

## RETHINKING FOLKLORE AS ECONOMICAL PATTERN: OVERVIEW OF SUSTAINABLE, CREATIVE AND POPULAR STRATEGIES IN ITALIAN DOMESTIC LIFE

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**Abstract:** The way in which folklorists study their “scientific subject”, that is the creativity and the rich ways people attach meanings to their existence, has often been considered to be static and decontextualized. An interest in popular culture for propaganda purposes is associated with past regimes. Therefore, the notion of “folklore” still carries contradictory meanings and connotations. The author starts from a debate prompted in Italy by Alberto M. Cirese: in recent decades, Italian “native” ethnology has focused on endangered village traditions rather than opening itself up to new instances of cultural change. The main risk was misrepresenting the methodology proposed by Antonio Gramsci in 1929. Today Italian research into folklore places the subject of “folklore” in its broadest context, investigating developments in society associated with the shift from a peasant to an industrial society, and embarking on additional research domains through transnational cultures. This research draws on the growing interest in cultural heritage in the public sphere, and, simultaneously, draws on recent advances in the study of uses of culture and memory. The paper studies two aspects of daily life: pure yarn handmade clothes and ornaments, and long-life tomato sauce. The study concludes that contemporary everyday folklore takes on many free and unofficial forms that call for a renewed approach. To evaluate the multiplicity of folklore meanings and their capacity to integrate interactions between the traditional and the contemporary in specific contexts, the author explores the practicality of a new idea of folklore as sustainable, popular, domestic creativity using material and immaterial goods. This idea implies a rethink of the concept of heritage and of the complexity of its increasingly official, bombastic and rhetorical manifestations.

**Keywords:** folklore; creativity; sustainability; heritage.

### ***Material culture: An eccentric subject and a provocative intra-disciplinary debate***

Since we no longer talk of “uses and costumes”, is there a certain embarrassment associated with debating the use of the “concept of *folklore*” when exploring the contemporary “routine and ethical behaviours”? Not if we exclude value judgments and compare the different semantics concerning the folklore. Traditional and popular culture always establish a fruitful relationship with the technological and global world (Bausinger, 2005). Folklore does not disappear as consequence of technological and economical dynamics, because it constantly rebuilds itself around the cultural process of modernization. “Modernity” involves the expansion of horizons at the existential, spatial, temporal and social levels.

The classic model of folklore fences off a substantial section of folklore within the village dimension, oral transmission and social status of the agents. These boundaries dissolve through modernisation, leaving two factors at work: firstly, the *cultural creation* from this increased availability of resources that moulds and shapes many different worlds; secondly, the mechanisms of *proximity* and *domestication*, because the new worlds continue to be moulded by the local process. Hence, in the global world people continue to live in local worlds, called *cultural homelands* (De Martino, 1978). *Despondency theory* focuses on the universalistic dynamics of a mercantile system that made cultural situations increasingly similar and undifferentiated in the world (Lévi-Strauss, 1955; Wolf, 1982). Conversely, the concept of *cultural homelands* emphasizes the autonomy of the cultural level and the crucial role of differences.

My goal is to explore, within this interpretative context, *bricolage* expressions found in daily Italian life. The “bricolage expressions” I explored are part of a traditional and local system aimed to feed, dress and ornate the familiar membership: a sort of familiar “body treatment”. The “bricolage expressions” related to food are set up at the same time: a) in a family group; b) through a ritual; c) through techniques that refer to the division of labor. Conversely, the activities related to realize dress and ornaments, are individually realized by women. All the activities I explored, translated into final objects that were exchanged, and consumed by the actors, by their family members, relatives and friends.

I documented these bricolage expressions during an investigation that was not expressly conducted, but shared in Italian transnational communities from 1993 to 2013. I assume that the communities contain everyday informal reports of living in the form of experiences of cultural creativity. Therefore, the culture of gift and bricolage represents a space of freedom in interpersonal and symbolic communication. People explicitly state their loyalty not to ideologies, but to objects. Items may be purchased, received as a gift, found, inherited or collected. People can relate to them as a moral commitment and responsibility to future generations. In contemporary life, in western societies, the ethnographic path suggests the big and general ideologies are marginal: the state, public welfare, public education, the market, movements and information flow are delivered to the people without there being a focus on the processes of their production and distribution (Hannerz, 1992). Therefore, these forces do not mobilize people and people become aware of them only when these forces collapse or betray high expectations (Miller, 2008, pp.181-183). We can search for culture in socialization and tradition, in the production of homemade items or in the sharing or giving of objects. We can theorize on greater cultural elasticity in random social zones, which involves creativity aimed at dealing with the crisis by recycling cultural themes of local folklore, such as the ability to independently and unofficially produce goods. My research brings me also in a new reading of contemporary spaces, starting from the users and from qualifying that they give to the houses and urban spaces.

My investigations start in 1993 into around 20 towns of Central and Southern Italy, which grew in the twentieth century, attracting people from the surrounding villages and lands. I then extended my search to the Italian neighbourhoods in Toronto, Perth and Buenos Aires, interviewing Italians immigrants. I opted to conduct qualitative research. I have been favoured in clarify this “popular taxonomy” but, like any “native ethnologist”, I struggled to detach myself from the cultural and social assessment. I conducted informal interviews with

subjects (random interviews) and family groups. I observed 250 households in the act of self-handling, collecting approximately 300 individual interviews in Abruzzi, Molise, Puglia, Basilicata, Campania, Sicily, Lazio, Canada, Australia and Argentina.

### Looking for folklore through the “art of making things”

Actions and items are placed in the “folklore enclosure” according to popularity, informality, localism and non-standardization, and not because they are part of the mass culture, which is, by contrast, official, intensive and standardized, although popular (Dei, 2002, 2008). A further characteristic of folklore actions and items is that they are of an “old style”. “Folklore holders” report that they practise past uses for rhetorical reasons; they embody a traditional repetition, keeping the heritage alive in the present by transmitting it from one generation to the next (from the Latin *trado*). Folklore actions and items display a sort of “general model of simplicity” of design and operation; these actions and items are not very compatible with narcissistic exteriority and consumerist capitalism. Folklore actions and items have orality, anonymity and variability: this means the actions/items are orally transmitted and anonymous, i.e. we do not know who the author is, nor do we know who the authors of the variations are. The folkloric model results from collective processing. Folklore actions and items are therefore a major competitor to industry: while popular, these cultural products are not “mass” products because of their localism and lack of standardization. Therefore, folklore actions and items are subversive in comparison to the official industrial production: their vitality express in garages and basements rather than on the upper floors of buildings. In this hidden world, I received an extraordinary and confidential welcome, discovering that—behind the walls of culturally removed neighbourhoods with monotonous routes and solitary benches—social life bustles: open doors reveal unexpected worlds of laborious creativity, accompanied by rich socialization rituals, such as coffee breaks with limoncello and homemade pastries. The main characteristic of those who create their own products is that they tend to be middle-class. The second characteristic is peasant birth and place of education. The third characteristic is they are aged between 50 and 80. Women are mainly involved in preserving food (the pantry), dress-making and body treatments for family and friends, while men prefer to maintain vehicles, spaces and technological tools; men’s work also relates to the activities women perform in the pantry. For example, an old man in Pescara conditioned a single-phase electric motor (from a broken laundry machine) to create a kneader and tomato-squeezer, for his wife’s housework needs. These creative and industrious crafts are typically performed by Italians who were educated during the “time of poverty” related to the Second World War (1940-1955). This generation was brought up to be economically competitive with a respect for the fundamental values of family and community and in past decades they were extremely productive in Italy and abroad (Levi, 1978).

*1. I make homemade cakes, soap, tomato sauce, jams, pickles, pasta, and bread. I sew clothes and style hair for the whole family and the neighbours. It is our tradition: making money by saving money and resources (Angela, housewife, 65, Pescara, Italy).*

*2. I was born a peasant then I emigrated to take up a job as a mechanic in Frankfurt, Germany. My wife and I came back in 1987. I do minor maintenance work in the garage. Do not ask for*

*money, the local custom is to barter, as we were in a village. Our neighbours do not complain because of the noise but are happy: honourable work is neither shameful nor sinful!* (Mario, retired, 72, Chieti, Italy).

The garage and basement laboratories are also workshops and storerooms for scrap: electric motors and drums disassembled from washing machines, carboys, stacked boxes of empty bottles ready for new content (wine, oil, and tomato sauce), metal sheets, bolts, grinders, masonry and painting tools, and sausages hung to mature. The items are ordered and not chaotic: they are inventoried in the narrative memory, according to the model that structuralism defined as “savage mind” and that I would also define as “neo-romantic nostalgia” for past restraint and limited use of material resources.

*3. Everything I keep here has a story: here you can see my father's tools; he was a carpenter when we lived in the village. Here you can see my tools from when I worked in railway maintenance in Switzerland. Then there are things given to us by friends, things I found near bins, here there is an incomplete set of wrenches. People throw out objects which have little things wrong with them, I save them from oblivion and give them a new life* (Gianni, retired, 72, Matera, Italy).

### **Memories and items: Economic strategies in domestic contexts**

Today, questions around human life focus on cultural processes and increase through the globalization. The different societies and human groups cannot combine into a single model: even through the mass-communication and the distribution of industrial products and processes, no culture reacts in a predictable way, no culture is replicable. In seeking to understand dynamics, the braking and acceleration, cultural anthropology is interested in the specificity of “situations in progress”. In my research into the economic strategies of micro worlds, I looked at two kinds of “cultural items” associated with the body:

- (a) pure yarn handmade clothes and ornaments;
- (b) long-life tomato sauce.

The “small scale” society (or folk society) has occupied a privileged place in cultural anthropology. The village square and the house were prototype meeting places in ethnography. In folk society, despite conflict and social inequalities, the cultural landscape is homogeneous and reassuring to the researcher as well. It has ethical-religious meanings that are very different from contemporary geographical concepts. In the course of the twentieth century, because of the eclectic rhythms of industrial culture and the extension of boundaries all over the world, this dimension disappeared, but was rediscovered, re-invented and re-valued as a tool for memory, conservation and tradition (Giddens, 1998, pp. 53-68).

Naturalness and authenticity are easier places in which to identify the good, as the ethnocentric perspective is still capable of evoking sympathy, uniqueness, and morality. The socio-anthropological literature on this topic is rich and various. In fact, due to socio-cultural inequality and the inevitable difficulties of overcoming the cultural barriers of objectification and ethnocentrism, today, the tradition, although a modern concept, often betrays a focus on the contemporary and violent claims of rights which are considered atavistic.

To overcome these problems and shift the cultural good away from the self-referential

position of nature, emotion or mood, the scholarly perspective focuses on a symmetric approach (Latour, 2009) and on cultural relativism. However, the salvific dimension of subjectivism always lurks. Even in the definition given by the European Landscape Convention (2000), there are many abstract and generic references to the cultural objects, perceived as individual aspect. This allows and encourages: a) the risks of aesthetic and psychological drift; b) the concealment of complex networks that activate choices, responsibility and representations of cultural goods of those who build, inhabit and experience the goods, even temporarily.

Specific scientific advice on the meaning of “popular tradition” as “heritage” can be found in the 2003 *UNESCO International Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, which employs a historical, sociological and anthropological methodology. The Convention provides general categories for identifying “worthy and sustainable heritage”, such as oral traditions, languages, performing arts, social practices and rituals, knowledge and practices that relate to the nature and the universe, the craft skills and spaces associated with them that communities, groups and even individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. In order to avoid ethnocentric drift; however, heritage has special requirements. Heritage passed down from generation to generation, constantly recreated by communities and groups in close correlation with the surrounding environment and with history. Heritage provides communities, groups, and individuals, with a sense of social and cultural belonging. Heritage promotes respect for cultural diversity and human creativity, and encourages observance of respect for human rights and sustainable development in each country (Convention for the Intangible Cultural Heritage, UNESCO, Paris 2003, art. 1-2-3, 14, 15). The relational and cultural landscape thus becomes a condition for safeguarding material heritage which is taken into account by the *Convention on the protection of cultural goods in armed conflict* (1954) and to the *UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (1972). To identify and to protect material goods means that they should be treated as an interest in their societies and by their society, but the interest in assets may change in time and space. The value of cultural heritage involves endless variables. Every society, identifying “its objects”, “its sites” and “its traditions”, operates a temporary selection that makes heritage dynamic, relative and in perennial reconsideration, which therefore makes it an imaginary dimension subject to up and downs.

That is the reason why, in the vortex of “heritage anthropology” and in the current cultural complexity, there is a need in Italy to return to the matter of the material culture, to perform an anthropology of the objects (Bernardi, Dei, & Meloni, 2011; Dei, 2013). This domain involves a strong theoretical tradition that cultural anthropology developed during the twentieth century on the themes of exchange, gift and reciprocity (Wilk, 1996; Papa, 1999). The question now is to consider the particular approach taken by social anthropology and the study of symbolic systems (Douglas, 1966). This approach should be near to the ethnography on the creative forms of mass consumption that anthropology has wrongly considered non-authentic and anti-cultural (Miller, 2008); finally, this approach should be related to an analysis of the political use of cultural requirements (Latour, 2009).

Unknown spaces, unfamiliar surroundings and different cultures represent a cultural danger that is fenced in by the greater size of the “natural hazard” and represent a constant that “modern man” shares with “primitive man”. Even political uses of this cultural danger

are constant. The house and the country used to be the most profound reason for projecting the ego, and the man of today no longer invokes his bell tower as the “core of his life”, as he did in the past (Pitré, 1886, p. 38), but uses his imagination by drawing from the past, into the present and toward the future. This cultural practice provides a powerful cultural and existential reassurance, because it capitalizes on “traditional use” in a mythical and ritual way. The mythical-ritual mechanism manipulates time because of the repetition, through gestures, formulae, diagrams and narrations that allow us to eliminate the risk of not being in the world, and every other expression of negativity in the present time (De Martino, 1959).

Traditional and popular elements pose as a resistance against the sense of loss and as an unconscious effort to oppose the substance of the “bodied and differentiated man” to the “modern enchantment of the abstract person”. The current order of things does not guarantee a reassuring conception of life, and indeed, through progressive and regional cultural loss, precipitates the person in anguish. For this reason, “the folkloric residues, although in their negative aspects, are an anchorage for the humanity submerged by cultural crisis” (Di Nola, 1982).

Therefore, this level of submerged knowledge continues to reproduce and distribute its styles, along new and unimaginable roads of social communication, and every day troubles the public powers, when it express what seems to be an “unpalatable truth” (Cirese, 1973, 1991, 2007, 2010). In this context, information and new technologies develop through the internet, giving life to new computer landscapes, capable of emphasizing the dynamic and interactive character of folklore, and in his new “landscape of reality” people in-form, de-form, trans-form the process of rewriting continuing the present in the space (Giancrisofaro, 2010). The nation’s cultural contexts of today are transnational, which accumulate to local contexts in which heritage refers (Fabre & Iuso, 2010); that is, the folkloristic know-how, which distributes and reproduces “reading world tools” and “technologies to tame world” that seemed unthinkable in the industrial and global world. As numerous authors have said, globalization cannot stop. The local cultures of today’s world cannot be studied and understood without taking into account global flows, but this does not imply that there is a standardization of worlds and cultures (Sahlins, 1976; Hannerz, 1992; Appadurai, 1996; Favole, 2010). Folklore, wrongly considered to be abstract, reactionary, static and decontextualized, is instead a cultural phenomenon that is exuberant, local, programmatic, progressive, reactive, sustainable and “facing the future”.

### **A sweater with a crocodile: Handmade clothes and ornaments**

Culture is created in the synergism between body, mind and matter, according to an evolutionary process that proceeds by successive degrees of exteriorization and increasingly locates adaptive functions out of body (from the amygdala to automated production) and out of mind (from writing to cybernetics). The production processes, of both today and yesterday, represent an alliance with matter (Leroi-Gourhan, 1964). Therefore, my ethnographic search focuses on production, rather than consumption. In the houses and places I visited, I looked for objects that were at the same time a witness, a sign or a memory. In 1998, in one house, amongst all the objects stood out a sweater beautifully made by hand, with a crocodile embroidered on a heart, similar to a known brand of knitwear. The owner told me that it was a gift he received from his mother, when he was an adolescent.

*I was at high school. I liked the sweater with the glamorous crocodile, but my parents could not afford it. Then my mother created this with her own hands. I wore this sweater every year in high school. It did no matter to me if people saw that it was a completely different thing. To me, it was the most beautiful knitwear in the world, because it reminds me when my family was very united in solving problems, and now it is an honour for me to tell this experience to my children and friends (Massimo, doctor and surgeon, 45, Latiano, Italia).*

This creative and material expression represents the operational and programmatic way in which Massimo's mother challenged class inequality. Her son was able to maintain his calm and overcome the patriarchal reference of wealthy peers (also called "daddy's boys") who liked the status symbols of the industrial era. Thanks to her traditional knitting skills, this "local mother" produced a masterpiece: it is not a fake, but her own creation. The crocodile (nicely reproduced in crochet) on this handmade sweater smiles at the observer, who cannot criticize nor despise a similar item that, in its intangible value, certainly exceeds the industrial sample that inspired him. In making the sweater herself, the mother symbolically invested in her promising boy. She used all her human capital to ensure he maintained social face in front of his classmates. That totemic sweater is a sort of initiation that proves the creative solidarity of the in-group culture and helps free the boy from his disadvantageous present, employing irony to remove class subordination.

Something similar happened more recently with a pair of earrings that, in reality, were two small fabric creations that a grandmother had made for her teenage niece. Confident in her abilities, the woman, rather than proposing traditional crochet schemes, was inspired by the initials of Justin Bieber (the girl's favourite singer), and brought the traditional handicraft into the modern time.

*5. I learned when I was a girl. It is a versatile hobby: working with wire, you can achieve what you want starting from zero. I do not repeat the usual patterns. I made my niece earrings moulding the name of her favourite singer. My idea to make crochet necklaces, rings and bracelets has been successful and circulated on Facebook (Anna Rita, housewife, 64, Casalbordino, Italia).*

This popular theme can be traced also in thousands of economic and ecological examples that include the second-hand market, the re-use and barter that now takes place in both town and country alike. The second-hand market is a space of creative freedom where the goods can be touched in an open and conspiratorial space, free from the formalities of megastores and the bulky figure of the seller, industrially trained to condition the customer. The limited cashflow and the distrust toward the large companies systems have created flourishing spaces of exchange and relations. These spaces are open, flexible and soft compared to industrial production and distribution, which is schematic and rationalized.

The sweater with the crocodile made entirely by the mother means more than this: it is not the exchange of utility, nor the mere assembly of yarn and a fake designer label intended to increase the prestige of the final goods, nor is it a conscious and organized cultural movement. The cultural setting of each movement is indeed a sort of industrial processes and, when inspired by the "happiness in decreasing the economy", expresses itself in conscious and standardized models such as the car-pooling, the bank of time and the buying groups (Latouche, 2010). By contrast, in peripheral areas one can find the single precursor



to economies that are halfway between industry and agriculture, that the Fifties rationalist reading rejected as an expression of “amoral kinship comes first” (Banfield, 1958). The Italian industrialization, in many Southern and Central areas, has long remained suspended halfway between industry and agriculture, between familiar and national traditions. The industrialization was also accompanied by an excessive national debt and unacceptable self-referentiality and corruption among political elite (Felice, 2013). Therefore, especially during periods of contraction, people can use a network of “cultural shock absorbers” that were locally generated over decades of limited trust in the industrial model and the co-existing frugality and sustainability of the local model of life.

### **Saving food for the winter: Pantry and heritage**

The second path is more complex because it is a link between the human nutrition and the embodiment processes. The cultural object I examined was a bottle of long-life homemade tomato sauce, often simply referred to as “the bottle” or “tomato bottle”. People who belong to this cultural circuit use this metonymy to indicate, in addition to the food content, a particular style of Mediterranean life that enriches food manufacturing with positive emotions proving the role this good plays in improving the overall quality of food and social relations.

In central southern Italy and other transnational communities, the “tomato bottles” are produced by the local families during the summertime, and are consumed during the winter, when it is cold and tomato cultivation is possible only if farmers use modern artificial greenhouses. The summertime production brings about and defines the ritual of “making the tomato bottles”, which is a rite where the whole family is gathered together. The event conventionally happens during the holidays in August, when the Mediterranean tomato production is at its peak. Tomato “day” and “jars” are cultural markers. In previous ideologies, the ritualization of the passing of seasons was marked by the annual cycle of agricultural production. Back in the 1950s, peasant families directly produced and conserved food for their own subsistence. Then with the economic boom in the 1960s, living conditions changed and despite the convenience of the flavoured industrial product, many families continued to make their own “tomato stock” for the winter. This popular tradition started in the nineteenth century when tomatoes were dried and changed with pasteurization and sterilization, and migrated from farms to houses, and from villages to towns. The “emotional stakeholders” of this tradition emigrated across the world. Today, the tomato day takes place in farmyards and in the narrow streets of villages, where the bond with memory and nature becomes stronger, but it also lurks in Rome, Turin and Milan. It lurks in the interstices of towns, in the houses and basements of Mediterranean communities abroad, living in Toronto, Buenos Aires and Perth, following paths of cultural creativity, embodiment, economy, democracy, agency and domestic plans for the future.

My ethnographic survey analyses a marginal culture where the following model still prevails and includes these values:

- a) self-restraint and a propensity “to save goods” as a way of capitalizing on an additional benefit;
- b) family and parental solidarity;
- c) uncertain prospects for the economical future.



These “traditional values”: a) work in parallel to the widespread penetration of industrial society and to the utilization of the distribution of merchandise; b) expresses a residual resilience against consumerism and a positive attitude towards sustainability; c) creates silent opposition to industrial consumerism based on the optimization and standardization of human actions. The “resilience of traditions”, both collective and unconscious, often hidden and masked, operates in many areas of contemporary life. For example, the families I interviewed about tomato sauce usually purchased food and other items in shopping malls and superstores, but they preferred to make or obtain from elsewhere their tomato sauce, olive oil, soap, bread, salad, firewood, and other goods.

“Tomato day” is particularly interesting because it involves:

- a) recycling glass, because the containers for sauce belong to the industrial world and are bought for the food (beer, mineral water or fruit juice) but instead of being disposed of, are recycled to be used for other foods.
- b) reduced road transport, because the whole product is locally sourced with tomatoes being procured from gardens or farmers; in addition, food is stored at home where it is usually eaten;
- c) a reduction in “environmentally harmful” energy, because the filled bottles are boiled on a gas stove or a fire burning garden waste or waste industrial wood, and once the bottles have been boiled, the same fire is used as a barbecue and as a facilitator for socializing.

Through several tests, I demonstrate the symbolic reasons for this food tradition are more important than organoleptic ones (Giancristofaro, 2012). These items are good to think about, thus they are good to eat (Harris, 1985). The tomato has been popularly cultivated in Italy since the nineteenth century and used as a main ingredient, becoming a symbol of Italian and Mediterranean culture (Gentilcore, 2010). Tomato sauce is healthy; it helps to prevent many fatal or debilitating diseases, so the tomato culture operates as a sort of free and public welfare system (Giancristofaro, 2012, p. 92).

The cultural system of tomato sauce has spread all over the world: millions of people eat food with tomato sauce produced by large-scale agriculture, manufactured by large-scale industry, and distributed by large-scale traders. The industrial regime is the dominant regime today, but people I interviewed declared that they took “no pleasure in eating industrial tomato sauce”, and settled for it “only when the traditional homemade sauce is not available”.

Each Sunday lunch, when the family comes together, the “homemade sauce” is appraised and considered “superior to the industrial sauce”, which is considered “low quality” for many logical and emotional reasons. The “homemade sauce” is better “because someone checked the tomatoes one by one”, “because it represents a local and domestic product”, “because it does not produce waste packaging”, “because it reminds one of childhood, the summertime, the village, grandparents and good feelings”. In fact, the domestic production of tomato sauce reduces packaging and has other environmental and economic benefits. The tradition of “homemade tomato sauce” saves “energy” twice: it saves energy in a natural sciences sense (mainly, the recycling of glass bottles), but it also saves energy in a “social psychology” sense, because this social activity strengthens relationships starting from the experience of “making things together” in the name of a common good.

6. *My village has never experienced a summer without the “buttijie” (tomato bottles). I have beautiful memories of childhood, when grandparents lead the “tomato day”. As in the past, tomato day is still the most important day in our summer, now we love to make tomato sauce with our children and nephews and we keep up this beautiful Mediterranean tradition (Stefano, teacher, 46, L’Aquila, Italia).*

7. *In our neighborhood, we all have Puglia background, every year we make the tomato sauce all together and we use recycled bottles. We get tomatoes, we need to buy at least 3-4 quintals. When the farmers deliver the tomatoes, we prepare the work spot in our little square, we do the work and we clean up afterwards. Nobody has ever complained or called the police for that. When I was in Putignano, we made until 800 bottles: we built an electric tomato-squeeze with a giant funnel and a two-stroke engine, and we also built a compressed air machine to seal the filled bottles (Patrizia, 45, industrial designer, Milano).*

8. *I am American but spend my holidays with my grandparents in Vaughan, Ontario, Canada; they are Canadian but they were born in a little village near Salerno, in Italy. I make pummarola with them every summer. It is fun. I like the “pummarola day”! Grandma gives me the “pummarola bottles” to take home. My grandma’s pummarola is my favourite drink when I miss my grandparents (David, student, 21, Miami, USA).*

The technology used in popular and traditional manufacturing demonstrate that popular and traditional culture is equipped with the capacity to “deal with and overcome” the problems of daily life, creating technical and scientific opportunities. Great scholars of folklore have undervalued or denied it this power. Now it is evident: the local power of folklore conceptually raises this culture to a level that is stronger and autonomous in comparison to the “state of fragility” that would characterize a “subordinate culture”. In decreasing the official economy, the decline in the production of goods does not mean a reduction in levels of autonomy. Hence, this folkloric search involves not only economic behaviours because of the use of cultural factors in understanding economic decisions, but also analysis of the work in progress around public assessments on heritage as established by the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, UNESCO 2003 (Giancrisofaro, 2012).

### **Traditions in creolizing modernity: the religion of objects**

In complex societies, two logics vie for human attention and investment: on the one hand, we have analytical logic, based on the written word, on consistency and responsibility, and on the other hand, we have visual logic, based on the synthetic and packaged image. Today, the logic of the “synthetic image” pushes people into accepting the “synthetic simulacrum of the reality” although they did not build this reality, they fall victim to it via a sort of passive and hypnotic enchantment. This enchantment with the present deletes any attention regards the background, but the human beings who do not critically know the past, cannot understand the present, and not even plan the future. The increased of “learning opportunities” that mass media enhance as the privilege of modern man, in fact, deform him, engulf him and paralyze him. The excess of information creates an inner noise which means the individual, in the redundancy of visual stimulus, is no longer capable of creating a set of priorities, a distinction between what is important, what matters less, and what does not count at all

(Baudrillard, 1974, 1980). The oral and daily dimension of cultures produces antibodies to this and continues to train people through the continuous building of “models of cultural survival” in underground and hidden areas of life (Di Nola, 1982). For this reason, there is increasing interest in investigating the surprising persistence of the “typical learning mode” of the early modern age in current everyday life rhetoric and practices. Common sense and some sciences define these behaviours as a “return to the basic and autarkic economy” (negative value), but the anthropological perspective holds instead that it is the “creolization of modernity” as a positive value (Sahlins, 1976; Remotti, 2007; Favole, 2010).

According to the cultural sciences, a “bricoleur” is not simply someone who owns the instructions for managing an industrial product that is a product aimed at the optimization of daily life under the global model. A “true bricoleur” is not someone who puts together a piece of “flat-pack furniture”, or someone who buys a spare part to repair appliances with a modern engineering spirit. A bricoleur is someone who continuously processes the available materials (available locally) and uses new ways to “combine things” in a creative way. Subconsciously, the bricoleur embodies the ecologic spirit of a sustainable economy in contrast to the constant supply of replacements emanating from the “world machine” that is both industrial and global. A bricoleur does not buy things, but chooses to barter, swap, reuse and recycle. His cultural processes are a retrospective: he faces a set of tools and materials, he cares and makes an inventory, and lastly, and most important, he intertwines with things a sort of dialogue, in choosing possible answers to his momentary problem (Lévi-Strauss, 1962).

Italian culture contains the tradition of “dedicate life to the domestic job”. In Italy, the traditional, creative and adaptive connection between hands and brain was identified through artisan workshops and after the Second World War was still reproduced in people who followed their work with a spirit of self-denial in productive areas of Northern Italy as well as abroad. The economic crisis of 2008 marks the eclipse of this traditional “dedication to the job”: now Italians experiment with under-employment and hidden work, trying to carve out a space of self-employment conceived of as a welfare parachute. Maybe this cultural skill should have been converted into a new economic system at the beginning of the new millennium, when the crisis in the industrial neoliberal model first appeared. Unfortunately, institutional policies blindly continued to follow the path of the official economy and of infinite growth, implementing a “soft totalitarianism” based on the psychological dependency of local citizens on the global market (Latouche, 2010). However, the main cultural dimension is still daily life (Hannerz, 1992), where individual and peculiar abilities trigger social Darwinism. In the daily life dimension I explored, people criticize and avoid the “institutional imperative” to purchase outside the “specialized production”. The people I observed try to overcome the hypnotic enchantment and the redundancy of information through self-reliant production, reviewing spending habits, recycling, exchange, barter and creativity. This solution is also functional, to overcome the flattening of space and time, and to let people consider the background, understand the present and plan the future. The bricoleurs are mindful of their “village background” and are aware of their family tradition of self-subsistence, and they have opted for it today as “the most up-to-date solution”. Until the 1950s, the population in Italy had daily “limits” and so they had to use goods carefully, apart from on occasions when the limits could be exceeded, during seasonal rituals, such

as the Carnival (Cocchiara, 1981). The megalomania of the neoliberal model, which gave the western popular masses the illusion that they can feast every day, has generated the private debt and the current inability to grow according to the classic economic model. The traditional “self-restraint” was swept away by the economic boom (and by utopias of infinite growth), but it still exists as a social choice and a cultural opportunity, as summarized by this scheme.

**Table 1**

Bricoleur model	expresses	value of voluntary restraint
Neo-liberal model	expresses	individualistic megalomania

The power of the tradition is strengthened by the mythical-ritual mechanism, which is a manipulation and domestication of time and space, because repetition, through gestures, formulas and narratives, allows the historical elimination of negativity (De Martino, 1959). Therefore, economical traditions in Italy today are a heterogeneous set of “scraps of the past” recycled as being good and corroborated, since they were tested by previous generations. By contrast, industrial ideology legitimizes production through novelty as summarized by the following table.

**Table 2**

Folklore	suggests	the second-hand, or recycled tested models at the popular and local levels
The neo-liberal model	suggests	the new practical and innovative production, as global state of the perfection

The self-reliant production, like tradition, is loaded with “religious capital gains” such as the achieving of well-being or earning social prestige as “popular creators”. For the families interviewed, the self-reliant production is a “behaviour of honour”, and certainly has a role to play in the context of inputting implicit principles into the relational optimization. Apparently, those who spend all their energy are losers, but earn in terms of honour and social existence.

*9. In our village, whoever “does things” is frowned on. The women are generous and they are the leaders, they are a true social power. Between neighbours, they compete to see who is better at making tomato sauce, traditional cakes, huge meals for the largest neighbourhood festivals (Luigi, 47, office worker, Pescara).*

*10. The girls are now half-hearted and always unhappy despite their young age. On the other hand, their grandmothers are very busy and they invite people over to have lunch together.*

*They organize common jobs, work a lot and are always happy! Thanks to these industrious ladies, families have got ahead and our migration has brought this positive Italian attitude also here to Canada (Antonio, 68, retired, Vaughan, Canada).*

Today bricolage plays an important role in bringing order into the world of its protagonists. This cultural order is not created by simply “assigning meanings”, but also by encouraging industriousness in a family landscape. Semiotics and industriousness are present in all cultural actions, and overlap each other (Cirese, 1991). Therefore the bricolage experience is still linked to its linguistic expression and to its function to “give order to the world”, despite the fact that it tends to differentiate, survive, or even disappear in the groups and families where it has so far occurred. The paradigm of self-production comes from the modern experience that has configured the peasant and artisan autarkic production. Because experiences, visions of the world and language are all mutually interrelated, we may assume that this particular dimension of “domestic belief” could be a “religious experience”. So, bricolage is a culture that is a sort of sacred experience: what other reason could be to take on the stress of producing at home goods that can be purchased at lower prices? The art of home crafts finalizes not (only) to rake a monetary saving, but aims the person to focus on own surroundings, with his/her human desire to domesticate the world. Therefore, we can consider the bricolage today as a practical “religion of sustainability”.

These niches of traditional economic culture are exactly what the word “economy” means. To the Ancient Greeks, “economy” meant something like the “rules of the household” (“eco” is from the Greek word for house, “oikos”, and “nomy” is from their word for law). These niches of traditional economic culture are a sort of living heritage, strongly influenced by gift-giving and receiving, i.e. it is an ideological system in which the product has a different value and in which the main feature is trust, namely the origin of each socio-cultural bond and the basis of reciprocity (Godelier, 1996). Religion is the main human strategy for alleviating both existential and economic anxiety; it is a cultural survival mechanism providing shelter from the “difficulty of being present in the world” (De Martino, 1978). Therefore, traditions, such as religious agency, can help people deal with global problems, such as global warming, global emergencies and the contemporary crisis of big cultural frames (the state, movements, global markets), which render people helpless. We can consider this hidden intangible cultural heritage as the main cultural heritage of Italy: it is a relational and creative database, and I personally consider it as heritage. While sharing and appreciating the institutional discourse on the safeguard of intangible heritage, I see that the hidden and widespread folklore remains undetected and subordinated to the celebrations and activities now safeguarded and registered as being globally representative by the UNESCO List (Meloni, 2014).

I personally prefer this hidden and unofficial folklore, submerged and not formalized, which produces no richness and money, but has the essential merit of supporting the existence and morality of its bearers and its connoisseurs. The “heritage communities”, when ask to be recorded in the global “UNESCO List”, are linked to their public level of recognition and officiality. The bricoleurs instead repeat and reproduce their economic tradition independently of its original condition, because it is still an oral system, and because of that, this economic tradition operates embedded within other systems of values.

Because of that, this economic tradition can easily embed in the culture of migrants. On the contrary, it seems more difficult to share with immigrants the official traditions, as the festive celebrations, that therefore remain a powerful factor of cultural demarcation.

The industrial economy rejects this “traditional economy” as an irrational, anti-institutional, inefficient, and dispersive practice, because it base not on mathematical calculation. However, this economic tradition is more logical and sustainable than the industrial economy, because it aims to the social inclusion, to the voluntary restraint and to the environmental protection. The mass culture originated from an encounter between popular culture and the market, where the market prevailed: therefore, the mass culture is unimaginative, and nailed to its present time, devoted only to consumption. In marginal areas, where osmosis between the hegemony (market culture) and the local culture (folklore) still ends up in favour of the local culture, daily life arranges in a creative way. The folklore today is regenerating itself as a contemporary and sustainable popular philosophy. The folklore is, more than ever, a cultural production which should be held in high esteem and studied, so that we can gain an understanding of the main role of unofficial cultures in the complex societies, as an important theorist of folklore stated in 1929 (Gramsci, 1966).

## Conclusion

Today Italian demographic anthropology/ethnology focuses on social sustainability and on the reflexive processes of inventorying and capitalising cultural heritage. In the global world, normative actions around heritage (UNESCO Convention, 2003; EU Convention of Faro) produce this wide dimension of a “return back home” in cultural anthropology; I mean a return to ethnography and to material culture. Italian demographic anthropology/ethnology currently operates within applied anthropology and, in particular, interprets—as Gramsci wrote—people who struggle against power and governance. On the other hand, Italian institutions, despite drawing freely on the rhetoric of the prestigious UNESCO safeguard, do not involve demographic anthropology/ethnology enough in regulatory practices for protecting heritage, as evidenced by the absence of a specific schedule in social pedagogy by the Italian institutions. This research shows how the usual tracks of ethnography can usefully be restructured within the practices of Italian and regional heritage inventory, providing not only operational tools, but also elements of theoretical reflection and regulatory consulting for the direct benefit of education, welfare and local development.

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