

# Life as a *Guaglio*'

## Public and Private Domains in Central and Southern Italy

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This paper proposes a re-examination of some 'classic' approaches to the problem of analyzing 'kinship' behaviour in Italy. The essay examines apprenticeship in several contexts and in several locations (southern and central Italy). It is argued that no one single trait, such as access to power (central to viewpoints that deal with 'patronage' and 'brokerage') can explain the behavioural complex associated with apprenticeship. Instead, the concept of public validation of social relationship appears to be a more fruitful tool for analyzing the simulation interplay of distancing and incorporation that characterizes apprentice-master relationship. It is argued that just as there is a strong incorporative tendency in the formation of social relationships – perhaps due to the pervasive notion of competition and limited good – there is an equally strong tendency at exclusion at the same level. That is, because of mutual economic and social interests on both parts, there is a tendency to incorporate apprentices into the same structural dynamics that govern 'close/private' relationships; the family, for example. But since the attaining of goals – fulfilling one's *interessi* – depends very much on performing in public, the master-apprentice relationship develops along other lines, which can be labelled 'close/public'.

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The psychological, social and cultural centrality of the Italian family, especially the ubiquitous southern peasant family, has long been acknowledged by students of Italian social life and culture, despite debate about its nature and its precise role as a motivational force in contemporary social life of a country that has re-emerged as a leading industrial nation.<sup>1</sup> Guaranteed its sanctity by the post-War Constitution, *la famiglia* provides a ramified behavioural matrix for individuals, as well as acting as a pervasive and powerful symbol with implications on other, non-'kinship', domains. It is the closest thing to a Durkheimian total social fact that can be found in any highly diversified and complex society in the West. The family can appear to consume so much of Italian social life that it is not surprising that Banfield went so far as to argue (1958) that the complex

that envelops familial solidarity was the ethical basis of social behaviour in southern Italy; not surprisingly, such an assertion raised many objections on a variety of grounds.<sup>2</sup>

The behaviours and attitudes that form part of the *famiglia* complex are not merely a model for interaction with non-kin. Conceptually, these attitudes are so complex, interwoven, diverse and complete that people need not differentiate between kin and non-kin.<sup>3</sup> As Bell describes it (1979:76), *la famiglia* is a concept that, for Italians, implies overlapping yet distinctive egocentric networks, each associated with fairly precise behavioural and moral guidelines (Bell identifies four such networks). Since 'kin' networks envelop large numbers of people (an 'unbroken' chain that stretches to an unknown but postulated ancestor, and with affines of affines, for example), there is neces-

sarily a complex set of rules that is continually brought to bear in order to formulate decisions of engagement and disengagement. This is particularly clear in times of economic hardship, when difficult choices involving access to scarce resources are forced upon people. Since hard times have been the single most obvious characteristic of the Italian economy from at least the Middle Ages until very recently (and continue to be typical of many parts of southern Italy), there is every reason to believe that economic 'choice', at least, has always been seen in largely negative terms, much like Foster's description (1956) of the image of limited good, and that mechanisms that adjust and reconcile opposing interests among people who mutually acknowledge ties of obligation and dependency are well developed.

Kertzer's interpretation of demographic patterns in turn-of-the-century central Italy shows (1984) that while complex extended families dominated among shareholders and nuclear family structure prevailed among *braccianti* (agricultural wage labourers) there was a continual movement from one type to the other as a family's fortunes rose or fell with economic conditions and its natural developmental cycle. People, in other words, expanded their kinship networks, including taking in unrelated casual labourers into their households, in order to accord with conditions over which they had very little control. Kertzer, building on Laslett's pioneering study (1972), demonstrates that Italian peasants were never isolated from the outside world; far from being circumscribed by the orders and immediate needs of the *Padrone*, they had been and continued to be a part of an international economy long before industrialization increased levels of world trade. As Bell points out (*Ibid.*), acknowledging the strength and type of reciprocal obligations may very much depend on the class of the people involved in a given transaction, but his study of four widely separated Italian towns (in the south, centre, north and Sicily) reveals surprisingly little intra-class variation from region to region. In a word, if a very wide 'kinship' network is recognized so that a person's *interessi*, 'interests', can be accommodated under variable and unpredictable con-

ditions, most of them unfavourable (but not all; there can clearly be no overwhelming notion that conditions are always unfavourable, since it is precisely hardship that makes people receptive to unexpected benefits from the outside), then everyone becomes 'kin'; or, no one is 'kin', in the sense that there is no clearly single identifiable category that is unequivocally accorded special treatment under all conditions. 'Kinship' does not appear to be a useful analytical category here; it is a antiquated concept that fails to describe a complicated and by no means easily understood dynamic.

Perhaps a clearer distinction than kin/non-kin might be between private and public aspects of networks, in which people invoke another gradient (private/public) in conjunction with close/far categories (more or less corresponding to the standard 'kin'/'non-kin', 'helpful'/'non-helpful' distinctions; here, 'close' and 'far' are necessarily relative distinctions and hence avoid the problem of determining who is kin and who is not). It seems unnecessarily cautious to limit the ideology of familism to the relations among members of the nuclear family, as do Banfield (*Ibid.*) and Berkowitz (1984:86), for example, and ignore the reality of so-called 'quasi-kin' or 'fictive' kin behaviour and attitudes that form an overwhelming percentage of total interaction; and not to mention what appears to be massive evidence that southern Italians, given almost continual exploitation by foreigners and an internal elite that over the centuries created a continual need for wage-labour as a necessary supplement to subsistence farming even when some access to land was granted, were never in a position to circumscribe their social universe by means of a limiting frontier around the nuclear family. In other words, family obligations can as much represent a drain on person's resources as the outside world represents a solution. In terms of sentiments and related behavioural tendencies it seems very unlikely that there is a boundary around the nuclear family, and that the world outside is regarded with anything resembling a baleful eye.

'Public' and 'private' also provide useful reference points for locating another important feature of Italian social life, the public vali-

dation of private relationships. It is precisely because relationships with persons outside the nuclear family can provide invaluable benefits that these 'public' relationships will be 'close'; that is, marked by public demonstrations of privilege on the behavioural level. The vast and well-known literature on Italian patron-client relationships need not be cited in detail to sustain this point: patrons deal in power and knowledge, both of which are social and public resources.

In this essay I will discuss some of behavioural and structural implications, especially in the relationship between skilled craftsmen and their apprentices, that simultaneously evoke both the private/public and close/far gradients. The relationship between *maestri* or *mastri* ('masters', as in the expression "master mechanic") and *apprendisti* ('apprentices', often called *guagliuni*, 'boys' in Neapolitan dialect) is particularly close, and yet it is not considered an overt part of the private realm. Hence, I will examine the means by which a very strong relationship is established and distinguished and even contrasted from 'private' relationships, mostly familial in the usual sense of the word. The term *guaglione* (singular form) engages a type of discourse and a behavioural set that refers to an important dynamic in the operation of Italian culture, especially in the manner in which particular structural traits are maintained and re-created in every interpretative gesture and instance of discourse. Specifically, the term refers to a type of relationship in which the sense of reciprocal obligation is extremely strong in the economic and social realms, as strong as that which is typically found between parents and children. Insofar as it represents a widening of the circle of mutual dependency and obligation, however, it must be and is accompanied by specific distancing mechanisms that are unique to the public aspect of the relationship; not the least important of which is the very word 'boy' by which the apprentice is often publicly addressed and referred to, simultaneously connoting closeness on the one hand and hierarchy and faint derision on the other. I contend that in a situation in which people create personal ties with others who are not

necessarily part of the private category, there is a mechanism by which social distance is maintained when strong bonds emerge; such relationships become 'strong/public' bonds. *Guaglio* implies a strict and close tie between people yet a tie that resembles intimate familial relationships in only some aspects. In other respects it implies as strong a hierarchical division between the participants as is to be found anywhere in Italian culture.

## Public Show, Private Interests

The public validation of what are otherwise privatized relationships is an intrinsic feature of Italian social life. The two worlds, in other words, are separate but mutually interdependent. 'Family' honour, even if we restrict the term to the immediate nuclear family, is a very public spectacle indeed. The attitude that life is lived on a stage (preferably an operatic one at that) has a long and convoluted history, but is basically tied on the Italian peasant tradition, which evolved in conjunction with generations of foreign oppression (Normans, Arabs, Spaniards, French and Austro-Hungarians in different epoches and different times). Italians have long learned to hide what is private and to be very careful in constructing and presenting a public persona that is as much aimed at obtaining desired results as it is necessarily reflective of their 'true' characters or individuality.

For example, people pledge public alligiance (not only, and perhaps not even, by votes but by membership and participation on the local level) to a political party not only to reap possible rewards from the party (if this were the case, the Communist Party, with nearly 30% of the electoral vote in every post-war election but which has never been allowed a single cabinet seat in Italy's numerous governments would not enjoy wide popular support) but to initiate a series of networks from which benefits may accrue by virtue of having created personal relationships with a wide number of people. Politics, in other words, is simply a means of conferring and confirming a public identity from which more traditional and supposedly non-political alliances are generated;



otherwise, there is no common meeting ground for any relationship. In other words, when everyone's *interessi* are so obviously engaged in public life, it is necessary to construct an arbitrary and artificially 'neutral' meeting ground. On a large scale, this is parliamentary politics; locally, it is the village square. As LaPalombara argues (1987) in reference to the idioms that dominate Italian politics, all aspects of Italian life can be considered as *spettacolo*, in which people consciously act out predetermined roles, even on the most mundane level, and even if such roles are not entirely 'natural' in the sense of befitting a person's beliefs and predispositions. Italians do not consider any given gesture to be isolated or mundane; nor do they want a gesture, whether deed or word, to fail in conveying a sense of its essential importance to other actors in the drama of life. The general result, says LaPalombara, is an exaggerated sense of the dramatic even on the most mundane level. Naturally, the notion that every action holds fundamental importance is maintained by making penalties for miscalculation high and consequences dear: demonstrably rich people are kidnapped and held for ransom in alarmingly high numbers; powerful criminals who openly flaunt the law are tried in televised trials and receive long sentences, just as hundreds of young girls become prostitutes in large cities after public opinion in the village square taints them with real or imagined labels that make the girls unmarriageable; magistrates, judges, lawyers and police officials are routinely assassinated for doing their jobs efficiently and honestly (or sometimes not); and the standard weapon of the police is the machine gun. Yet the show goes on, and to be a success at anything one must maintain a very public profile: the rich (and especially the would-be rich) still live out '*la dolce vita*', (though with discrete bodyguards for those who can afford them), and criminals often distribute some of their gains to the poor in acts that would earn them medals had the money been earned legally (or the illegalities hidden from public view). One cannot be *un gran signore* without evidence.

The process of creating personal ties in order to accommodate mutual *interessi* is even more

obvious in everyday life, since national politics at least contains a ready-made ideological rationalization for a wide scope of encounters that is absent on the local level, or at least restricted to public feasts and local politics; creating the basis for associations on the local level is serious work indeed (see Boissevain 1965, 1984; Campbell 1967). If there is a private dimension to social life in Italy, it exists in the confines of the household, where people are relatively 'natural', 'themselves' and 'free' from the pressures of continually maintaining a public front; in other words, mutual accommodation of *interessi* has already reached a balanced plateau. Of course, the distinction between 'real' self and 'public' image is blurred by the simple fact that such a basic part of the culture cannot be contained in a special category that is completely divorced from general norms and tenets. In other words, the distinction between what is 'merely' a public front and what is 'really' a personal and private trait is more an analytical convenience than a distinction that Italians use to categorize different types of relationships; all relationships contain aspects of the private and the public, of genuineness and calculation. Within the bosom of the family Italians are very much aware of a special intimacy, yet male-female roles are clearly defined such that people are aware of the roles they occupy (see Berkowitz 1984; Pitkin 1985).

Within the immediate family, however, consequences and aftereffects of miscalculations are less severe and drastic than those imposed by the outside world, unless, of course, the miscalculation becomes public, as in illicit pregnancies or, less dramatic, when the wife is obliged to work in the fields (especially on parts of Calabria) because of a lack of money. In this case, the family's honour can be just as irremediably tainted as in the case of a pregnant daughter and unacknowledged or unfindable fiancé (see Gilmore 1987 on the importance of honour and shame in the South). In short, *interessi* have a multidimensional expression, even if its basis is the idea of publicly maintaining family honour in a complex social cultural mix of limited economic goods and unlimited moral commodities (see du Boulay and Williams 1987).

Italians are conscious of the subtle blend of *interesse* and amicability in their social life, and even have a special word, *fesso*, for people who are straightforward in their dealings with others, especially bureaucrats.<sup>4</sup> Generally, the greater the social distance between people in a relationship, the greater the need for deviousness or at least attentiveness to the possibility of deviousness on the part of others (being taken advantage of results in a *brutta figura*, 'loss of face', which is another widely feared consequence of being *fesso*). 'Social distance' in this sense implies the absence of a personal relationship between people.<sup>5</sup> In a word, Italians are probably no more or less honest and efficient at their jobs nor more devious in their friendships than other Europeans or North Americans; they are merely very aware of the importance of personal connections in getting what they want, and of introducing an element of privilege into what are otherwise mundane and common relationships. What may appear as deviousness to a non-Italian is simply the awareness that personal relationships are more diffuse, complex and intense and, hence more easily jeopardized than impersonal and restricted relationships, and yet much more capable of accommodating a person's interests. *Guaglio*, with all its special connotations, and in the context of extremely formal and complex forms of address and reference (as befits a society where all aspects of life take on the exaggerated serio-comic aspects of a play), is both indicative of and a means of introducing a special type of public dimension within an essentially private relationship.

## Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship is an important means by which some social mobility is introduced into what was and remains a relatively stagnant and rigid system of social categorization and mobility.<sup>6</sup> Apprenticeship is also an important means by which the pool of skilled craftsmen reproduces itself, though of course this figures not at all in the strategies of tradesmen in their decisions about expansion and continuity; whether or not to take on *guaglioni*, in other words. Since many Italians in this class work

in the grey market – they do not report all or even most of their income to the government, though the work activity is not illegal as such – statistics are unreliable. However, given the large number of very small-scale and essentially 'family'-type business operations<sup>7</sup> that depend on the financial inequalities of the apprenticeship system, apprenticeship would appear to be still widespread.

On the other side of the coin is the fact that apprentices know that they are in a relatively privileged relationship and are not easily dismissed if the volume of business decreases. Especially in southern and central Italy the small size of most manufacturing enterprises (Martinely 1985), the pervasive 'do-it-yourself-and-save-money' and 'build-or-buy-as-you-can' values of many Italians, and the 'traditional' southern occupational structure concentrated in the labour-intensive manufacturing of consumer goods guarantee a continual demand for skilled and semi-skilled tradesmen who are willing to 'work for less for a friend'. The result is economic pressure that urges tradesmen to keep their businesses labour-intensive and small-scale (and, hence, keep their income more easily hidden from the state) and ensure the survival of the apprentice class. Employee benefits that must be paid by employers' contributions to the government (health and unemployment insurance, for example) also play a part. On the one hand, small-scale tradesmen are reluctant to officially hire apprentices; sometimes the *contributi* that must be paid amount to one third of the salary the employer is able or willing to pay. On the other hand, such reluctance turns some employers into black-market operators; apprentices receive no *contributi*, but the employers' long term obligations may be correspondingly stronger, plus the fact that many apprentices are willing to work under such conditions when the only other choice is not to work at all (unemployment in southern Italy for 18 to 25 year olds was estimated at 33% in 1987).

As in so many other sectors of Italian life, well-intentioned but clumsy institutional arrangements drive Italians to seek practical and private solutions that either bypass or undermine the authority of the state. Even in as

prestigious, highly (officially) regulated and nonregionally-oriented institutionalized sector as university teaching, apprenticeships under the tutelage of *baroni*, 'barons' (i.e., powerful patrons) were the only means of training professors until the reforms of 1980 (Saunders 1984). The general result is a very common tendency to opt out of the 'official' economy, with its crippling bureaucratic apparatus, and 'just get things done'.<sup>8</sup>

## The *Guaglio*'

*Guaglio*' relationship were observed in Puglia, in the provincial capitals of Bari and Lecce, and in a small village about 90 kilometres north of Rome near the provincial capital of Viterbo (here called Milopoli, a pseudonym<sup>9</sup>). All four enterprises observed were one-man operations, apprentices excepted. Both regions have very different histories and cultures (the local dialects are almost mutually unintelligible). Despite these differences, the fact that *guaglio*' holds the same meaning in both regions points to the fundamental importance and 'near-kin' implication of the term in Italian culture, as well as pointing to the difficulties in unequivocally assigning the terms 'private' or 'public' to a particular action and in understanding the role of *interesse* in social life by means of a single determinant.

The linguistic context of the term *guaglio*' indicates the subtlety of rank gradation that is engaged in any exchange in Italian. *Guaglio*' in Neapolitan dialect means 'boy'. It is almost universally recognized in Italy despite (or perhaps because of) its regional provenance (in Naples, it means 'young boy', just as other Italians use *ragazzino*). It does not, however, only mean 'boy' in the sense of a young male; it has at least two other meanings. First, it is used<sup>10</sup> to address any young boy of obvious (or intended) inferior social rank, especially when one requests something in the form of an order. When *guaglio*' is used as a prefatory form of address it is not considered necessary to add 'please' to the request: "*O guaglio', che ore so' (sono)?*" ('What time is it, boy?'). Hence, whoever uses the term in this way must be relatively certain that differences in age or

rank are clear if a polite answer is expected. Italy, after all, is a republican democracy, and a rich one at that; money is a great equalizer of social and political rank. Yet despite a very egalitarian distribution of wealth compared to pre-War Italy, gradations of polite forms of speech still survive and indeed, thrive, since money alone is no longer a sufficient means of distinguishing people,<sup>11</sup> and much of the older system still survives.

Second, *guaglio*' is used as a term of reference (properly, *guaglione*) and address for an apprentice in some trades, especially those that require little formal education but much on-the-job training such as mechanic, plumber and stonemason. Clearly, in this instance *guaglio*' does not imply as much a difference in relative age as in relative status; when *guaglio*' is used in the first sense relative age is an important factor in the situational context. One cannot normally address any boy over 13 or 14 as *guaglio*', whereas in the latter case, a person will use the term to address young men in their late teens or early twenties. In short, Italian has no more or fewer linguistic registers than other languages, but Italians are aware of and sensitive to the rules governing address; there is no Dickensian cobbled speech when people of different social standing address each other.

Apprentices are *guaglione*, though any helper is considered a *guaglione*, even if temporary. Not all craftsmen have *guaglioni*; either the size of the business does not justify the expense or, as one mechanic put it, he preferred to work more and make more. In this case, however, his shop was located in the small village of Milopoli (population 2,000). Some craftsmen hire casual labourers as they need them, but this does not necessarily create a *guaglio*' relationship (although a craftsman tends to always hire the same man as a helper; there is no obligation between them, however, and the helper usually has other income). Milopoli's busiest stonemason was such a tradesman. His work, unlike the mechanic's, was part time. Unlike his friend the mechanic, he could plan his work around his other interests (mainly working his small plots of grapes and olives). The stonemason does not have to be 'on



call', while the mechanic depends on drop-in business; if he is not in his shop, people will go to the neighbouring village. People rarely build houses, but their cars often break down. In one sense, the mechanic's higher fixed expenses (rent for the shop, electricity, etc.) prevented him from hiring a full time apprentice, unless, as he put it, he wanted to become a "big time" mechanic. Although not explicitly stated, it was obvious from the context and from other conversations that a higher volume of business meant greater difficulties in concealing income from the fiscal authorities.

The duties of the apprentice or helper are simple: obey the boss, the *maestro*, and learn the trade. Conditions vary; apprentice mechanics gradually learn to fix any part of a broken automobile, but apprentice stonemasons rarely get to build a complete structure until they are independent; nor will the apprentice undertake the expert finishing work that is the stonemason's trademark. In practice, an apprentice is responsible for cleaning and preparing the workplace so that the skilled *maestro* does not waste his time in menial tasks but is able to put his skill to use immediately.

There are two main differences between an apprentice relationship and a casual labourer: in the short run, the casual labourer is paid more, perhaps as much as 100,000 lire (\$80,00 U.S.) a day, whereas the apprentice may be paid less than one-half of that. Pitkin, for example, describes (1985:72) a traditional apprenticeship in the early 1950's in *Le Marche*: the tailor received his meals for two years from the apprentice's mother, while the apprentice worked for two years without wages, twelve hours a day and six days a week. Later, in another establishment, the apprentice was given a cot to sleep in and a small (unspecified) wage. This arrangement continued for an additional three years. As recently as 1973, Pitkin notes (1985:166) that one of his informant's daughters was receiving 3,000 lire per week as an apprentice hairdresser (about \$2,55 U.S. today; then, a clerk earned from 60,000 to 90,000 lire per week).

In the long run, however, the craftsman recognizes certain obligations to the apprentice

that he does not acknowledge towards the casual labourer. Apprentices are paid a low wage for what seems like long and exhausting hours of labour, though towards the end of the apprenticeship, it is the *maestro* who gains less and who sustain financial loss from the relationship. The apprentice will normally stay with the *maestro* five to seven years (in an automobile repair shop, for example, a little less for a stonemason), but when the *guaglio* reaches what the *maestro* deems to be an appropriate level of competence, the *maestro* will undertake to get his apprentices established in their own business.

In one case (Bari), two apprentice mechanics were to be given their own shop with the understanding that one would later sell his share of the shop to the other and use the money to become independent in another location, a *maestro* himself. The *maestro* in fact gave his two 'boys' the use of a small property he owned in a different part of town.<sup>12</sup> There was no fixed limit on the length of time the two could use the shop, though it was understood that when the business was generating enough profit that both could be independent, the remaining ex-apprentice would begin paying rent or buy the property from the *maestro* (though both sums mentioned were low). It is noteworthy that one *maestro* expressed his view that the time for independence had arrived by stating that it was "about time to marry [off] my boys".

The *maestro's* interest is not only economic; he stated that it was, "time to find them wives", (*"trovare le mogliettine per i guaglioni"*, 'find the boys [a pair of] little wives').<sup>13</sup> The Bari *maestro* mentioned that one of his 'boys' already had a fiancé, but that he would introduce the other to one of his nieces. Of course, the *maestro* did not consider himself responsible for the emotional well-being of his 'boys', but chose this expression to emphasize his apprentices' transition to adult status. It is an appropriate expression, since few Italians of this class (or any, for that matter) will get married before being *sistemato*, 'fixed' or 'set up', with a job and owning a house.<sup>14</sup> With wives, in other words, 'his' boys would become men in the full sense of the term; not only reaping the financial reward of long years of

hard work and low pay but assuming the responsibility of a family as well. Ironically, therefore, apprenticeship is considered a time of relative freedom in comparison with adult responsibilities. The equation between youthful poverty and freedom is not so far-fetched, since money is only one measure, and a relatively unimportant one at that, of honour and respectability. In the final analysis, an apprentice's skill plays only a small part in the *maestro's* granting of independence; it is his judgement of them as men that counts. Since they are publicly recognized as 'his' boys, the tradesman's honour would suffer if his apprentices turned out to be bad mechanics or socially disruptable. It is not, therefore, only money (continually improving skills for relatively little money) that impels the *maestro* to prolong his boys' apprenticeship.

There is no strict measure of how much the *maestro* benefits or loses from having apprentices. He may already own a small business property in town that he inherited; therefore, no actual outlay of money may be involved in granting independence to his apprentices (and in all likelihood, he bought the property with profits that were in part generated from the low wage paid to his apprentice; it is almost a form of forced saving on his apprentice's behalf). Certainly, the Barese's decision to provide the *guaglio* with a wife (actually, a formal introduction with the understanding that his niece will receive a substantial dowry from the *maestro* when the apprentice marries her) is unusual in my experience, but in this case it was sign of the *maestro's* fondness for his boys (there is also the underlying motive that the property 'stays in the family', a not unsubstantial consideration in Puglia): "they're good boys, they work hard and don't make trouble. They're like my boys" (meaning, his sons, of which he had two; in Italian the distinction is clear: *guaglioni* versus *figli*). In a word, the relationship is close, intimate, and mutually supportive, and approaches a degree of closeness that is as strong as any public relationship. *Maestri* and *guaglioni* often eat lunch together, and often have a coffee or drink (which the apprentice usually fetches and sometimes pays for) during breaks or after

work. It is noteworthy that *guaglioni* rarely eat in the *maestro's* home; improvements in Italian economic life have apparently changed this aspect of the master-apprentice relationship. Today, there is less migration from the place of birth and an increased tendency for children to live at home until they marry.<sup>15</sup> Hence, the apprentice-master relationship would seem to be more business-like, more delimited in the scope of interaction, than other close relationships. But this is only part of the picture; new obligations have been recognized by masters, such as financial aid when the apprentice matures (there is no mention in the literature of this feature before the contemporary period). Thus the relationship continues to be special, or at least different from an impersonal business arrangement as it is normally understood.

But *guaglioni* are not family, nor are they friends. They are in between. Just as a Pugliese will maintain certain restriction and boundaries in intimate friendships (with other men), so does the *maestro* consistently invoke boundaries in what is otherwise a familial-type bond. There are several ways in which this is accomplished.

First the *maestro* often uses either the term *guaglio* or a nickname when addressing and certainly when referring to his 'boys'. In a sense, the *guaglio* has not yet earned his name while still an apprentice. The *maestro* is, like his apprentices will be, usually a self-made man whose business and hence livelihood depend entirely on his good name, literally and figuratively. He is therefore usually proud and conscious of his status as *maestro*, and not likely to take or give away the status of *maestro* lightly. By calling his 'boys' *guaglio*, the *maestro* establishing the nature of the link between them; not only hierarchical but a professional relationship.

Within the day to day instruction that occurs between *maestro* and apprentice there is no plan or guide as such. The *maestro* instructs only when he needs something; more precisely, when he needs the apprentice to do something. Nor is the instruction in any sense formal or explicit; the apprentice is as much responsible for his own instruction as the *maestro* is in



teaching. The *maestro* requests something, and will only add as few instructions as are necessary for the apprentice to do the task. The apprentice is responsible for carrying out the task efficiently, and doing it well (that is, not interrupting the *maestro* at his work) if he doesn't want to be rebuked by the pervasive epithets *cretino* or *deficiente*. I have never heard a *maestro* give an order that was impossible to carry out, however; the apprentice has usually observed the task performed by the *maestro* enough times to be able to carry it out without too many difficulties.

But if the *maestro* does not allow much leeway for the apprentice's ignorance, he certainly does not indulge it either. One of my main tasks as a *guaglio* was to mix the different grades and types of cement my stonemason *maestro* used. I was given no instructions nor told to watch carefully when the mason prepared the first batch in the morning. I was given some instructions from another apprentice, who, as it turned out, had never prepared this particular type of cement before (his instructions were wrong). Although such a system of instruction places a great deal of responsibility on the shoulders of the apprentice, it also places the *maestro* at risk. If the apprentice mason prepares cement with too much or not enough limestone, the structure will at the very least not be waterproof or at worst will collapse. The mason, not the apprentice, will be held responsible. In one sense, this type of instruction is exactly the opposite of what a young boy has encountered in his own family; Italian children, especially boys, are often sheltered from responsibilities by their parents<sup>16</sup>.

In a word, the relationship involves mutual responsibility and dependence as well as mutual trust. The *maestro's* responsibility is very different from the male head of the family, since he is putting at risk what he does, not what he is. The responsibility is also limited, in the sense that both apprentice and *maestro* are engaged in specific, not diffuse, roles. Yet the mutual dependency does not resemble the support family members offer each other in private. In the apprentice-master relationship, the underpinnings and results are on display for all to see and possibly criticize, while a

father would never grant the equivalent measure of independence to his young daughter, though she is much more the product of his influence and education than the apprentice will ever be.

The element of authority is always present, no matter how close the relationship between *maestro* and apprentice may be. It is manifested in several forms, one of which undermines the *maestro's* competence, or at least his efficiency.<sup>17</sup> On the most straightforward level, the *maestro* orders his apprentice about, giving them various tasks to perform. More subtly, however, the *maestro* often calls his apprentices to his workstation for no apparent reason; nearly every time I was called, I was told to wait. No orders or requests were forthcoming on these occasions (when there is a direct order to be given, the *maestro* usually shouts from wherever he happens to be working). After a few minutes of waiting, when I or the other apprentice would ask if there was anything that the mason needed, the order to wait was either repeated or we were ignored while the mason worked. Clearly, the mason knew what he was doing in his work (he had 30 years experience), and was not only calling because he thought that he would need help; in this kind of work the mason usually works alone and requires apprentices to mix cement and carry it (and bricks and stone) to his workstation. The implication is that the mason was exercising his authority at the expense of efficiency, since after a minute or two the apprentice invariably returns to his work and thus loses five minutes or so in climbing up and down the scaffolding. Experienced apprentices soon learn to shout and ask if there is anything they can do before the *maestro's* work is interrupted by a lack of materials; very experienced apprentices simply learn not to ask, and when called, combine the obligatory 'obedience' trip with a task which the job requires.

Again, the contrast with familial authority is clear. It is quite normal for parents to offer explanations for their actions and see them challenged by their children. Pitkin's description (1987) of a family disagreement seems to depict a serious attempt at imposing an autocratic authority structure on family politics,

but his analysis reveals subtle quasi-sexual behavioural undertones between parents and opposite-sexed children that provide a demonstrable affirmation (as long as everyone plays by the rules of the game) of the father's relative lack of power as his daughters grow more capable of playing the traditional female role. Such scenes are closer to Victor Turner's view of social dramas than indicative of real structural upheaval.<sup>18</sup> In the workplace, however, the master is more clearly the boss; there is no forum in which apprentices can question the master's decisions except in terms of the master's competence. The difference in power is in part maintained by the constraints within which the master imparts his knowledge to his apprentices; very much the hoarder, the master expects the apprentices to learn by observation of everyday routines. Apprentices are never presented with a broad and coherent theoretical overview that would allow them to generate new insights without guidance. Apprentices of course soon do learn to do things their own way, but since the framework by which knowledge is produced is never publicly acknowledged, there is always the uncertainty that the master has not revealed all of his knowledge. Even if the apprentice discovers a simpler or more efficient way of doing a particular task, the master can always find a previously unknown 'oversight' that invalidates the apprentice's efforts. The cycle undoubtedly repeats itself (I am speculating here, since I have no information on the specific instructions master stonemasons and mechanics received 30 years ago) when the apprentice becomes a *maestro* himself and institutes his own hard-won forms of working which, given the task-oriented way in which he was taught, will be little more than simple variations on proven methods.

## Conclusion

I have argued that quasi- or fictive kinship, like 'kinship' itself, are not useful concepts for describing or understanding social behaviour and norms in the Italian context. A more fruitful approach – or at least one that is closer to the 'native' Italian dynamic – obtains by using

the terms 'public/private' and 'close/far' as intersecting gradients that help unravel the complexities of master-apprentice relationships.

I have argued that just as there is a strong incorporative tendency in the formation of social relationships – perhaps due, I have speculated, to the pervasive notion of competition and limited good – there is an equally strong tendency at exclusion at the same level. That is, because of mutual economic and social interests on both parts, there is a tendency to incorporate apprentices into the same structural dynamics that govern 'close/private' relationships; the family, for example. But since the attaining of goals – fulfilling one's *interessi* – depends very much on performing in public, the master-apprentice relationship develops along other lines, which can be labelled 'close/public'.

Boissevain has argued (1979) that there has been a shift from patronage to brokerage as Mediterranean economies become more complex and richer, and that there should be an accompanying shift in the focus of research. Granted that modernization has undoubtedly changed the terms of reference for many Italians, there remains the suspicion that anthropologists have been too eager to view Italian society as having 'traditional' features; this has all too often implied an uncritical application of equally 'traditional' anthropological concepts like kinship, whether 'real', fictive, pseudo-, quasi-, etc. The time, as Kenny and Kertzer (1983:3–19) have said, is ripe for change.

## Notes

This essay is based on material collected during one and a half years residence and work in Lecce (Puglia) and several months residence in the village of Milopoli (Alto Lazio). I would like to thank Luigi Solivetti, Università di Roma "La Sapienza", for reading the manuscript and offering comments.

1. See, for example, Berkowitz (1984); Davis (1970, 1973); Pinto (1981); Pitkin (1985); Silverman (1968), among others.
2. See, for example, Davis (Ibid.); Brøgger (1971); du Boulay and Williams (1987); Loizos (1975); Silverman (Ibid.), among others.
3. But see Berkowitz (1984), who argues that fam-

ilism is a residual category due to the weakness of ties "not based in kinship" (Ibid.:83).

4. For a discussion of *fesso* and its opposite, *furbo*, see Barzini (1966:166).
5. See Korovkin (1988) on the structural implications of patronage in southern and central Italy.
6. Bell (1979: Appendix A) contains a long and finely gradated list of worker and elite terms in use in Calabria and Sicily; this suggests fairly rigid social mobility, as does the Italian habit, especially prevalent in the South, of addressing people by their job titles. Galt (1986) suggests that social mobility in Puglia in the mid 1700's was relatively open-ended, though Snowden (1986) describes class warfare between peasants and landowners in the beginning of this century in the same region, suggesting fewer opportunities for social mobility in recent times.
7. See Vinay (1985) for a survey of the numbers of workers in central Italian occupational categories.
8. This attitude is almost considered a joke: "*Ci penso io*", 'Let me worry about it' is a common and self-ironic expression in Puglia.
9. I have chosen a pseudonym because Milopoli is a very small village, unlike Bari or Lecce.
10. Though not universally; for example, Romans tend to say *A ragazzi*; in standard Italian, *O, ragazzino*.
11. Italians are not only very conscious of differences in status, they habitually identify themselves as members of a particular class. It is quite common for people to state, "*Sono contadino*", 'I am a peasant', or "*Facciamo parte della borghesia media* [or '*alta*']", 'we are members of the middle-bourgeoisie' (meaning, 'old middle class'). In formal or legal contexts, *contadini* are '*coltivatori diretti*' 'agricultural workers' or 'workers in the primary sector'. Nor is nobility officially recognized in republican Italy, but obituary notices commonly identify the deceased by title, if there was one. And then there are the ubiquitous *dottore* (a university graduate) and *commendatore*, an official title more or less equivalent to the English O.B.E. but commonly used in Puglia as a mark of respect.
12. Since most boys who undertake a long apprenticeship have no independent means, it is in their interest to enrich their *maestro*. One *maestro* I knew admitted to not being eager to encourage competition next door, and so gave his apprentices some property in another part of town. His motives, however, are a moot point, since all his vacant properties were far from his shop. Automobile service stations in Italy are usually very small, with no attached parking lot (the cars are kept on the street). Hence the value of the loaned shop is a relatively small part of the *maestro's* worth, yet still completely inaccessible to apprentices.
13. *Moglie* means 'wife'; *mogliettina* means 'little wife' in the English sense of a 'good little wife': a traditional housewife. It is sometimes used ironically by villagers, who are aware that the condition of woman is rapidly changing in Italy; middle-class urbanites sometimes use the term sarcastically to imply that people who are or have a *mogliettina* are backwards and simple.
14. It is normal practice in southern Puglia for the parents and relatives of the bride and groom to 'help' in the *sistemazione* by providing large gifts at the wedding: a house or the majority of its furnishings, a car, a partnership in the family business (if the son-in-law is not already working for his father's business) or, in some cases I heard of, a *raccomandazione*, a personal guarantee for a job, often with the civil service. See Barzini (1966:113) for its significance in Italian culture, and Pitkin (1985) for an ethno-historical description of the process and its consequences among Marchigiani peasants. Despite such aid, the age at first marriage is high in Puglia relative to the rest of Italy, and the birth rate and rate of marriage are the lowest (see CENSIS etc.)
15. This is a tendency similar to that found by Kertzer (Ibid.) for post-industrial central Italy, Anderson (1976) for parts of England after industrialization, and by Pitkin's description (Ibid.) of a peasant family in post-War Marche, a late developing zone in central Italy.
16. Perhaps more out of a sense of spite than love; because male children are so highly valued in the south (the traditional toast at a wedding is *auguri e figli maschi*, 'congratulations and [may you have] male children'), mothers often develop a strong tie to their daughters and, while sheltering their boys from work, are simultaneously and consciously raising them to be immature. This, of course, depends strongly on class: peasant children usually worked from a very early age; see Bell's description (Ibid.) of the traditional peasant life cycle, in contrast to Pitkin's description (Ibid.) of conditions.
17. Apart from the obvious loss of income which a lack of efficiency implies, there is also the risk of undermining the *maestro's* reputation. In Puglia and in small villages everywhere, very few people do business without knowing the workman or salesman. Hence, diminished efficiency can be interpreted as a personal affront to the client, although to a certain extent this is attenuated by the clients' knowledge that inefficiency can be due to 'good' reasons; that is, the *maestro* does things 'the right way'. Workmen who work carefully (and hence, slowly) are esteemed, since Italians value craftsmanship and prudence.
18. Though the tensions are clearly structurally produced: a father's desire for continuity through his boys undermined by his obligations to settle a dowry on his daughters, who will, after all, continue another family's name and honour.



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