He was a slave in Tripoli, “in the hands of these dogs, with great sufferings, and beating and little food” (“nele mani di questi cani con travaglio grande e bastonate e poco da mangiare”), and explained that, were a ransom to be paid, he could be freed. Pietro described his sufferings and added that only the hope of being freed stopped him from committing suicide. He asked his father to forgive him if he had caused him sorrow, added pleas for help addressed to his wife, children, mother, father in law and many others from his village, as well as a particular plea to the priest to pray for him, that God might give him the patience to bear all that suffering. He also explained to

<sup>10</sup> See for instance the case of the Vindolanda tablets, about 2,000 items (many are letters) of Roman writings discovered while excavations were being carried out at Vindolanda (Chesterholm) at Hadrian’s Wall on the English-Scottish border, see <http://vindolanda.csad.ox.ac.uk/tablets/index.shtml>; [http://www.romans-in-britain.org.uk/ar1\\_vindolanda\\_tablets.htm](http://www.romans-in-britain.org.uk/ar1_vindolanda_tablets.htm)

his father that he could write back to him through a Jew called Salomone (with no further detail on him)<sup>11</sup>. It may seem incredible but this letter actually arrived and about 14 months later Pietro was back home<sup>12</sup>.

I don't want to overemphasise the opportunity, for Christians enslaved by Muslims in early modern times, to be in touch with their families. In his letter, Pietro mentioned that he had already written twice to his father and seemingly these letters had not arrived. Yet of the 45 people from the Bolognese area who, it seems, were enslaved by the Muslims between the 1630s and the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, at least 21 were freed after the payment of a ransom. This does not mean that all of them were in touch with their families: in early modern times there were religious orders (such as the Trinitaries<sup>13</sup> and the Mercedarians<sup>14</sup>) and brotherhoods which collected money to ransom Christians enslaved by the Muslims (such as the Bolognese Brotherhood of Santa Maria della Neve), and this mainly to prevent them from converting to Islam. Yet many, at least in the cases I have analysed, were able to be in touch (also) with their families<sup>15</sup>.

Letters similar to the one I have briefly described here can be found in the archives of those religious orders or brotherhoods. There is no doubt that the chance of being in touch with one's family, friends or co-religionists, to be ransomed and to go back home is a major difference between Mediterranean and Atlantic slaveries. In fact, in some cases it was precisely the slaves' masters who encouraged them to get in touch with their families in order to get a ransom.

Being in touch with one's family was obviously no guarantee of redemption from slavery. From this point of view, the case of the Bolognese nobleman Andrea Casali is particularly telling. According to an official version, he was killed in 1604 during the siege of Ostende. Yet a slave from Algiers always maintained that he was the nobleman: according to his version, in Ostende he had been blessed (by another Bolognese) and abandoned on the battlefield. The enemies had then captured him and imprisoned him for five years. Thereafter he had been captured, so he told, by the Muslims while he was travelling back to Italy on a ship. In spite of several letters he sent to the Casali family and the fact that a famous painter such as Guido Reni recognised a portrait of him, the Casalis (who were the heirs of Andrea's large fortune) never recognised the slave as their kin. In 1634, after 25 years in slavery, the mysterious man from Algiers was redeemed by the Mercedarians but when he arrived in Italy he was condemned as an impostor and imprisoned. He died in prison in 1639. It seems likely that he really was Andrea Casali<sup>16</sup>.

---

<sup>11</sup> Bologna State Archives, Italy, *Opera del Riscatto*, b. 19, Rinfuse, f. 4, *Lettere di diversi soggetti Scritte a Signori Priori della Compagnia ed Opera del Riscatto di diversi Anni*, Letter from Tripoli by Pietro Balducelli to his father Lorenzo, 11th October 1674. See also *Nel riscatto di Pietro Balducelli Bolognese...*, Bologna, Giacomo Monti, 1676, pp. 4-5, 8.

<sup>12</sup> *Nel riscatto di Pietro Balducelli*, p. 8 (one third of the ransom was paid by the father of Pietro, the rest by the Bolognese Brotherhood of Santa Maria della Neve); Raffaella Sarti, "Bolognesi schiavi dei 'Turchi' e schiavi 'turchi' a Bologna tra Cinque e Settecento: alterità etnico-religiosa e riduzione in schiavitù", *Quaderni storici*, XXXVI, 2001, n. 107, pp. 437-473.

<sup>13</sup> For information on this order see the entry in the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15045d.htm>.

<sup>14</sup> For information on this order see the entry in the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10197b.htm>.

<sup>15</sup> Sarti, "Bolognesi schiavi dei 'Turchi'".

<sup>16</sup> Gian Paolo Brizzi, *ad vocem*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 21, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1978, with further references.

#### 4. Lucia “the Moor”

As I mentioned, Christians were particularly worried by the possibility that their enslaved co-religionists would convert to Islam, losing, in this way, their soul for all eternity. In fact, Christians converting to Islam were not uncommon, particularly in the 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, not least because enslaved Christians who converted to Islam were freed (this was not always the case with Muslims who were slaves in Europe and converted to the Christian faith)<sup>17</sup>. Since the world of the cross and that of the half moon were represented as two highly opposite and conflicting worlds<sup>18</sup>, one would imagine that Christians who left their religion and became “Turks”, to use the language of the time, inevitably ceased to have any contact with their families on the other side of the Mediterranean. In fact, this was not always the case. Several cases of “renegades” in touch with their Christian families have been found, for instance, by Giuliana Boccadamo in her research on Naples<sup>19</sup>, but the most striking story is probably that of a man studied by Giovanni Ricci. His Muslim name was Mami; we don’t know his original Christian name.

Mami was born in Ariano, a little and poor village near Ferrara, in the Po valley, and had enlisted as a sailor boy on Venetian ships. Shortly after 1600 he was captured by the Muslims and brought to Tunis, where he converted to Islam. In Tunisia he made a career as a shipowner and, as such, he also benefited from piracy, even owning Christian slaves, sometimes people born in the same area where he, too, had been born. Furthermore, he also held an important public office as lieutenant (*kahya*) of the *dey* of Tunis. Surprisingly, his Christian relatives visited him in Tunis: his brother-in-law (his sister’s husband), who was a sailor, was quite often his guest. Once, even his mother, a poor peasant from Ariano, visited him and went back home with huge gifts and merchandise to sell. After her journey to Tunis, she became known in her little village as “Lucia the Moor”!<sup>20</sup> Some converted people from Capri (Naples), such as, for instance, Amato di Capra, who lived in Tunis, even sent money back home to their families<sup>21</sup>.

In other words, these people did not cease their contacts with their relatives after their conversion to Islam; nor – in some cases – did they cease to manage their interests back home: another man from Ariano, Francesco Guicciardo *alias* Ali, went to the French Consulate to make a donation to his sister of all the possessions he had inherited or was to inherit from his father and mother. Other converted Christians, too, are known to have made notary acts at the French consulate<sup>22</sup>: both interests and emotions were likely to climb over the boundaries between the Christian and the Muslim worlds.

#### 5. Muslim slaves

It is generally assumed that it was more difficult for Muslims enslaved in Christian countries to keep in touch with their families back home than for Christians enslaved in the Ottoman empire or

---

<sup>17</sup> Bartolomé and Lucile Bennassar, *Les Chrétiens d’Allah: l’histoire extraordinaire des renégats, 16.-17. siècles*, Paris, Perrin, 2001 (ed. or. 1989); Lucia Rostagno, *Mi faccio turco: esperienze ed immagini nell’Italia moderna*, Roma, Istituto per l’Oriente C. A. Nallino, 1983; Lucetta Scaraffia, *Rinnegati: per una storia dell’identità occidentale*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1993.

<sup>18</sup> In fact many millions of Christians lived under the Ottoman rule.

<sup>19</sup> Giuliana Boccadamo, “Schiavi e rinnegati capresi fra Barberia e Levante”, in *Capri e l’Islam. Studi su Capri, il Mediterraneo, l’Oriente*, Napoli, Conchiglia, 2000, pp. 193-247 (in part. 224 ff).

<sup>20</sup> Gianni Ricci, *Ossessione turca. In una retrovia cristiana dell’Europa moderna*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2002, pp. 90 ff.

<sup>21</sup> Boccadamo, “Schiavi e rinnegati”, p. 26.

<sup>22</sup> Ricci, *Ossessione turca*, pp. 90-91.

in the North-African kingdoms. This does not mean, however, that it was impossible: walking through Marseille in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Italian general Luigi Ferdinando Marsili, once bumped into a poor slave from a French galley and: surprise! he was a cousin of his former master's when he had been a slave in Bosnia. Each evening, the now enslaved Bosnian had been in charge of tying Marsili's chains to a pole. The two men embraced each other and the Bosnian told Marsili that his wife, too, had been enslaved but by then was free and was in Algiers (thus the Bosnian was in touch with her). Marsili promised to help him and in fact was able (so at least he writes) to obtain from the French King the Bosnian's freedom. Once freed, the Bosnian went to Algiers and to express his gratitude to Marsili, sent him a small sack of dates and a precious handkerchief<sup>23</sup>.

## 6. "Open" families

Having a foreign slave among one's servants meant not only having a captured enemy in one's home, but also breaking the unity of one's family as far as its national and cultural identity were concerned. In other words, not only did the families of the slaves become international because one of their members became a slave in a land far away, the families which owned these slaves became international, too, because they included foreign people (in early modern times servants and slaves were considered members of their masters' families).

In fact, it was not only the presence of slaves that had these consequences. For centuries, upper class families all around Europe hired foreign governesses and tutors to guarantee a good education to their children, and, in many countries, French cooks, to have their meals prepared according to the rules of the French highly fashionable cuisine<sup>24</sup>.

The presence of foreign domestics, particularly governesses, even provoked protests in several contexts (as distant as 18<sup>th</sup>-century Germany and 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Turkey), because of the influence of these foreign women on the national identity of the children they were in charge of raising. In 18<sup>th</sup>-century Germany, for instance, families hired a French governess to teach French to their children, but at the same time there were complaints. As early as 1698 the Pietist German author August Hermann Francke, for instance, accused the French governesses of encouraging vanity of the young, teaching them to *plaire au monde* and transmitting to them only a superficial culture. Criticism against them grew as long as German nationalism developed and complaints multiplied that children educated by French governesses were not able to write or even speak German correctly, that they lost their "original" German character and so on<sup>25</sup>.

Actually, even today Filipina domestic workers are likely to be chosen because of their good knowledge of English, which they are expected to teach the children<sup>26</sup>.

---

<sup>23</sup> Luigi Ferdinando Marsigli, *Ragguaglio della schiavitù di Luigi Ferdinando Conte Marsigli*, in Emilio Lovarini (ed.), *La schiavitù del generale Marsigli sotto i Tartari e i turchi da lui stesso narrata*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1931, pp. 90-91; Sarti, "Bolognesi schiavi dei 'Turchi' e schiavi 'Turchi' a Bologna", pp. 448-449.

<sup>24</sup> Irene Hardach-Pinke, *Die Gouvernante. Geschichte eines Frauenberufs*, Frankfurt a. M. - New York, Campus, 1993; Barbara Petzen, "Governesses in the Ottoman Empire and Egypt in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries", paper presented at the seminar *Domestic Service and Mobility: Labour, Livelihood and Lifestyles*, Amsterdam, 5-7<sup>th</sup> February 2001; Barbara Petzen, "Matmazels' nell'harem. Le governanti europee nell'Impero ottomano", *Genesis. Rivista della Società Italiana delle Storie*, I, 2002, pp. 61-84. On the fashion for French cooks in England see for instance Jean Joseph Hecht, *The Domestic Servant in Eighteenth Century England*, London - Boston, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980 (1956<sup>1</sup>), pp. 43-44.

<sup>25</sup> Hardach-Pinke, *Die Gouvernante*, pp. 106-115.

<sup>26</sup> R. Skeldon, *Emigration Pressure and Structural Change in Southeast and East Asia. A Synthesis*, Report prepared under UNDP Technical Support Services 1, ILO East Asia Multidisciplinary Advisory Team (ILO/EASMAT), ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok, July 1997 [<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/asro/bang->

In other words, because of the presence of foreign domestic workers, households became/become “internationalised”: they became/become like a frontier where different people kept/keep in touch. Focusing on this issue allows us to question from quite an unusual point of view the idea of the family as a private and closed sphere and to suggest that the presence of foreign domestic workers made/makes the employers’ households quite an “open” field, where exchanges and conflicts between cultures took/take place. At the same time, because of the migration of some members, even the domestic worker’s family left at home might/may turn out to be quite “open” to the penetration of money, objects and ideas “arriving” from the countries where the migrant member was/is employed<sup>27</sup>.

---

[kok/paper/se\\_asia.htm](#)]; Jacqueline Andall, *Gender, Migration and Domestic Service: The Politics of Black Women in Italy*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2000, p. 169; V. Chell-Robinson, “Female Migrants in Italy: Coping in a Country of New Immigration”, in Flora Anthias & G. Lazaridis (eds.), *Gender and Migration in Southern Europe. Women on the Move*, New York, Berg, 2000, pp. 103-123; Margaret Magat, “Women Breadwinners in the Margins: Filipina Domestic Workers in Rome, Italy”, in Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux (ed.), *Domestic Service and the Formation of European Identity. Understanding the Globalization of Domestic Work, 16<sup>th</sup> - 21<sup>st</sup> centuries*, Bern - Berlin - etc., Peter Lang, 2004, pp. 351-368, etc.

<sup>27</sup> Raffaella Sarti, “Conclusion. Domestic Service and European Identity”, in Suzy Pasleau and Isabelle Schopp (eds.), with Raffaella Sarti, *Proceedings of the Servant Project*, vol. 5, Liège, Éditions de l’Université de Liège, forthcoming; Raffaella Sarti and Patrizia del Piano (eds.), *Servants, Domestic Workers and Children*, special issue of *Paedagogica Historica*, forthcoming; Raffaella Sarti, “Wet-nurses, nannies and governesses at the crossroad between cultures, classes and countries”, paper presented at the conference “Migration and Domestic Work in Global Perspective”, The Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies, Wassenaar, 26-29 May 2005 ([http://www.nias.knaw.nl/en/news\\_forthcoming\\_activities/lutz/new\\_10/C%3A%5CDocuments+and+Settings%5Cuser%5CMy+Documents%5Csarti.pdf](http://www.nias.knaw.nl/en/news_forthcoming_activities/lutz/new_10/C%3A%5CDocuments+and+Settings%5Cuser%5CMy+Documents%5Csarti.pdf)).