UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

Matera 1945-1960: the history of a ‘national shame’

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of European Languages, Culture and Society

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Declaration

I, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.
Abstract

This thesis examines how and why the southern Italian city of Matera came to be seen as a national shame and symbol of the southern question in the post-war period. Moreover, it traces the impact that these narratives had on the city's social and urban history from 1945 to 1960. It draws on methods from the history of nationalism, the history of emotions, the new southern history, and urban history to achieve these aims. A range of primary and secondary sources are examined including documents from the Italian State Archives in Rome and Matera, the US National Archive in Maryland, Italian newspapers and magazines, parliamentary documents and debates, and official newsreel and documentary footage. The first chapter analyses the image of Matera as Other and a symbol of southern Italy's civiltà contadina featured in Carlo Levi’s post-war bestseller Cristo si è fermato a Eboli. It also assesses the book's impact in shaping ideas of Matera amongst Italy's post-war public sphere. The second chapter looks at how and why Matera came to be seen as a national shame in the immediate post-war period. It examines the distinct catholic and communist moral worlds which shaped this notion in a Cold War context. The third chapter investigates the implementation of the first special law for Matera. It assesses the project’s limitations and critiques the existing secondary literature on this topic. Finally, the fourth chapter is a case study of the purpose-built rural village La Martella. It examines how and why Matera and La Martella were used in government propaganda to promote official reforms in southern Italy. The thesis concludes that narratives of national shame and the southern question directly shaped Matera’s urban and social topography post-1945.
Table of contents

DECLARATION ........................................................................................................................................ 2

ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................................................... 3

TABLE OF CONTENTS ......................................................................................................................... 4

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .......................................................................................................................... 6

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS ....................................................................................................... 9

INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................................................ 10
  Scope .................................................................................................................................................. 12
  Existing literature .............................................................................................................................. 13
  Sources .............................................................................................................................................. 17
  Methods .............................................................................................................................................. 21
  Thesis structure ................................................................................................................................. 29

CHAPTER 1: CARLO LEVI AND THE ORIGINS OF THE MATERA QUESTION .................................................. 33
  1.1 Cristo’s historical and political context ....................................................................................... 37
  1.2 Matera in Cristo ............................................................................................................................ 46
    Matera: symbol of the civiltà contadina ......................................................................................... 47
    Matera as Other ............................................................................................................................... 53
  1.3 Cristo’s reception and impact ....................................................................................................... 61
  CONCLUSION ....................................................................................................................................... 73

CHAPTER 2: MATERA AND NATIONAL SHAME ...................................................................................... 76
  2.1 Historical context .......................................................................................................................... 78
  2.2 Studying national shame ........................................................................................................... 87
    Existing literature .......................................................................................................................... 89
    Theoretical framework ............................................................................................................... 93
CHAPTER 3: THE FIRST SPECIAL LAW FOR THE SASSI .......... 147

3.1 THE RESIDENTIAL VILLAGE MODEL ......................................................... 151
3.2 THE STUDY COMMISSION ........................................................................ 159
3.3 THE FIRST SPECIAL LAW ........................................................................... 165
3.4 IMPLEMENTING THE RISANAMENTO PROGRAMME .................................. 177
   Serra Venerdi ................................................................................................... 180
   Lanera .............................................................................................................. 183
   Spine Bianche ................................................................................................. 184
   Venusio ............................................................................................................ 186
   Re-evaluating the first special law ............................................................... 188
   CONCLUSION ............................................................................................... 196

CHAPTER 4: LA MARTELLA: A MODEL FOR SOUTHERN ITALIAN DEVELOPMENT .......................................................... 199

4.1 A BRIEF HISTORY OF IL BORG LO LA MARTELLA .................................. 202
4.2 LA MARTELLA IN OFFICIAL SOURCES .................................................... 209
4.3 MATERA AND LA MARTELLA IN CENTRO DOCUMENTAZIONE FILMS .......... 219
   Accade in Lucania ............................................................................................ 227
   Paesi Nuovi and Cronache del Mezzogiorno .............................................. 231
   Borgate della riforma ..................................................................................... 234
4.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE LA MARTELLA PROJECT ..................................... 242
   CONCLUSION ............................................................................................... 259

CONCLUSIONS .............................................................................................. 262

BIBLIOGRAPHY .............................................................................................. 270
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronyms and abbreviations</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DC</td>
<td><em>Democrazia Cristiana</em></td>
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<td>ECA</td>
<td>European Cooperation Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>GL</td>
<td><em>Giustizia e Libertà</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>IMES</td>
<td><em>Istituto meridionale di storia e scienze sociali</em></td>
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<td>INU</td>
<td><em>Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>OPW</td>
<td>Office of Public Works</td>
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<tr>
<td>PCI</td>
<td><em>Partito Comunista Italiano</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>PdA</td>
<td><em>Partito d’Azione</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>PRG</td>
<td><em>Piano Regionale Generale</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>SVIMEZ</td>
<td><em>Associazione per lo sviluppo dell’industria nel Mezzogiorno</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>UNRRA-CASAS</td>
<td>United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration-Comitato Amministrativo Soccorso ai Senzatetto</td>
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Introduction

‘Nessuno sa meglio di te, saggio Kublai, che non si deve mai confondere la città col discorso che la descrive. Eppure tra l’una e l’altro c’è un rapporto,’

Italo Calvino.1

The southern Italian city of Matera in Basilicata was dubbed a national shame in the period immediately following the Second World War. Moreover, the city became a symbol of Italy’s intractable southern question. This was the result of a period of intense political, intellectual, and media focus on Matera's infamous cave dwellings, or Sassi, which housed an estimated 15,000 people in the early 1950s. These distinctive troglodyte homes, some of which date from the Paololithic era, were carved into the side of the city’s limestone gorge and then completed with brick façades. In the early 1950s it was estimated that only 3 per cent of the Sassi’s dwellings had running water and there was no conventional sewage system.2 In many cases, three generations of one family lived side-by-side with their farm animals in this 29-hectare labyrinth of semi-underground homes. In the context of Italy’s acute post-war housing crisis, Matera was portrayed in the national media as a low point for Italian civilization - a monument to southern poverty and Fascism’s neglect of the southern question hewn from the living rock.3

Following political and media pressure, the Christian Democrat government passed a special law for the Sassi in 1951. Its primary aim was to

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1 Italo Calvino, *Le città invisibili*, Mondadori, Milan, 2003, p. 60
2 Riccardo Musatti, ‘Viaggio ai “Sassi” di Matera’, *Comunità*, (1950), no. 9, p. 41
3 Official data from the immediate post-war period, however, suggests that apart from its large agglomeration of cave homes, housing conditions at Matera were ostensibly comparable with many other parts of post-war Italy. See pp. 137-138 below.
evacuate uninhabitable cave homes and rehouse their inhabitants in purpose-built agricultural villages and residential quarters. There was, however, almost no consultation with the local population about the provisions of the special law and its subsequent implementation. Instead state intervention at Matera was carried out from above. The first special law was used to promote the twin reform programmes that the Christian Democrats had implemented for southern Italy in the early 1950s. Furthermore, the official intervention programme saw Matera become a testing-ground for, what was at the time labelled, Neorealist architecture and the decentralization theories of Italian town planners and architects. The Sassi were gradually emptied and most of their 15,000 residents rehoused in purpose-built villages and urban quarters. The intellectual, media and political focus on the town in the immediate post-war years were fundamental catalysts in initiating this dramatic change to the city's urban and social topography. The complicated process of closing dilapidated cave dwellings and rehousing residents, however, lasted over twenty years and was never entirely completed.

There is a large body of secondary literature about Matera's turbulent post-war history. However, hitherto there has been little research into how and why the city came to be viewed as a national shame and a symbol of the southern question post-1945. This thesis aims to fill that gap. Drawing on previously neglected primary source material and methods, it will examine the discursive construction of Matera as a national shame and emblem of southern backwardness in the context of post-war Italy’s complex political landscape, renewed interest in the southern question, and notions of Italian national
identity in a Cold War context. In addition it will endeavour to ascertain how and why these discourses were used politically and the concrete impact that they had on Matera’s social and urban fabric during the period 1945-1960. These themes will be examined using research methods that draw on recent scholarship in the history of emotions, nationalism, urban history, and the new southern history. Through its study of post-war Matera, this thesis aims to make an original contribution to these different research areas in the broader context of twentieth-century Italian history.

Scope

The decision to focus on a specific southern Italian city during the period 1945-1960 has been made for a number of precise reasons. First, Matera was chosen because it constitutes a laboratory for examining notions of national shame at a micro-level. Italian national identity was considered to be in crisis and renewal in the immediate post-war period following twenty years of Fascist rule, military surrender, the loss of Italy’s overseas colonies, foreign occupation, and civil war. The onset of the Cold War saw notions of Italian nationalism reshaped along apparently transnational ideological lines. The narratives of national shame produced in the context of Matera, therefore, constitute an ideal test case for a micro-study of notions of the Italian nation at a moment in history when the country’s seemingly weak sense of national identity was believed to be in a

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4 Stuart Hall’s work on discourse construction is helpful in defining this term in the context of this thesis. Drawing on Foucault, Hall has defined discourse as ‘a group of statements which provide language for talking about – the way of representing knowledge about - a particular topic at a particular moment in history.’ In addition Hall contends that discourse ‘constructs the topic. It defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. It governs the way a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about.’ See Stuart Hall, ‘The Work of Representation’, in Stuart Hall (ed.), Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1997, pp. 13-75.
state of flux. Second, post-war Matera provides a test-case for examining notions of the southern question. Matera came to be seen as a symbol of the southern question post-1945 due to the success of Carlo Levi’s book *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*. The book triggered a period of intense political, media and intellectual focus on the Sassi. Images of the city played a fundamental role in the ‘rediscovery’ of the Mezzogiorno following twenty years of Fascist rule. Examining how and why Matera came to be seen as a symbol of the South between 1945-1960 will shed light on notions of the Mezzogiorno and how they were used politically in the immediate post-war period. Finally, the time period 1945-1960 was chosen because it encompasses the beginning and the end of the period of intense media and political focus on Matera, the implementation of the first special law for the city which initiated the process of emptying the Sassi, and Italy’s post-war economic boom and rural exodus of the late 1950s. By 1960 Matera had ceased to be important in terms of political propaganda and subsequently faded back into obscurity.

**Existing literature**

A large body of secondary literature has been published about Matera’s post-war history in the sixty years since the *risanamento* programme for the Sassi was first implemented. There are a substantial number of works which look at the social and urban changes that took place in post-war Matera from architectural and town planning perspectives. See Marcello Fabbri, *Matera dal sottosviluppo alla nuova città*, Basilicata editrice, Matera, 1971; Domenico Fiore, *Architettura e urbanistica: Il caso matera (1841-1956)*, Unpublished graduate thesis, Istituto universitario di architettura di Venezia, 1986; Angela Raguso, *Matera dai Sassi ai borghi (1952 – 1964)*, Altrimedia, Matera, 2007; Amerigo Restucci and Manfredo Tafuri, *Un contributo alla comprensione della vicenda storica dei Sassi*, BMG.
examined aspects of the city’s social, cultural and political history from the enactment of the *risanamento* programme onwards.\(^6\) In addition three chronological urban biographies of Matera have been published which trace the city’s urban and architectural development from prehistory to the present day.\(^7\) All of these works have made an important contribution to the on-going debate about Matera’s post-war history. Key texts from the existing secondary literature will be critiqued in detail at different points throughout this thesis, but it is necessary to briefly set out some of the gaps which the current research project aims to fill.

First, it is generally taken as a given that Matera was seen as a national shame and a symbol of the southern question in the immediate post-war period. There has been no detailed study of the discursive construction of these concepts and the subsequent impact that they had on shaping the *risanamento* programme for Matera. In contrast, this thesis traces the origins of these notions, how and why they developed, and their subsequent impact on the city’s social and urban history during the period 1945-1960.

Second, there has been a tendency to examine post-war Matera in isolation without taking the broader social, political and cultural changes that took place in Italy and the wider world into account. Writing about Italian urban biographies, Sergio Pace argues that by ‘focusing exclusively on the city itself,


they tend to ignore everything that occurs beyond its confines.'

This point is applicable to the historiography of post-war Matera, in which the broader changes that took place at a macro-level have largely been neglected. In part this can be attributed to the fact that many studies of Matera are essentially local histories written by non-professional historians. However, the same charge can also be levelled at a recently published academic study of the city's post-war history which arguably fails to examine the risanamento programme in the context of broader historical processes taking place at national and international levels.

The existing literature on post-war Matera has generally neglected to engage with recent scholarship on Italy's southern question. Anne Toxey's work on Matera draws on revisionist studies of the Mezzogiorno. However, she arguably reduces the complexities of the southern question to a single and unified ethnocentric discourse rather than approaching it as a contested and fractured idea. This is primarily due to a lack of contextualization of stereotypical images of Matera and the South. As a result Toxey's work fails to adequately explain how and why Matera came to be seen as a symbol of the southern question in the post-war period, how this idea came to be seen as a symbol of the

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8 Sergio Pace, 'Through the Looking-Glass: Research on the Italian City in Historical Perspective', in Robert Lumley and John Foot (eds.) *Italian Cityscapes. Culture and Urban Change in Contemporary Italy*, University of Exeter Press, Exeter, 2004, p. 18

9 See Anne Toxey’s recent work on post-war Matera. Toxey arguably fails to take the social and economic upheavals that took place in post-war Italy into account. In particular her work overlooks the rapid social and cultural changes that the economic miracle engendered. For example Toxey claims that the risanamento programme was a deliberate government strategy to transform Sassi residents from dialect-speaking agricultural workers into Italian-speaking tertiary workers. This assertion overlooks the fact that Italy experienced a huge rural exodus in the late 1950s and that spoken Italian slowly began to replace regional dialects throughout the country due to a myriad of social and cultural changes in the post-war era. Instead Toxey examines Matera in isolation without taking broader historical processes into consideration. Toxey, *Materan Contradictions*, p. 61. For a discussion of spoken Italian’s rapid growth in the post-war period see Tullio De Mauro, *Storia linguistica dell’Italia unita*, Laterza, Bari, 1970, pp. 51-126.

convincing, and the impact that it had on the city's social and urban fabric. This study, in contrast, will look to make an original contribution to the new southern history. It will critique the existing literature on the southern question and historicize the concept of Matera as a symbol of the South in detail. This approach will shed light on the discursive construction of broader ideas of southern Italy in the post-war period and allow for their reception and impact at a micro-level to be examined in detail.

Furthermore, the voices of Sassi residents who were transferred from their cave homes to new accommodation are largely absent from the existing historiography. A number of oral history studies have been carried out in recent years, but little work has been done on popular reaction to the social and urban changes that took place in post-war Matera and in particular the marginalization of Sassi residents from the *risanamento* programme's implementation.11 In general historians of post-war Matera appear more interested in local politics, architecture and urban developments than the

11 Patrizia Zuccari interviewed a number of former Sassi residents for her chapter ‘I Sassi di Matera: il luogo ritrovato?’, in Lucilla Rami Ceci (ed.), *Sassi e Templi. Il luogo antropologico tra cultura e ambiente*, Armando Editore, Rome, 2003, pp. 446-460. However, arguably Zuccari’s work presents life in the Sassi as an idealized pre-industrial *Gemeinschaft* which ignores the class and generational conflicts that appear to have existed amongst the district’s 15,000 residents. Pasquale Doria’s book *Ritorno alla città laboratorio. I quartieri del risanamento cinquanta anni dopo*, Antezza, Matera, 2010 also contains fragments of oral testimony from ex-Sassi residents. In addition Angelo Del Parigi and Rosalba Demetrio carried out interviews with a number of people that were transferred from the Sassi to new housing between 1950 and 1970. Their work examines life and culture in the Sassi from an anthropological perspective. See Angelo Del Parigi and Rosalba Demetrio, *Antropologia di un labirinto urbano, i Sassi di Matera*, Osanna Edizioni, Venosa, 1994. Moreover, Anne Toxey carried out a large number of interviews with former Sassi residents between 2000 and 2006. She has used oral testimonies to examine the impact that narratives of shame associated with post-war Matera have had on collective memory of the Sassi at a local level. However, Toxey arguably neglects to examine the mistakes and myths found in these oral testimonies in favour of summarising broad themes. The subjectivity of these accounts could potentially shed light on the psychological impact that the *risanamento* programme had on Sassi residents. See Anne Toxey, ‘Reinventing the Cave: Competing Images, Interpretations, and Representations of Matera, Italy’, *TDSR*, vol. XV (2004), no. 2, pp. 61-78; Anne Toxey, ‘Via Media: The Circulation of Narratives and their Influence on Tourists’ and Residents’ Actions and Memories’, *Material Culture Review*, (2010), no. 71, pp. 67-83; and Toxey, *Materan Contradictions*, 2011.
people that the first special law directly affected. There is a tendency in the existing literature to present the estimated 15,000 people that lived in the Sassi as a unified block with a singular opinion and voice rather than a collection of individuals with varied opinions, hopes and fears. Drawing on previously neglected archival material this thesis will look to examine the reaction of Sassi residents to the *risanamento* programme. Although these sources are fragmentary and sometimes filtered through official documents and the party press, they represent an important contribution to the existing historiography of post-war Matera.12

**Sources**

This project makes extensive use of documents from Matera’s Prefecture and the city’s office of public works related to the first special law for the Sassi and the subsequent *risanamento* programme. These files are housed in the *Archivio di Stato di Matera*. In addition, the thesis draws on official and unofficial reports about the Sassi, post-war architectural and urban planning periodicals, political journals, as well as local and national newspaper articles published during the scope of this study. These different sources were crucial in examining the implementation of the first special law for Matera and its various problems in detail and from a variety of perspectives. Many of these sources have been cited in the existing literature on the city’s post-war history. However, it became clear during the research stage of the current project that a number of important primary sources had been underused or neglected completely in previous

![](image)

12 It became clear halfway through this research project that an oral history component would have greatly contributed to including the voices of Sassi residents in the historical narrative on post-war Matera. Due to temporal and financial constraints, however, it was not feasible to carry out interviews at that point in time. This is an area which could be developed in future research.
studies of the *risanamento* programme - in particular the files pertaining to the first special law’s implementation which are held in the state archive at Matera. These documents show that the special law’s application was reactive rather than systematic and they help to shed light on the legislation’s various shortcomings. Instead in the existing literature on post-war Matera there had been an overreliance on a number of influential secondary sources which had, in a number of cases, substituted the historical analysis of archival material. In contrast this study has drawn on previously neglected primary sources located in the state archive at Matera as well as in additional archives located in Italy and the USA. These sources have allowed for a more comprehensive examination of the *risanamento* programme and the reassessment of a number of arguments in the existing historiography. They have also provided important insights into the reactions of Sassi residents to the rehousing programme that the first special law generated.

Previous studies of post-war Matera have largely overlooked the body of relevant primary sources housed at the *Archivio centrale dello Stato* in Rome. In contrast, this study draws on the files of the Ministry of the Interior and the Italian Prime Minister’s office. The documents from the Ministry of the Interior provided supplemental details of correspondence between the Prefect of Matera and the Interior Ministry relating to political visits to the city and shed light on problems encountered during the first special law’s implementation. The files of the Italian Prime Minister’s office contained some important documents which illustrated the links made between housing conditions
amongst the Sassi and morality in official circles. These sources proved to be crucial in examining notions of Matera as a national shame.

Furthermore, this thesis draws on files from the US Department of State's International Cooperation Administration held in the National Archives and Records Administration, Maryland. These documents on the construction of the agricultural village La Martella, built to rehouse 200 families from the Sassi, have not been used in any previous studies of post-war Matera. They have added new perspectives to the existing historical narrative and meant that a more comprehensive examination of La Martella’s construction could be carried out. Archival research was also carried out at the Archivio Storico dell’Istituto Luigi Sturzo in Rome. A number of important documents were located in the Fondo Democrazia Cristiana, Serie segreteria politica (1944-1992). They revealed internal rivalries and power struggles within the DC at a local level and enabled a number of arguments in the existing literature to be reassessed.

This thesis has also made extensive use of the large body of newsreel and documentary footage produced about post-war Matera during the period 1945-1960. These sources were crucial for examining how the Sassi were used as a symbol of the southern question in government propaganda promoting the intervento straordinario: the name given to the implementation of land reform legislation and a state development programme for southern Italy in the early 1950s.\textsuperscript{13} Although a selection of this material has been examined in a recent study of post-war newsreels and ideas of modernization, no previous work on

\textsuperscript{13} See pp. 90-91 below for the history of land reform and the Cassa del Mezzogiorno.
Matera has drawn on these important visual texts.\textsuperscript{14} A number of relevant documentaries and newsreels films were consulted via the Istituto Luce’s online archive. This resource provided access to a selection of government-sponsored films that feature Matera in the context of official visits and government reforms for southern Italy. In addition, a number of important documentary films from the USIS-Trieste collection that feature Matera and the rural village La Martella were consulted at the Archivio centrale dello Stato in Rome.\textsuperscript{15} Examining these visual texts provides a more comprehensive understanding of how the notion of Matera as national shame and symbol of the southern question was constructed and later appropriated for political ends.

Finally, this thesis has collected a vast quantity of local, regional, national and international press articles on Matera published during the scope of this study. While a number of Italian press sources have been cited in the existing literature on post-war Matera, the actual texts themselves have rarely been examined in detail.\textsuperscript{16} In contrast, the present study has drawn on press material to examine their contribution in the creation of notions of Matera as a national shame and a symbol of the southern question in the immediate post-war period. Furthermore, the existing literature regularly alludes to international media coverage of Matera in the 1950s but rarely examines concrete examples.

Conversely, this thesis has gathered a large collection of English-language

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\textsuperscript{16} See for example Carmine Di Lena, \textit{Quando l’America scopri i Sassi. Antefatto della Legge per il risanamento dei Sassi}, Altrimedia, Matera, 2007. It cites and reproduces a large amount of newspaper coverage on the Sassi but offers no textual analysis of these important sources.
articles on the Sassi from physical and digital archives. This has allowed for Italian claims about the depiction of Matera in the foreign press to be re-evaluated.

The large body of primary sources consulted and examined in this thesis has allowed for an in-depth study of the discursive construction of Matera as a national shame and emblem of the southern question to be carried out. Furthermore, these sources have enabled a more comprehensive examination of the *risanamento* programme’s implementation and shortcomings to be achieved compared to the existing literature.

**Methods**

This thesis employs a number of different methods in order to examine narratives of Matera as a national shame and symbol of the Mezzogiorno post-1945. In its study of how the idea of Matera as Other developed in the immediate post-war period, this study draws on the work of the urban historian Alan Mayne.\(^\text{17}\) His research into the narratives used to create the concept of the slum in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century provides a theoretical framework for examining Carlo Levi’s influential description of Matera in his memoir *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*. In addition, this thesis draws on recent scholarship in the history of emotions, cultural studies, moral philosophy, psychology, and nationalism in order to examine national shame. Studies of patriotic narratives in an Italian context have primarily focused on the Liberal period. This study looks to broaden the scope to the post-war period and thus

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aims to make an original contribution to the existing literature on Italian nationalism. The theoretical framework employed for examining patriotic narratives is outlined in detail in the second chapter, but the works that informed the current study will be briefly listed here. Emotions were a relatively neglected area of research for historians until the so-called ‘affective turn’ over the last two decades. In the context of modern Italian history, there is a growing body of research in this area. Silvana Patriarca’s work on national shame and the Risorgimento has been path-breaking in this regard and is one of the inspirations for the current study. Furthermore, Renaissance historian Barbara Rosenwein’s concept of an ‘emotional community’ is used to examine the parameters and norms which shaped how distinct social groups expressed national shame in the context of post-war Matera. The cultural theorist Sara Ahmed’s work on the cultural politics of emotion proved invaluable for analysing the ways in which expressions of patriotic emotion define the object that they purport to describe: the nation. Furthermore, in its study of patriotic narratives this thesis has drawn on John Dickie’s large body of work on notions of the Italian nation and national identity. Building upon Benedict Anderson’s influential concept of the nation as an ‘imagined community’, Dickie contends

18 The Association for the Study of Modern Italy’s annual conference in 2009 was dedicated to the history of emotions and a number of articles based on conference presentations were later published. See the articles in Modern Italy, vol. 17 (2012), no. 2, pp. 151-285.
that nations are in fact a myriad of competing and conflicting social fictions. He advocates the need for micro-studies of patriotic expressions at specific moments in history in order to avoid broad generalizations about notions of national identity. This theoretical approach has been adopted in the current study. These different methodological strands are drawn together in chapter two which examines post-war Matera and patriotic narratives in detail.

Furthermore, Matera provides an opportunity to examine notions of the South after 1945. The Sassi were an important source for images of southern Italian alterity in the post-war period. In order to examine notions of the Mezzogiorno as Other it is necessary to outline in brief the historiography of the South as a concept. The southern question paradigm has influenced the social, political and economic history of Italy since the country's unification in 1861. In addition this concept has played a fundamental role in defining notions of Italian national identity. It is generally agreed that the framework was born in the Liberal period through the writings and fieldwork of the first meridionalisti Pasquale Villari, Leopoldo Franchetti and Sidney Sonnino. It is characterized by two fundamental components: the totalized representation of the Italian South as a homogeneous territory which is economically and culturally backward, and the use of a dualistic framework to study the Mezzogiorno: southern Italy is studied in direct comparison to a normative model of European modernity embodied by northern Italy. Through this methodological

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prism, the histories of the diverse regions of southern Italy have been reduced to a ‘single, undifferentiated and stereotyped Mezzogiorno.’ Stereotypes of the South in Liberal Italy were created in the context of imagining the Italian nation and the putative values that it represented. As John Dickie argues: ‘to define Italy as civilized, one has to have a sense, albeit perhaps implicit, of where that civilization fades at its boundaries into the barbarous.’ In the dichotomy between modernity and backwardness the Mezzogiorno was positioned as Other to the rest of the country. Stereotypical images of the South, therefore, were as much the product of narratives of the Italian nation and modernity as a reflection of material conditions. The southern question paradigm continued to dominate the historiography of the Mezzogiorno until the mid-1980s.

Consequently, the different histories of southern Italy’s diverse regions were reduced to the history of a uniform and stereotyped South; as Piero Bevilacqua notes: ‘la storia del Mezzogiorno contemporanea ha fatto tutt’uno con la storia della “questione meridionale”.

The framework of the southern question was challenged in the mid-1980s with the emergence of the new southern history. The reassessment of how southern Italy had been and should be studied was spearheaded by a number of scholars who founded the *Istituto meridionale di storia e scienze*

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26 Dickie, *Darkest Italy*, p.12
The new southern history highlighted the paradigm's theoretical weaknesses and challenged many of the stereotypes associated with the South. Studying the Mezzogiorno in direct comparison with a normative concept of the North, it was argued, reduced the diverse nature of the regions that had made up the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies into a simplified and totalized territory caught in stasis, thus ignoring the complex cultural and economic mosaic of southern Italy. This new theoretical framework for studying southern Italy was adopted by a number of Anglophone scholars in the 1990s whose work focused on the discursive construction of stereotypical images of the South – a topic that hitherto had largely been ignored in Italian academic circles.

The new southern history successfully dismantled many of the stereotypes associated with the Mezzogiorno in an academic context. However, revisionist studies of the South have not been without their shortcomings. The present work will outline these limitations in brief and then endeavour to avoid them. First, the new southern history has placed too much emphasis on refuting the validity of the southern question paradigm and not enough attention on historicizing the framework itself. As a result the effect that

29 For an unofficial manifesto of IMES's primary aims see Carmine Donzelli, 'Mezzogiorno tra “questione” e purgatorio. Opinione comune, immagine scientifica, strategie di ricerca', *Meridiana*, vol. 9 (1990), pp. 13-53.


31 The large body of work produced in the 1980s and 1990s which re-examined the historiography of southern Italy has not been adequately built upon in recent years. This appears, in part, a result of the fact that the Mezzogiorno is not currently fashionable in academic circles. While academic trends come and go, that does not make the work of the new southern history any less valid. This thesis aims to draw on, and critique where necessary, the large body of existing work previously carried out on images of southern Italy in an attempt to make a small contribution to this field of research.
discourses of the Mezzogiorno have had across time and space at intellectual
and popular levels has often been neglected.\textsuperscript{32} In particular, the impact that
discourses of the South have had on political decisions and on official policy has
largely been overlooked. More work needs to be done into how and why
specific images of the South came to be seen as convincing at specific moments
in time. To avoid similar omissions historians of the southern question need to
carefully weigh up the reception and impact that the texts under examination
had on notions of the Mezzogiorno - at the time of publication and over time.
They need to assess how texts were disseminated, who actually read them, and
how they were received before any conclusions about their effects can be
drawn.

Second, there has been a tendency to reduce the complexities of the
southern question to a seemingly unchanging monolithic neo-Orientalist
discourse which, it is claimed, was used to subjugate southern Italy.\textsuperscript{33} This
argument has been taken to its extreme with assertions that the southern

\textsuperscript{32} Nelson Moe’s work is illustrative in this regard. His monograph \textit{The View from Vesuvius},
offers detailed literary analysis of key texts which contributed to the formulation of the
southern question paradigm. However, there is a failure in Moe’s book to give adequate
space to the historical context within which these images were created. \textit{The View from
Vesuvius} focuses exclusively on how stereotypes of the Mezzogiorno were constructed,
neglecting to explore the historical impact that these representations had, how they were
disseminated, who read the various texts studied and how they were received at popular
and political levels. This is primarily due to the rigidity of methodological approaches
applied. The detailed textual and literary analysis he carries out needs to be supplemented
with historical research. For a critique of Moe’s work see John Foot, \textit{The View from
Vesuvius. Italian Culture and the Southern Question}, \textit{Modernism/Modernity}, vol. 10 (2003),
no. 3, pp. 586–587.

\textsuperscript{33} See in particular Jane Schneider, ‘Introduction: The Dynamics of Neo-orientalism in Italy
(1845–1995)’, in Jane Schneider (ed.), \textit{Italy’s ‘Southern Question’: Orientalism in One Country},
argument see Lucy Riall, ‘Which Road to the South? Revisionists Revisit the Mezzogiorno’,
Souths: Many stereotypes’, \textit{Modern Italy}, vol. 4 (1999), no. 1, pp. 79–86.
question was in fact the product of an imperial ideology. These viewpoints, however, overlook the fractured and disparate nature of *meridionalismo*. To view all writers on the South as part of a single neo-Orientalist discourse seems reductive in the extreme. This viewpoint, moreover, arguably reflects a failure to properly examine images of the Mezzogiorno in the various historical contexts in which they were produced. The neo-Orientalist framework therefore elides the very complexities and contradictions that historians should aim to uncover. As a result it appears to contradict one of IMES’s original aims: to examine southern Italy’s diverse territories and identities on their own terms.

Furthermore, in terms of scope, the bulk of research carried out on stereotypical images of the Mezzogiorno has focused on the Liberal period. The post-war era has been relatively neglected in contrast. The Liberal period was undoubtedly a crucial time in the context of forging a sense of Italian national identity and the work carried out on southern question discourse and patriotic narratives in that context is exemplary. However, historians must be careful not to fall into the trap of presuming that once broad patriotic narratives are established they then remain fixed through time. That, in essence, is to confuse ideas of national identity with how ‘nations’ would like to be seen. Instead

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35 See Donzelli, pp. 13-53.

36 An exception to this point is Grazia De Michele’s important work on the impact that notions of the South as Other had on the experiences of southern Italian children in Turin schools between the 1950s and the 1970s. See Grazia De Michele, ‘*At the Gates of civilization*’ *Southern children in Turin primary schools, 1950s-1970s*, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Reading, 2012.

37 See Dickie, *Darkest Italy*. 
historians need to examine the changing nature of nationalist discourse. If the ‘nation’, as this thesis contends, are a series of competing social fictions, then these changing discourses need to be studied at various points throughout history. Moreover, the fact that there are a myriad of patriotic narratives at any one time suggests that a micro-historical approach is required. Broad claims about the state of a society based on nationalist discourse are redundant if not ahistorical.

Italian patriotism was less vocal in the post-war period. Fascism had discredited the ideology of nationalism and the destruction of the Second World War had produced an apparent crisis of Italian national identity on the one hand, and a strong sense of patriotic renewal on the other. However, notions of Italy and a sense of common identity were still very much at stake post-1945. The different imaginings of the nation were politically inflected in the context of the Cold War and were one of the means through which political identities were forged in post-war Italy.


39 Gaspare Nevola argues that there was a period of intense political focus on ideas of Italian national identity in the immediate post-war period until the mid-1950s. He contends that ‘i partiti di massa [the PCI and the DC], con maggiore o minore convinzione, più o meno strumentalmente, hanno avuto modo di impegnarsi sulla questione nazionale italiana, sotto il profilo dell’elaborazione ideologica ma anche sul piano dell’azione politico-organizzativa. Soprattutto nei primi anni del dopoguerra, quando essi erano alla ricerca di una “legittimità nazionale”’. This, Nevola argues, sparked a period in which Italy’s two main post-war parties attempted to ‘formulare e … diffondere letture della vicenda nazionale alternative a quelle offerte dalla cultura politica liberal-democratica.’ This resulted in the creation of two ideologically opposed notions of the Italian nation. The PCI formulated the idea of the ‘nazione popolare’ which was meant to contrast with Liberal-era ideas of the nation which were deemed to have been elitist and bourgeois and a betrayal of the Risorgimento. In contrast, the DC communicated the concept of the ‘nazione cattolica’ which emphasized the central role that the Catholic Church had played in Italian culture and society. In essence the implication was that to be Italian was to be Catholic. See Gaspare Nevola ‘La nazione italiana: un ritorno dopo il congedo’, in Gaspare Nevola (ed.), *Una patria per gli italiani? La questione nazionale oggi tra storia, cultura e politica*, Carocci Editore, Rome, 2003, pp. 32-41.
opportunity to examine notions of the nation and the Mezzogiorno after 1945. The city was an important source for images of southern Italian otherness in the post-war era. These images were generated in the context of competing and contrasting imaginings of the Italian nation and the putative values that defined it.

**Thesis structure**

This thesis is divided into four loosely chronological chapters. Chapter one examines Matera’s brief yet influential depiction in Carlo Levi’s best-selling memoir *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*. This book played a fundamental role in the ‘rebirth’ of the southern question following the end of Fascist rule. Although correctly cited as one of the primary reasons for political, academic and media focus on Matera in the immediate post-war period, the textual representation of the Sassi that Levi presented is rarely examined in detail or placed in its historical, political or biographical contexts. This chapter aims to redress that fact. It argues that Levi’s depiction of Matera was directly influenced by his political beliefs and the historical context in which his book was written. Furthermore, it argues that Levi’s account of the Sassi drew on a number of literary strategies employed in nineteenth-century slumland depictions. These narratives were used to denounce the Italian state’s apparent neglect of the Mezzogiorno. In addition, this chapter examines the reception and impact that Levi’s most famous work had in post-war Italy. There is an attempt to ascertain how the book’s success influenced media and political interest in Matera and shaped attitudes towards the city amongst Italy’s post-war public sphere. This
chapter, in addition, examines how Levi’s description of the Sassi was adopted and adapted by different political interests. In order to contextualize Levi’s political and intellectual biography the chapter draws on early political articles published in Piero Gobetti’s *Rivoluzione Liberale*, his writings for the *Giustizia e Libertà* movement and the Action Party, as well as his first book *Paura della libertà*. Furthermore, the urban historian Alan Mayne’s framework for examining slumland depictions is employed to study Levi’s image of the Sassi in detail. This chapter also makes extensive use of the large volume of press clippings on Carlo Levi’s work that the *Fondo Levi* has collected and donated to the *Archivio centrale dello Stato* in Rome.

Chapter two examines the discursive construction of Matera as a national shame in the immediate post-war period. It draws on recent scholarship in the history of emotions, moral philosophy, psychology and nationalism to formulate a theoretical framework for studying national shame. It is argued that the distinct moral worlds of post-war Italy’s catholic and communist movements shaped the different patriotic narratives produced in the context of post-war Matera. The chapter contends that broader historical factors produced a number of similarities in these expressions of national shame which spanned the Cold War divide. The chapter draws on the large number of regional, national and international newspaper articles published about the Sassi during the scope of this study. Moreover, it analyses expressions of national shame found in parliamentary debates, prefect reports and additional official documents on Matera in the early 1950s.
The third chapter examines the impact that notions of Matera as a national shame and a symbol of the southern question had on the city’s social and urban fabric. It focuses on the terms and implementation of the first special law for Matera in the 1950s. The special law aimed to rehouse families living in those cave dwellings that were deemed uninhabitable. The aim of this chapter is to reassess the limitations of the *risanamento* programme and how narratives of the city as a symbol of the South influenced this process. It draws on the vast body of archival material available in the *Archivio di Stato di Matera* including the files of the local prefect and the regional office of public works. An attempt is made to show that the existing secondary literature on the *risanamento* programme has neglected to examine key primary source documents in detail. Instead there has been an overreliance on the arguments that the architectural historian Manfredo Tafuri put forward in 1974. His conclusions about the first special law’s limitations appear to have been ideologically driven and have arguably stifled subsequent analysis. This chapter, therefore, aims to be a corrective and will re-examine the first special law using primary documents hitherto neglected while concurrently critiquing arguments put forward in the existing secondary literature on post-war Matera.

Chapter four is a case study of the rural village La Martella. Built in 1952 to rehouse 200 families from the Sassi, official sources depicted this project as a model for the future of southern agriculture and an example of the South’s rebirth thanks to the combined efforts of the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno and Marshall Plan aid. This chapter examines how and why the DC used Matera and La Martella to promote the effects of its twin reform programme for southern
Italy in the early 1950s. It aims to shed light on the way in which the concept of Matera as a symbol of the southern question was appropriated for political ends. This chapter draws on archival material from the *Archivio centrale dello Stato* in Rome (prefect's files), the *Archivio di Stato di Matera* (Ministry of the Interior and the Italian Prime Minister's office), the *Fondo Democrazia Cristiana* held at the *Archivio Storico dell'Istituto Luigi Sturzo* in Rome, and US Department of State files on La Martella from the National Archives and Records Administration in Maryland. Moreover, newsreel and documentary footage depicting Matera and La Martella from the Istituto Luce and the USIS-Trieste collection is examined in detail.

Finally, it needs to be made clear that this thesis does not claim to be a comprehensive history of post-war Matera. Rather it examines a select number of themes and primary sources that have been hitherto overlooked in the existing literature using methods that no other study has employed. This research project aims to make an original contribution to the large body of work on Matera and the Sassi, but other accounts are needed to fully understand the city's complex post-war history.
Chapter 1: Carlo Levi and the origins of the Matera question

The city of Matera became a symbol of Italy’s southern question in the post-war period. Matera was also dubbed a *vergogna nazionale* in media and political circles.¹ These narratives had a concrete impact on the city’s social and urban history post-1945. The description of Matera in the Turin writer, painter and political activist Carlo Levi’s book *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* played a salient role in the discursive construction of these concepts.² The book focused media and political attention on the city due to its critical and commercial success in Italy and overseas. Furthermore, *Cristo* influenced how Matera was studied and imagined in the immediate post-war period. Levi’s book, therefore, is a key source for understanding how and why the city came to be seen as a symbol of the southern backwardness and a *vergogna nazionale*. The existing literature on post-war Matera acknowledges that *Cristo*’s critical and commercial success was one of the main factors that generated the period of intense media and political interest in the city examined in this study.³ However, hitherto the book’s influential description of Matera, as well as how and why it shaped subsequent images of the city, has rarely been examined in detail. This chapter aims to be a corrective. It will examine Levi’s image of Matera in detail and then endeavour to trace its impact and reception on the Italian public sphere in the immediate post-war period.

¹ Notably Carlo Levi never directly referred to Matera as a ‘national shame’. However, the term gained political and media currency in the context of debates surrounding the Sassi from the late 1940s onwards and the notion of the city as Other to putative ideas of modernity was central to this concept.
³ See for example Sacco, *Matera contemporanea*, pp. 70-71.
Descriptions of Matera and the Mezzogiorno from 1945 onwards were produced in the aftermath of almost twenty years of enforced silence regarding the southern question. Following the suppression of both parliament and the press in 1925-1926, the Fascist authorities had monopolized the mass media; any counter discourse was reduced to a clandestine level. In order to build political support in southern Italy, Mussolini had appropriated Francesco Saverio Nitti’s theories of state intervention to deal with the Mezzogiorno’s economic and infrastructural problems. However, the programme of public works that the Fascist government established for southern Italy was based on ruralismo rather than the industrialization policies proposed by the Nittian school of meridionalismo. The primary focus was on land reclamation schemes culminating in the so-called Legge Mussolini of 1928 which undertook notable programmes in the Agro Pontino, the Tavoliere di Puglia and the Basso Volturno. Drainage of marsh land became an integral part of Fascism’s programme of ruralisation embodied by the drive for agricultural self-sufficiency, i.e. the battaglia del grano, launched on 14 January 1926. In addition, Mussolini abolished the Visocchi decree of 1920 which had assigned uncultivated land to cooperatives of landless rural workers in the aftermath of the First World War and was viewed as a threat to property rights by southern land owners. These policies were successful in the context of building political support for Fascism amongst the southern propertied classes. This led

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5 Gabriella Gribaudi, 'Images of the South: The Mezzogiorno as seen by Insiders and Outsiders', in Lumley and Morris, The New History of the Italian South, p. 103
7 For an outline of the battaglia del grano see Claudia Petraccone, Le due Italie. La questione meridionale tra realtà e rappresentazione, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2006, pp. 183-190; and Brian Moloney, Italian Novels of Peasant Crisis, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2005, pp. 52-58.
Mussolini to declare at the beginning of the 1930s that Italian culture had finally been unified and the southern question resolved. This position was reflected in newspaper coverage of southern Italy with Gaetano Polverelli, the head of Mussolini’s official press corps between 1931-1933, issuing a communiqué to Italian newspapers in 1931 advising them to avoid using the terms ‘Mezzogiorno’ and ‘Italia meridionale’ to describe southern Italy and Islands and instead use them when referring to Italy’s African colonies. Consequently, the southern question disappeared from official journalistic debate. The reality of life in the rural South during the Fascist ventennio, however, was in stark contrast to the image propagated in official sources and the mass media. In fact, the period was marked by tax increases, a loss of income through a decrease in agricultural prices, restrictions on the amount of grain that could be consumed by rural workers, and changes in American immigration law restricting entry from Italy. As a result southern Italy’s population began to grow but was not producing sufficient resources to meet the demands caused by its demographic boom.

Peasant land occupations in Calabria, Puglia and Basilicata in 1946 were one of the factors which sparked the ‘rediscovery’ of the southern question in the immediate post-war period. The publication of *Cristo* and its subsequent commercial and critical success contributed to this renewed interest in the Mezzogiorno. Moreover, the book focused political and media attention on the

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8 Petraccone, p. 190
region of Basilicata and the town of Matera in particular. Matera had been studied and depicted before Cristo’s publication, but Levi’s description of the city as a metaphor for the rural south and its relationship with the Italian state triggered a period of intense media and political interest in the Sassi. The image of Matera that the book presented influenced how the city was studied and imagined at political and intellectual levels. The text, therefore, is a crucial source for understanding how and why Matera came to be seen as a symbol of the southern question after 1945. Despite its important role in the discursive construction of Matera as a symbol of the South, however, Levi’s text is rarely analysed or historicized in detail in the existing literature. Given the fact that Cristo devotes just six pages to its description of the city there was nothing inevitable about the media and political interest in Matera that it subsequently generated. For that reason the book’s reception needs to be examined in detail to understand how and why its description of Matera gained political and cultural currency in the immediate post-war period.

This chapter will be divided into three sections. First, it will analyse the political, social and biographical context which shaped Levi’s images of Matera and the South. Second, it will examine the depiction of Matera in Cristo to determine its internal logic, illustrating how it was shaped by the author’s intellectual formation and political vision for Italy during the uncertainty of the Resistance and the Second World War as well as narratives drawn from nineteenth-century slumland descriptions. Third, this chapter will examine Cristo’s reception and impact at political and intellectual levels in an attempt to
understand how the book shaped attitudes towards Matera within Italy’s post-war public sphere.

1.1 Crìsto’s historical and political context

Carlo Levi’s intellectual formation and the political context within which he wrote his most famous work informed the image of Matera presented in Crìsto.

The book describes the ten months that the Turinese author spent as a political exile, or *confinato*, between 3 August 1935 and 26 May 1936 in the towns of Grassano (where he was detained until 18 September 1935), and then Aliano (renamed Gagliano in the text) in the southern Italian region of Basilicata. A mixture of lyrical memoir, internal journey, reportage and socio-political treatise, Crìsto gives an account of the social and economic conditions that its author witnessed during his internment. Basilicata, for Levi, became representative of southern Italy, a homogeneous territory characterized by ‘a uniform peasant society excluded from the ownership of land, immobile in its folkloric and near archaic culture, and cut off from history’. The book also denounced the failings of the Italian state and the southern bourgeoisie (personified by Aliano’s gentry and in particular the town’s mayor Don Luigi Magalone) which, Levi claimed, were culpable for the southern question. In contrast, Crìsto underlines the perceived positive values of southern rural

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culture, albeit from the othering perspective of an outsider. The *civiltà contadina* is presented as an antidote to the belief system embodied by Western culture and the centralized state. One of the book’s central passages of reportage is a detailed description of the living conditions that the author’s sister Luisa Levi witnessed during her brief visit to Matera. Writing about this section of *Cristo* in the post-war period, Carlo Levi described it as ‘le pagine più appassionate e più nere del mio libro.’\(^{14}\) Although taking up just six of *Cristo*’s 259 pages, this account of Matera’s cave dwellings influenced how the city was studied, imagined and depicted after 1945.

While *Cristo* describes the Mezzogiorno’s social and economic conditions in the mid-1930s, the book itself was written between December 1943 and July 1944 in Florence at the height of the Resistance movement in northern Italy when the Tuscan capital was under Nazi occupation.\(^{15}\) From October 1943 until August 1944 Levi went into hiding in a safe house in Piazza Pitti in Florence. It was here, in a hidden room into which ‘giungeva il rumore di ferro dei passi delle pattuglie tedesche sul selciato,’\(^{16}\) that he wrote *Cristo*. A letter from Anna Maria Ichino, who ran the refuge, describes the uncertain climate in which the book was finished:


\(^{15}\) The handwritten manuscript of *Cristo* is held at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre at the University of Texas, but a fascimile copy is available at the Central State Archive in Rome. Giovanni Falaschi has argued that not all of *Cristo* was written in Florence (the first date recorded on the 330 handwritten pages being 26 November 1940). The dates which appear in the finished book (December 1943 to July 1944), however, correspond to Levi’s time in hiding in Florence. It is believed that he wrote the final section of *Cristo* there while also carrying out revisions. Moreover, it appears that Levi had already recounted episodes from the book orally to friends and had kept detailed notes on his time in political exile too. See Giovanni Falaschi, ‘*Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* di Carlo Levi’, in Alberto Asor Rosa (ed.), *Letteratura italiana. Le Opere, Volume V, Il Novecento. La ricerca letteraria*, Einaudi, Turin, 1996, pp. 469-470.

Era un periodo duro; pieno di timori, incertezze e speranze e talvolte nelle lunghe ore di attesa egli amava raccontarmi episodi della sua attività passata, e del lungo periodo di confino. Nacque così l’idea del libro e il lavorare ad esso fu l’unica distensione in quel periodo atroce ... non sempre poteva lavorare la sera; non c’era luce, e non sempre avevamo mangiato abbastanza ... Ogni giorno amici e compagni venivano arrestati e deportati, alcuni uccisi. Eravamo sotto le incursioni aeree ed ogni giorno non eravamo certi di vedere il seguente.\(^{17}\)

Levi claimed that writing *Cristo* had allowed him to focus on his time in Basilicata and momentarily escape the sense of fear and death that pervaded Florence.\(^{18}\) While he penned his most famous work ‘chiuso in una stanza’\(^{19}\), the book was produced in the context of Levi’s direct involvement with the Florentine Committee of National Liberation with whom he founded the newspaper *La Nazione del Popolo*. Although the book makes no explicit reference to the Resistance, it does reflect Levi’s political hopes and anxieties for the future of a post-Fascist Italian society. The ten-year gestation period between Levi’s exile in Basilicata and the writing of *Cristo* had a profound impact on the book’s final form. This decade allowed him to redefine and bring together in one place many of the themes that he had encountered and that had inspired him during his nascent political activism in Turin. These included the southern question, his belief in *autonomia* (collective rule at local and regional levels) and a rejection of the centralized state.\(^{20}\) The depiction of Matera that

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\(^{17}\) The letter from Anna Maria Ichino, dated 16 April 1962, accompanies a photocopied version of *Cristo*’s original handwritten manuscript. ACS, FCL, busta 59, fascicolo 135. For further information on Levi’s time in hiding and clandestine political activities in Florence 1943-1944 see De Donato and D’Amaro, pp. 152-174.

\(^{18}\) Carlo Levi, ‘Quando scrivevo il Cristo’, in Pagliara, p. 125. Giovanni Falaschi, however, has argued that by 1944 Levi would have been aware of Fascism’s imminent demise and this would surely have impacted his morale and the tone of the book. See Falaschi, pp. 469-487

\(^{19}\) Levi, *Cristo*, p. 3

\(^{20}\) Writing about the ten-year gap between Levi’s internment in Basilicata and the writing of *Cristo*, David Bidussa has argued that ‘è un testo che si colloca alla fine di un lungo percorso, anche tormentato, in cui il confronto tra esperienza vissuta, capacità di comprensione e
the book presents needs to be examined in this historical, biographical and political context.

Despite graduating as a medical doctor at the age of twenty-two, Carlo Levi primarily dedicated his adult life to painting and politics. He was an acolyte of the Turin intellectual and journalist Piero Gobetti and wrote eight articles for the latter’s radical Liberal newspaper *La Rivoluzione Liberale* between 1922 and 1924. Levi’s first article was written in 1922 at Gobetti’s behest. It was a critique of the southern Liberal-Conservative politician Antonio Salandra. Although he had joined the *Associazione nazionale per gli interessi del Mezzogiorno* in 1921, this was Levi’s first published writing on the southern question and foreshadowed some of the themes which would later be found in *Cristo*, i.e. the apparent mediocrity of Italy’s political class (personified by Salandra), an analysis of the southern question, Levi’s disdain for the southern middle classes, and his distrust of federal government.22

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Through Gobetti, Levi came into contact with the meridionalista Guido Dorso, who also contributed to *La Rivoluzione Liberale*. Dorso's book, *La rivoluzione meridionale* (1924) directly influenced Levi's vision of southern Italy. The book called for decentralization to end what Dorso believed was Northern subjugation of the South from unification onwards. *La rivoluzione meridionale* argued that the southern question was a political rather than a socio-economic problem. The roots of this problem, for Dorso, could be traced back to the formation of the Italian state. Rather than building on the revolutionary ideals of the Risorgimento and including the masses in politics, Dorso viewed Italian unification as nothing more than a 'royal conquest': the extension of Piedmontese state bureaucracy throughout the peninsula. The book traced a direct line from what its author interpreted as Cavour's politics of compromise to the trasformismo of Depretis and Giolitti, and ultimately the rise of Fascism. This, according to Dorso, had manifested itself in a mutually beneficial agreement between central powers and the southern middle classes: political power at a regional level was exchanged for support at the ballot box. Dorso believed that resolving the southern question would be a fundamental component in any process of political change in Italy. *La rivoluzione meridionale*

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23 The twenty articles that Dorso wrote for *La Rivoluzione Liberale* can be consulted at [http://www.erasmo.it/liberale/ricerca.asp](http://www.erasmo.it/liberale/ricerca.asp) (accessed 30/07/2013). Amongst this number are the articles ‘Il Mezzogiorno dopo la guerra’ and ‘Appello ai meridionali’, which although signed by a number of different meridionalisti, including Tommaso Fiore, appear to have largely been written by Dorso. Both articles contained many of the themes later found in *La rivoluzione meridionale* including the Italian state's failure to build on the values of the Risorgimento, the role of the southern middle classes in perpetuating the South's social and economic problems, and the rejection of claims that state intervention would completely resolve the southern question. See Guido Dorso, ‘Il Mezzogiorno dopo la guerra’, *La Rivoluzione Liberale*, no. 32, 23 November 1923, pp. 129-130; and Guido Dorso, Tommaso Fiore et al., ‘Appello ai meridionali’, *La Rivoluzione Liberale*, no. 45, 2 December 1924, pp. 181-182.

24 Guido Dorso, *La rivoluzione meridionale*, Palomar, Bari, 2005, pp. 73-79
put forward *autonomia*, but not separatism, as the only possible solution to resolving Italy’s political malaise and as a result the southern question.25

In a eulogy written in 1957 to mark the tenth anniversary of Dorso’s death, Levi directly acknowledged the influence that the latter’s writings had had on his own *meridionalismo* and by implication on *Cristo*. However, Brian Moloney argues that while the ideas presented in *La rivoluzione meridionale* influenced Levi’s theory of local and regional autonomy, it diverged from Dorso’s outline of how autonomous government should be implemented on a number of key points. Dorso’s concept of self-government placed rural agricultural workers in a subordinate position to small rural landowners. He advocated, moreover, the creation of an intellectual elite which would offer the political leadership that the southern middle classes had been unable to provide. In contrast, Levi proposed a more radical form of political autonomy which would be based on the collective values he perceived amongst the southern rural poor. Autonomy for Levi meant collective rule at a local level rather than decisions made from above by an elite group.26 This position would be later reflected in the political programmes of both *Giustizia e Libertà* (GL) and the Action Party (PdA) which Levi helped to formulate.

In 1928 Levi founded an anti-Fascist political magazine in Turin entitled *La lotta politica* and from 1930 onwards became GL’s representative in Paris where, in 1931, he played an active part in writing the movement’s programme. The concept of autonomous, local and regional government was central to GL’s manifesto. Levi’s anti-Fascist political activity resulted in his arrest on 13 March

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25 Ibid., pp. 261-281
26 Moloney, p. 179
1934 before he was released on 9 May with a two-year suspended sentence. He was rearrested on 15 May 1935 and sentenced to three years internment in Basilicata. Although he received a three-year sentence, Levi was granted amnesty after ten months following Italy's annexation of Abyssinia in May 1936. He subsequently lived in exile in France until 1941 where he wrote his first book *Paura della libertà* (1947). Between 1941 and 1944 Levi played an active role in the Resistance movement as a member of the *Partito d’Azione* and editor of *La Nazione del Popolo* in Tuscany - and later *L’Italia Libera* in Rome. This was also the period in which Levi penned *Cristo*. The political ideas that GL and later the *Partito d’Azione* espoused are key to understanding Levi's political aspirations while he was writing his most famous work. These hopes and anxieties both informed and are reflected in his depiction of southern Italy and Matera.

Levi wrote a number of articles published in the Parisian edition of *Quaderni di Giustizia e Libertà* from 1932-1933. They focused on contemporary Italian politics, the nature of Italian Fascism and GL's political position in contrast to other clandestine opposition parties. One theme dominated these writings: the concept of political autonomy. Levi rejected the economic argument that Fascism was simply the result of Italy's petit bourgeoisie protecting its own economic interests. Paraphrasing Gobetti, Levi...

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described the Fascist party’s rise to power as an ‘autobiografia della nazione’ which reflected, in his opinion, the Italian people’s fear of freedom and personal responsibility combined with the adoration of the entity which fulfilled individual needs, i.e. the centralized state.\textsuperscript{29} Furthermore, Levi believed that without a major restructuring of Italian society, and in particular of Italian politics, the danger of a new form of fascism emerging post-Mussolini was a concrete possibility.\textsuperscript{30}

Autonomy was put forward as a means for avoiding this outcome. Outlining GL’s political programme in 1932, in an article co-written with Leone Ginzburg, Levi argued that: ‘in verità, una sola posizione è possibile, come assolutamente rivoluzionaria e antifascista: un integrale liberalismo. Rivoluzione in Italia significa libertà, capacità di libertà; autonomia nella più larga espressione del termine: nei riguardi dello Stato: autogoverno.’\textsuperscript{31} Notably GL was equally critical of what it saw as Communism’s deification of the centralized state. It claimed that Italian Communist Party (PCI) members adhered to the party line rather than taking an active role in political decisions.\textsuperscript{32} GL’s concept of self-government, however, was deliberately defined as a fluid concept. David Ward notes that this was ‘not because of any real vagueness in their [GL’s] thought, but simply because they are convinced that actual forms cannot be worked out until the specific circumstances and the context of the question to be resolved are clear.’\textsuperscript{33} Levi’s time as a political exile

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{29} Ward, Carlo Levi, pp. 16–18
\bibitem{30} Ibid., pp. 16-18
\bibitem{32} Ibid., pp. 43-44
\bibitem{33} David Ward, Piero Gobetti’s New World: Antifascism, Liberalism, Writing, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2010, p. 111
\end{thebibliography}
in Basilicata provided him with a precise context and location to expand on GL’s concept of autonomy. GL’s political beliefs would be central to the Action Party of which Levi was a key member.

Founded in the summer of 1942 and defunct by 1946, the Action Party was a loose coalition of anti-Fascist Liberal Socialists involved in the Resistance movement which had a lasting influence on Italian political and intellectual life notwithstanding its short lifespan. The different ideological strands of the party were united by a number of core beliefs, closely based on the political programme for the GL movement which Levi had penned in 1931 and which punctuate his political-philosophical treatise *Paura della libertà*. First, the Partito d’Azione (PdA) believed that Fascism was not just a historical deviation as Croce claimed; rather it was a product of the Italian state’s failure from the Risorgimento onwards to create a fully democratic and unified state. Second the fall of Fascism was seen as a unique opportunity to move away from the socio-economic and political-cultural models which had characterized the Liberal period - reaching their nadir with the rise of Mussolini - and instead rebuild Italian society, culture and identity in the post-Fascist era based on the values of the Resistance. Third, the PdA rejected the idolization of the monolithic state by mass parties, mass society and critiqued the imposition of power from above by

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35 *Paura della libertà* was written between September and December 1939 at La Baule in Brittany but not published until 1946. The book was a reflection on the causes of what Levi believed to be a crisis in Western civilization. *Paura della libertà* explores the themes of self-government and the deification of the State. Notably the book contains a number of passages about state worship which foreshadow the style and content found in the political crescendo towards the end of *Cristo*. See Carlo Levi, *Paura della libertà*, in Bidussa, pp. 134-137. For an analysis of the intertextuality between *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* and *Paura della libertà* see Lawrence Baldassaro, ‘Cristo si è fermato a Eboli e la Paura della libertà’, in De Donato, *Carlo Levi il tempo e la durata*, p. 81-86.
centralized government. Instead the Action Party proposed a programme of autonomous, local and regional government designed to meet the specific demands of citizens in different parts of the peninsula. These political beliefs were informed by Levi’s intellectual formation and shaped his depiction of southern Italy and Matera in Cristo.

1.2 Matera in Cristo

Levi presented the Sassi as a monument to the Italian state’s continued failure to resolve the southern question. Matera embodied the abyss that Levi perceived between the Italian state and southern rural culture. For Levi the centralized state was the primary cause of southern Italy’s economic problems: ‘non può essere lo Stato ... a risolvere la questione meridionale, per la ragione che quello che noi chiamiamo problema meridionale non è altro che il problema dello Stato.’ Reflecting GL’s political programme and the influence of Dorso, Levi rejected the statism of mass parties on both the Left and the Right and their attempts to resolve the southern question through state intervention from above. Instead he claimed that southern Italy’s social and economic problems could only be resolved through a system of government which directly involved the rural poor, i.e. autonomous local rule. Levi depicted the Sassi as the embodiment of southern Italy’s social and economic problems; a symbol of the Italian state’s failure to tackle the southern question during its first eighty-years of existence.

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36 These points are outlined in detail in Ward, AntiFascisms, pp. 124-173.
37 Levi, Cristo, p. 220
38 Ibid., pp. 222-223
Notably the description of Matera in *Cristo* is recounted to Carlo the protagonist by his sister Luisa using reported speech. This literary device renders the book’s account of Matera more melodramatic. Rather than the impressions of Carlo, who had already witnessed the poverty of Grassano and Aliano and had become acclimatized to scenes of degradation, the reader is presented with the thoughts of an urbane, Turin-based doctor on her first visit to southern Italy. This means that Luisa Levi’s sense of horror at the Sassi’s living conditions is heightened in the narrative. Furthermore, through the use of reported speech, the line between the author’s thoughts and those of his character, in this case Luisa Levi, are blurred and at times indistinguishable. While the description of the Sassi in *Cristo* comes ostensibly from the mouth of the protagonist’s sister, its political undertones make it clear that her voice is being channelled through Carlo Levi the author.

**Matera: symbol of the civiltà contadina**

*Cristo* presents Matera as a symbol of southern Italy’s civiltà contadina. One of the ways this is achieved is through the description of the city’s topography. The irreconcilable divide between the Italian state and the southern rural poor is a

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39 Luisa Levi was born in 1898 and graduated with a degree in medicine in 1920. She continued her studies in Paris in 1927 where she specialized in pediatric neuropsychology. In the 1920s and 1930s she published widely in her field of expertise and worked in a number of psychiatric hospitals in Italy until the application of the leggi razziali in 1938. For a detailed biography of Luisa Levi’s professional career and a bibliography of her work see http://scienzaa2voci.unibo.it/biografie/1160-levi-luisa (accessed 24/08/2013).

40 Carlo Levi’s use of reported speech to describe Matera is briefly discussed in Restucci and Tafuri, p. 31.

41 Gigliola De Donato notes that unlike the rest of *Cristo*’s handwritten manuscript, the six pages on Matera were rewritten and corrected many times. Furthermore, it is the only section of the book in which the author left a double space between his text. De Donato contends that this illustrates the difficulty that Levi experienced in inserting the section on Matera into the narrative and is arguably the reason why Luisa Levi rather than Carlo the protagonist describes the Sassi to the reader. Gigliola De Donato, *Le parole del reale. Ricerca sulla prosa di Carlo Levi*, Edizioni Dedalo, Bari, 1998, pp. 129-130.
recurring leitmotif in *Cristo*. Levi repeatedly underlined what he perceived as the social and cultural gap between *le due Italie*, i.e. the Italian state, which imposed its will from above, and the southern rural poor, embodied by Gagliano’s agricultural workers, who viewed ‘quelli di Roma’ with suspicion: ‘per i contadini, lo Stato è piú lontano del cielo, e piú maligno, perché sta sempre dall’altra parte. Non importa quali siano le forme politiche, la sua struttura, i suoi programmi.’ Levi explicitly outlined this perceived dualism in the penultimate chapter of *Cristo*: ‘Siamo anzitutto di fronte al coesistere di due civiltà diversissime, nessuna delle quali è in grado di assimilare l’altra. Campagna e città, civiltà precristiana e civiltà non più cristiana, stanno di fronte; e finché la seconda continuerà ad imporre alla prima la sua teocrazia statale, il dissidio continuerà.’ The perceived abyss between these two dissenting cultures was directly reflected in Levi’s description of Matera. Reflecting the political beliefs developed through his writings for *La Rivoluzione Liberale, Giustizia e Libertà* and later the Action Party, Matera became the architectural expression of what Levi believed was the state’s imposition of its political will on southern Italy’s rural poor.

The town of Matera is divided into two different parts: the Piano, where the modern section of the town was built from the eighteenth century onwards, and the Sassi, which have been inhabited since at least the fourth century. The economic and social gap between the Piano and the Sassi became more marked

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42 Levi, *Cristo*, p. 67. The emptiness of Fascist rhetoric in resolving the southern question is embodied by Gagliano’s public urinal which was built at great expense, but only used by Carlo the protagonist. Ibid., p. 41.
43 Ibid., p. 221
in the nineteenth century with the former housing Matera’s middle-class professionals, landowners and government officials, while the latter was inhabited by the city’s rural poor, who became ever further marginalized from the town's economic and administrative centre. Levi used the social, topographical and architectural divisions between Matera’s two distinct urban areas as a metaphor for his meridionalismo. The image of Matera presented in Cristo embodied the separation that he perceived between the Italian state and the civiltà contadina, i.e. those in power and the disenfranchised.

The Piano, accordingly, is depicted as embodying the Italian state which imposes its will on the southern rural poor from above with the help of the southern middle class. On her arrival in Matera, Luisa Levi notes that instead of the ‘città pittoresca’ described in her guidebook she finds herself ‘su una specie di altopiano deserto’ in which ‘sorgevano, sparsi qua e là, otto o dieci grandi palazzi di marmo, come quelli che si costruiscono ora a Roma.’ These buildings represent the functions of the state: ‘questi palazzi novecenteschi erano la Questura, la Prefettura, le Poste, il Municipio, la Caserma dei Carabinieri, il Fascio, la Sede delle Corporazioni, l'Opera Balilla e così via.’

Echoing Dorso’s claims that the Risorgimento was merely a ‘conquista regia’ of southern Italy by the Piedmontese government, the Piano, with its austere and incongruous official buildings, is compared to a grotesque colonial outpost: ‘Sembrava l’ambizioso progetto di una città coloniale, improvvisato a caso, e

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45 Rosalba Demtrio and Grazia Guadagno, Matera. Forma e strutture, Testo & immagine, Turin, 2001, pp. 47-68
46 Levi, Cristo, p. 73. Following Matera’s promotion to provincial capital in 1927 a number of new official and commercial buildings were constructed on the Piano. These included provincial administrative buildings, the Chamber of Commerce, a new school, a Bank of Napoli in Piazza Vittorio Veneto and a new post office. See Restucci and Tafuri, p. 30.
47 Levi, Cristo, p. 73
48 Moloney, p. 151
interrotto sul principio per qualche pestilenza, o piuttosto lo scenario di cattivo
gusto di un teatro all’aperto per una tragedia dannunziana.'\textsuperscript{49} The description of
the Piano underlines one of the supplemental functions of Matera throughout
\textit{Cristo}, i.e. to represent the state’s imposition of its will upon the rural poor. This
point is most famously depicted in the order from the Questura di Matera
denying Levi permission to work as a doctor in Gagliano.\textsuperscript{50} Nicola Longo notes
that: ‘Matera è semplicemente una Roma in piccolo, né migliore né peggiore:
dovunque il potere s’incarna ed esiste perché è contro i contadini, contro il
buonsenso, contro le stesse leggi e il diritto.’\textsuperscript{51} However, as illustrated above, it
is the Piano which Levi presented as the embodiment of Rome’s authority and
bureaucracy. In contrast, the Sassi and their inhabitants embodied the
Mezzogiorno’s \textit{civiltà contadina}, excluded by the Italian state’s centralized rule.
The dire living conditions of Matera’s cave dwellings were an extreme
manifestation of what Levi described as the ‘dissidio secolare’ between the
Italian state and the southern rural poor.\textsuperscript{52} During the political crescendo near
the end of \textit{Cristo}, Levi warned of the potential consequences if no effort was
made to bridge this gap. In the dichotomy between the state and the \textit{civiltà
contadina}, Matera became synonymous with southern Italy’s rural poor:

\begin{quote}
La civiltà contadina sarà sempre vinta, ma non si lascerà mai schiacciare
del tutto, si conserverà sotto i veli della pazienza, per esplodere di tratto;
e la crisi mortale perpetuerà. Il brigantaggio, guerra contadina, ne è la
prova: e quello del secolo scorso non sarà l’ultimo. Finché Roma
governerà Matera, Matera sarà anarchica e disperata, e Roma disperata e
tirannica.\textsuperscript{53}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{49} Levi, \textit{Cristo}, p. 73
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., p. 201
\textsuperscript{51} Longo, p. 158
\textsuperscript{52} Levi, \textit{Cristo}, p. 220
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., p. 221
Levi expanded upon the concept of Matera as the symbolic capital of the Mezzogiorno’s civiltà contadina in his post-war writings. This point is exemplified in a talk given at the Associazione culturale italiana’s conference in Turin on 31 March 1950: ‘Che Matera, almeno simbolicamente, sia una capitale, è altrettanto fuori dubbio, tanta vi è là la chiarezza della civiltà che vi si manifesta, della civiltà contadina, non contaminata dai contatti storici.’

Notably Levi’s concept of the Mezzogiorno and contadini had at this point transcended the geographical confines of southern Italy and the class distinction of its rural workforce. In his 1950 novel L’Orologio Levi built further upon his concept of Italy’s due civiltà dividing society into two distinct groups: Contadini and Luigini. This first group was loosely defined as ‘tutti quelli che fanno le cose, che le creano, che le amano, che se ne contentano’ and included not just agricultural workers but the industrial proletariat, intellectuals, entrepreneurs, and, in short, anyone who produced something tangible. In contrast, the Luigini, named after Gagliano’s Fascist Mayor Don Luigi Magalone, were described as ‘quelli che dipendono e comandano; e amano e odiano le gerarchie, e servono e imperano.’ This second group was described as parasitic and comprised primarily of state bureaucrats and Italy’s lower middle classes. Rome, described as a city ‘fuori della vita reale e dello sviluppo di ogni giorno, ai nomi eterni dell’Impero e della Chiesa e dalla informe eternità della burocrazia’, was dubbed the Luigini’s symbolic capital. In contrast Levi’s

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55 Ibid., p. 55
56 Carlo Levi, L’Orologio, Einaudi, Turin, 1950, p. 192
57 Ibid., pp. 191-192
58 Ibid., p. 192
59 Ibid., pp. 192-193
post-war writing placed Matera firmly at the centre of this loosely-defined
dichotomy as the symbolic capital of the southern Italy’s rural culture.61

Levi further underlined the concept of Matera as the capital of the *civiltà contadina* in an interview from August 1959 that featured in Mondadori’s popular weekly *rotocalco Epoca*. The author commented that ‘fra mille luoghi dell’Italia meridionale, Matera ha rappresentato la prima esperienza, la più vera, la più completa, il primo punto di contatto reale con i problemi della vita del popolo del Mezzogiorno.’62 Levi continued that the town had: ‘Il carattere di un luogo centrale e significante ... la capitale del mondo contadino ... la sua realtà e i suoi problemi, rappresentino un punto centrale e tipico di quel grande movimento che va rinnovando e modificando sostanzialmente il Mezzogiorno.’63 Levi positioned Matera at the centre of his imagined South. He transformed the Sassi into a metonym of the southern question and the decades of division that he perceived between the state and the rural poor, between *Contadini* and *Luigini*. Thus, for Levi, Matera became an idea as much as a geographical space. This discourse of Matera and the Sassi as the symbolic capital of the *civiltà contadina* echoed in depictions of the town in the post-war period. Matera became synonymous with the perceived social and economic problems of the entire rural Mezzogiorno. This concept would have a concrete impact on how the city was studied and imagined in the post-war period. Matera was seen as a testing ground for resolving the southern question. As a

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61 Ibid., p. 60
62 This quote is reproduced in Sacco, *Carlo Levi*, p. 41
63 Ibid., p. 41
result generic development models for the entire South were applied to a specific local case with limited results.64

Matera as Other

The description of Matera in *Cristo* served a supplemental function. It looked to denounce what Levi perceived as the Italian state's neglect of southern Italy from unification onwards. Furthermore, the description of living conditions amongst Matera’s cave dwellings was designed to shock the book's implied middle-class readership. The narrative strategies that Levi used to achieve these aims resemble slumland depictions from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Matera’s complex network of cave dwellings is presented as Other to notions of the modern city. This narrative would influence how Matera was depicted in mass media and political sources in the post-war period. The literary techniques that Levi used to construct his image of Matera, therefore, need to be examined in detail. The work of the urban historian Alan Mayne is useful in this regard. His research focuses on the representation of slums in Britain, Australia, and the United States in the yellow press from 1870 and 1914. He argues that the concept of the slum was a discursive construct. According to Mayne, slumland depictions used a set of scenarios and stock figures to reduce the complexities of substandard inner-city housing to a series of stereotypes that a middle-class audience would easily recognise and understand. The slum was described as Other and juxtaposed with an idealized notion of the modern urban city. One of the primary aims of these descriptions was to create a sense of alarm amongst readers and promote the need for urban

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64 This point is developed in detail in Chapter 3.
renewal projects. Descriptions of slums, Mayne contends, did not mirror the social conditions of inner-city housing; rather they used a set of literary tropes to create the concept of the slum in the popular imagination.65

In his study of slum depictions in the yellow press of Britain, Australia and the United States, Mayne identified a number of recurring strategies that were used to create and reinforce stereotypical slumland images for an implied middle-class audience. Levi adopted a number of similar tropes in his description of Matera in _Cristo_. First, Mayne contends that the concept of time was used to create a contrast between notions of the modern city and the slum. Visitors to slums were described as being in a hurry and working to a timetable. They were depicted as focused and energetic. In contrast, time in the slum was apparently ignored. The pace of life was lethargic and slum dwellers were depicted as listless and slothful.66 Furthermore, the imagined temporal differences between the modern city and the slum were created through the juxtaposition of images of light and dark. These were synonyms for day and night, which in turn acted as metaphors for notions of virtue and vice. Words such as _gloomy, shadowy, dark_, and _black_ were frequently used in slumland descriptions. Moreover, slums were often referred to as _black spots_ or _stains_ upon the city. References to time were also used to juxtapose notions of the modern city with the apparent backwardness and decay of the slum. Slumland dwellings lacked the amenities and privacy of the ideal bourgeois home. They were described as relics of a bygone age. According to Mayne, these narratives

65 See Mayne, *The Imagined Slum*; Mayne, ‘Representing the slum’; and Mayne, ‘Review Essay: Tall Tales but True?’.
66 Mayne, *The Imagined Slum*, p. 167
contributed to the agenda of urban reformers who used them to argue for the need to carry out slum clearances.67

The description of Matera in Cristo echoes a number of these narratives. Luisa Levi is described as being pressed for time during her visit to Basilicata and complains about having to waste a day waiting for a bus in Matera before travelling on to Gagliano.68 This creates a clear temporal divide between the apparently timeless world of the South, and Matera in particular, and the implied modernity of Turin and the North from which she has travelled. There appears to be no sense of ordered time during Luisa Levi’s visit to the Sassi. The women encountered are described as exhausted due to malnourishment and the children depicted are described as either listless due to disease or swarming wildly in large groups. Cristo uses images of light and dark in its description of the Sassi. This implies a divide between Matera and notions of the modern city. The valley in which the Sassi are situated is described as being ‘un brutto colore grigiastro’ as well as having ‘un’aria cupa e cattiva’.69 Furthermore, Matera’s cave dwellings are labelled ‘buchi neri’ and ‘grotte scure’.70 In slumland literature darkness inferred night-time and was often employed as a metaphor for vice. It was a means for creating an image of the slum as a stain upon the modern city. This narrative trope is further implied in Cristo through Luisa Levi’s initial impression of Sasso Caveoso and Sasso Barisano: ‘Hanno la forma con cui, a scuola, immaginavamo l’inferno di Dante.’71 Matera, therefore, is presented to the implied middle-class reader as resembling hell on earth. In

67 Ibid., p. 173
68 Levi, Cristo, pp. 75-76
69 Ibid., p. 78
70 Ibid., p. 78
71 Ibid., p. 79
addition, the description of Matera’s cave homes in Cristo implies a temporal divide between the Sassi and notions of the modern city: ‘Passava sui tetti delle case, se così quelle si possono chiamare. Sono grotte scavate nella parete di argilla indurita del burrone.’ The implication is that the Sassi’s troglodyte dwellings resemble a bourgeois understanding of what constitutes a home, but are in fact not worthy of that title. The contrast with the implied home of the putative modern city is developed further through the interior description of Matera’s distinctive housing. Luisa Levi notes that ‘vedevo l’interno delle grotte, che non prendono altra luce e aria se non dalla porta. Alcune non hanno neppure quella: si entra dall’alto, attraverso botole e scalette. Dentro quei buchi neri, dalle pareti di terra, vedevo i letti, le misere suppellettili, i cenci stesi.’ The families that lived in these caves, moreover, shared their homes with farm animals: ‘Ogni famiglia ha, in genere, una sola di quelle grotte per tutta abitazione e ci dormono tutti insieme, uomini, donne, bambini e bestie.’ The inference from this description is that Matera’s cave homes were a remnant of a previous age and an affront to what would have been considered acceptable housing conditions amongst the book’s implied bourgeois reader.

Smell was an additional narrative used to depict the slum as alien to the idea of the salubrious modern city according to Mayne’s thesis. Frequent references were made in slumland depictions to bad smells, stenches, and foul odours. In the mid-nineteenth century, before the emergence of germ-disease theory, it was believed that illnesses such as malaria and cholera were caused by miasmas or ‘bad air’. As a result bad smells were associated with dirt,

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72 Ibid., p. 79
73 Ibid., p. 79
74 Ibid., p. 79
disease, and unsanitary living conditions. Mayne's research shows that slums in Britain and the USA were depicted as stench-filled and overcrowded. They were presented as a potential danger to the health of the modern city and its inhabitants. Newspaper references to slums as 'plague spots' and 'hot beds of disease' were commonplace. In addition, links were made between physical and social ills. Bad smells were associated with moral degeneracy. Mayne argues that the concept of slums as malodorous and filthy breeding grounds for infectious and moral disease played an important role in the promotion of slum clearances. Levi employed similar narrative techniques in his description of the Sassi. Matera's cave homes are described as 'scure e puzzolenti'. Moreover, they are presented as airless and filthy. The link between bad smells, dirt and disease is further elaborated in the description of health conditions that Luisa Levi witnesses. She sees malnourished children suffering from tracoma, malaria, dysentery and possibly black fever. The Sassi are compared to 'una città colpita dalla peste.' These narratives help to create an image of Matera as Other; the antithesis to the putative notion of the modern city which is implied throughout Carlo Levi's text.

According to Mayne's thesis slumland depictions featured five stock characters appropriate to the stylized setting in which they resided. He argues

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76 Mayne, *The Imagined Slum*, pp. 175-180
77 Levi, *Cristo*, p. 80
78 'Le donne mi vedevano guardare per le porte, m’invitavano a entrare: e ho visto, in quelle grotte scure e puzzolenti, dei bambini sdraiati in terra, sotto delle coperte a brandelli, che battevano i denti dalla febbre. Altri si trascinavano a stento, ridotti pelle e ossa dalla dissenteria. Ne ho visti anche di quelli con le faccite di cera, mi parevano malati di qualcosa di ancor peggio che la malaria, forse qualche malattia tropicale, forse il Kala Azar, la febbre nera.' Levi, *Cristo*, p. 80.
79 Ibid., p. 80
that these theatrical types were adapted from popular literature to illustrate the
hardship of slum living and thus promote the need for urban reforms to a mass
audience. The five characters were: the Woman, the Child, the Foreigner; the
Landlord, and the Inspector.\textsuperscript{80} The first two feature in Levi’s description of the
Sassi. Mayne contends that Woman was the main character that slum visitors
encountered in journalistic accounts. Most slumland descriptions were set
during the day when men would be at work. As a result women were the
spokespeople for the slum. There were two main types of women in slumland
depictions: the Good Woman and the Bad Woman. The Good Woman
personified the concept of the deserving poor. She was an industrious and
honest housewife but impoverished. Typically this character was portrayed as
keeping a clean home despite their surroundings. The implication was that with
improved housing conditions the Good Woman would be a respectable member
of society. The Good Woman was contrasted with her lazy neighbour the Bad
Woman. This figure personified urban degeneracy.\textsuperscript{81} The Bad Woman is
unkempt, sullen, and wizened in appearance. She was described as having loose
morals and being a drunkard.\textsuperscript{82} The female character in Cristo’s depiction of
Matera is the figure of the Good Woman. The women that Luisa Levi encounters
during her journey through the Sassi are described as malnourished,
impoverished and dejected yet at the same time ‘gentili’.\textsuperscript{83} The implication from
the text is that the women living in the Sassi are members of the deserving poor
who despite their surroundings live with grace and dignity.

\textsuperscript{80} Mayne, \textit{The Imagined Slum}, pp. 189-190
\textsuperscript{81} Narratives of urban degeneracy were prevalent in nineteenth-century Western culture. See
pp. 136-137 below.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., pp. 190-192
\textsuperscript{83} Levi, \textit{Cristo}, p. 80
The Child was another stock character used to create the divide between notions of the modern city and the slum according to Mayne’s research. The image of ill-clad children swarming together in large groups was a regular trope in slumland depictions. The difficulties of slum living was communicated through the description of slum children’s thin and haggard faces. Children, Mayne contends, also personified the potential for future regeneration. Descriptions of childhood innocence were common and contrasted with the harshness of slum life. Mayne argues that reformers used these images to mobilize community support for urban regeneration projects. The character of the slum child appealed to the implied bourgeois reader’s emotions and echoed tropes that were common in urban fiction, theatre and illustration.84 The character of the Child is central to Carlo Levi’s depiction of Matera and appears to draw on many of the literary techniques that Mayne has identified in his research. The text creates the impression that the Sassi are overrun with packs of seemingly feral children: ‘Di bambini ce n’era un’infinità. In quel caldo, in mezzo alle mosche, nella polvere, spuntavano da tutte le parti, nudi del tutto e coperti di stracci.’85 Moreover, the physical description of the Sassi’s child population is used to convey the hardship of life in Matera’s cave homes: ‘altri bambini incontravano, coi visini grinzosi come dei vecchi, e scheletriti per la fame; i capelli pieni di pidocchi e di croste. Ma la maggior parte avevano delle grandi pance gonfie, enormi, e la faccia gialla e patita per la malaria.’86 This sense of indigence and disease is further heightened through a comparison between the health conditions of Matera’s child population and that of Turin’s

84 Mayne, *The Imagined Slum*, pp. 199-203
85 Levi, *Cristo*, p. 80
86 Ibid., p. 80
urban poor. Luisa Levi notes that: ‘io non ho mai visto una tale immagine di miseria: eppure sono abituata, è il mio mestiere, a vedere ogni giorno diecine di bambini poveri, malati e maltenuti. Ma uno spettacolo come quello di ieri non l’avevo mai neppure immaginato.’ The text infers that Matera’s child poverty is worse than the urban poverty of the modern city, in this case Turin. It was arguably an attempt to create anger towards the Italian state’s neglect of southern Italy in the implied middle-class reader.

Levi’s description of the Sassi presents them as Other to notions of the modern city which were pervasive in the Western public sphere in the early twentieth century. Matera’s cave homes are depicted as a symbol of Fascism’s failure to resolve the southern question. A number of narratives prevalent in slumland descriptions appear to have influenced this image. Arguably these literary tropes were used because they would have been familiar to the implied bourgeois and learned audience for whom Levi wrote his book. These narratives were employed to create an image of poverty which would shock and anger the reader. However, there is a clear tension between Levi’s depiction of southern rural culture in Cristo and the image of Matera that the book presents. Southern rural culture is described as a positive value system which needs to be protected and Matera as the symbolic capital of this world. The image of the Sassi that Levi presented, however, conveys the idea that the city is Other to notions of modernity. This description implies that some form of intervention is needed to improve the living conditions amongst Matera’s cave dwellers. Although Levi advocated a system of autonomous local rule to resolve the southern question, his description of the Sassi played a salient role in focusing

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87 Ibid., p. 80
media and political attention on Matera. This process ultimately resulted in the implementation of the *risanamento* programme for Matera in the 1950s from above without the consultation of the local population.

The notion that Matera was a symbol of the Italian state’s continued neglect of the Mezzogiorno, would be highly influential in subsequent descriptions of the city. Images of Matera produced in media and political sources would appropriate many of the same narrative threads that Levi employed in his description of the Sassi. These concepts were important tools in the discursive construction of Matera as a symbol of the southern question and laid the foundation for notions of the city as a national shame which emerged in the late 1940s. Writing about Cristo’s impact on post-war Matera, Anne Toxey has argued that ‘following the descriptions in Levi’s book, Matera became known as the “symbol of peasant misery,” the very emblem of the Southern Question.’ Her work, however, does not explore how and why this narrative became part of the repertoire of stock images of the Mezzogiorno at both political and intellectual levels in the post-war period. The next section, in contrast, will examine this point in detail.

### 1.3 Cristo’s reception and impact

Einaudi published *Cristo* in June 1945 in three different series simultaneously: *Saggi, Testimonianze* and *Narratori contemporanei*. Along with Gramsci’s *Lettere dal carcere*, the book was one of the publishing house’s major successes.

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88 Toxey, ‘Reinventing the Cave’, p. 66
89 Falaschi, p. 470
in the immediate post-war period. Exact Italian sales figures for *Cristo* in its first two years of publication were not forthcoming, but Einaudi’s quarterly bulletin for winter 1946 showed that the book was already in its fifth pressing. A letter by Giulio Einaudi to Franco Venturi dated the 25 September 1947 noted that the publishing house expected to have sold at least 40,000 copies of *Cristo* by the end of the year in contrast to 30,000 copies of Gramsci’s *Lettere dal carcere*. Gigliola De Donato and Sergio D’Amaro claim that Levi took special care to ensure his book was distributed in southern Italy. Statistics on Italian literacy levels in the post-war period, however, suggest that *Cristo* was primarily read by a learned and urban intellectual class during the scope of this study.

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91 De Donato and D’Amaro, p. 184

92 Ibid., p. 198

93 The reliability of these claims, however, is questionable as no documentary evidence is given to back them up. See De Donato and D’Amaro, p. 184.

94 Approximately 12.9 per cent of Italians were illiterate in 1951 with that figure almost double in southern Italy and Islands for the same year at 24.8 per cent of the population. The same set of statistics reveals that illiteracy rates were as high as 29 per cent in Basilicata, second only to Calabria on 32 per cent. In addition, ISTAT statistics reveal that in 1951 only one per cent of the Italian population, and just 0.9 per cent in the South and islands, had completed third level education with 76.9 per cent of Italians leaving education after elementary school. While illiteracy rates in Italy had dropped to 8.3 per cent by 1961, the figure in the South and islands was still nearly twice the national average at 16.3 per cent. The diffusion of print media in rural areas of Italy in the immediate post-war period was limited by what David Forgacs has called ‘spatial inequality’ between city and country. The book selling market was primarily restricted to areas of urban growth with the distribution of printed materials in large parts of rural Italy virtually non-existent. The limited dissemination of books in rural Italy was caused by a number of specific factors: lower literacy levels, a lack of disposable income, a restricted amount of free time, and poor communications networks in many parts of the peninsula. These statistics underline that the Italian reading public from 1945-1960 was predominately an urban intellectual class with disposable income and access to centres of book publishing. See Ginsborg, p. 440 and David Forgacs, *Italian Culture in the Industrial Era 1880-1980. Cultural Industries, Politics and the Public*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1990, pp. 18-23.
The Fondazione Carlo Levi has collected a vast array of press cuttings on *Cristo* from the period 1945-1950. These articles reveal that the book was a commercial and a critical success in Italy during the scope of this study. Moreover, they illustrate how *Cristo* became a cultural reference point for articles addressing the renewed interest in the southern question. The book was reviewed widely on its release in a vast number of publications, from national to local newspapers, weekly and monthly publications as well as party organs. *Cristo* was widely praised in the Italian press for its detailed and sympathetic account of the Mezzogiorno. Levi’s depiction of southern rural culture, in addition, was hailed as revelatory.95 Writing in the Turin-based Christian Democrat daily *Il Popolo Nuovo*, Augusta Grosso Guidetti commented that: ‘per molti di noi questo libro [Cristo] ... ha rivelato, nella interpretazione e trasfigurazione personale di un artista, un mondo di cui non sospettavamo l’esistenza così vicino.’96 Moreover, *Cristo* was acclaimed for its role in refocusing intellectual and political attention on the southern question following the fall of Fascism. Particular merit was attributed to Levi’s ability to spread the debate about the South beyond the limited readership of the various political studies and social scientific reports previously published on the subject.97 Owing to the book’s critical and commercial success, therefore, it

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96 Augusta Grosso Guidetti, ‘Cristo si è fermato a Eboli’, *Il Popolo Nuovo*, 21 April, 1946, page number not available (ACS, FCL, Busta 103, Fascicolo 2415)
97 This point was expressed succinctly in *L’Italia Nuova* in May 1946: ‘Molti fiumi d’inchiesta sono stati versati sulla “questione meridionale”, ma non esitiamo ad affermare che quest’opera [Cristo] gioverà ad essa più di mille trattati di politica e di economia.’ See ‘Cristo
became a cultural reference point for the renewed debate regarding the southern question amongst members of post-war Italy’s public sphere. This point is reflected by the fact that Cristo’s enigmatic title was routinely cited and recycled in various articles and publications which focused their attention on southern Italy’s economic, social and political conditions after 1945.98

Furthermore, Cristo enjoyed relative commercial and critical success in the USA and the UK during the scope of this study. This had a direct impact on foreign interest in Matera at intellectual, journalistic and academic levels.99 The book’s American edition was released on 18 April 1947 by Farrar, Straus and Company. It sold 13,785 copies in its first year and had had reached an estimated 96,285 by 1950. Cassell published the book in the UK in 1948.100 Russell King has noted the substantial impact that Cristo made at an intellectual and academic level in both the US and the UK during the scope of this study. The book’s Italian edition was widely used in Italian departments in the English-speaking world. The English translation was read more as a document of southern Italy’s social and cultural topography than the diary of an internal
political exile. As a result Cristo became a reference point for researchers and intellectuals interested in studying southern Italy and its so-called 'peasant culture'.

Levi's book drew a number of foreign academics and journalists to Basilicata and Matera in the 1940s and 1950s. These included the sociologist George Peck, the political scientist Edward Banfield, the photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson and the philosopher Friedrich George Friedmann. This international interest appears to have fed back into the sense amongst Italy's public sphere that the country was being watched and judged by overseas visitors and commentators.

Italian reaction to Cristo's political content was divided along ideological lines. Predictably Action Party and Giustizia e libertà affiliated publications and writers agreed with Levi's rejection of state intervention from above, the distance he perceived between the southern rural poor and the Italian state, and his call for self-government to resolve the southern question. In contrast

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103 This point is examined in detail in section 2.3 below.
104 Massimo Mila, 'Esplorare l'Italia', Giustizia e libertà, 27 December 1945, page number not available; Vittore Branca, 'Lucania magica e desolata', La Nazione del Popolo, 21 February
the PCI rejected Levi’s political vision. Post-war cultural criticism in Communist Party circles was marked by the adoption ‘of a cultural value system centred upon realism and collective solidarity and a corresponding critique of “decadence” and mass culture.’\textsuperscript{105} Levi was accused of romanticizing and idolizing the southern rural poor as well as failing to offer a concrete explanation for the socio-economic reasons behind southern Italy’s backwardness in comparison to the North. PCI critics completely rejected the claim that southern society could be rebuilt through the positive values of the civilta contadina.

These points are exemplified in Carlo Muscetta’s critique of Cristo in Fiera Letteraria in 1946 and his review of L’Orologio from 1950 which was published in the PCI organ L’Unità. Muscetta criticized Levi’s depiction of southern Italy as ‘un mondo senza Storia, chiuso alla Libertà e alla Ragione’ which ‘tende ad allontanare il Mezzogiorno più che l’India e la Cina,’ at the very moment in which southern Italy ‘sollecitato da opposti interessi reazionari e democratici, tende ad uscire dalla sua immobilità, ed è politicamente e socialmente vivo, in agitazione e in movimento per avvicinarsi e ricongiungersi all’“altra” Italia.’\textsuperscript{106} The Communist intellectual and parliamentarian Mario

\textsuperscript{105} Forgacs, \textit{Italian Culture in the Industrial Era}, p. 159

\textsuperscript{106} See Carlo Muscetta, \textit{Realismo, neorealismo, controrealismo}, Garzanti, Milan, 1976, p. 60. Notably Muscetta worked in Einaudi’s Rome office in the 1940s and had been actively involved in publishing the first edition of \textit{Cristo}. Moreover, Muscetta had been a member of the PdA until March 1946 before joining the PCI later that same year. He was a personal acquaintance of Levi’s and appears in L’Orologio as the figure of Moneta. See Leonardo Sacco, \textit{L’Orologio della Repubblica. Carlo Levi e il caso Italia con 37 disegni politici di Carlo Levi}, Argo, Lecce, 1996, pp. 7-19 & 67-73.
Alicata was even harsher in his criticism of Levi. Writing in *Cronache Meridionali* in 1954, Alicata branded Levi as the leading exponent of a school of *meridionalismo* which ‘vorrebbe che non solo “Cristo” ma anche il moderno pensiero critico si fermasse a Eboli.’ Furthermore, the article accused Levi of failing to historicize southern Italy’s social backwardness and thus being unable to provide a coherent solution to the southern question. Alicata rejected Levi’s theory of political autonomy based on the positive values identified in southern rural culture. In fact Alicata contested the idea of a homogenous southern rural culture. Instead he claimed that there were a myriad of different cultures whose historical origins and social development needed to be studied individually.

Despite their ideological misgivings over Levi’s vision of southern Italy and proposed solution for the southern question, the PCI appropriated his image of Matera as a symbol of the southern question and Other to notions of modernity into its political propaganda. They used the city to denounce social conditions in the entire Mezzogiorno and promote the need for modernization.

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107 Mario Alicata was also a personal acquaintance of Carlo Levi and appeared in *L’Orologio* as Nardelli. See Sacco, *L’Orologio della Repubblica*, pp. 175-196.


109 Alicata claimed that Levi’s book had had an insidious influence on subsequent writers who focused their attention on southern rural culture. In particular Alicata critiqued Rocco Scotellaro’s *Contadini del Sud* and path-breaking intellectual and PCI member Ernesto De Martino’s research for failing to historicize the community’s they studied and in the case of De Martino for abandoning the PCI’s ideological position vis-à-vis the southern question. The case of De Martino is of particular interest as the Neapolitan intellectual had drawn heavily on Gramsci’s *Osservazioni sul folclore* in his own work. As a result De Martino outlined a distinction between *folclore tradizionale* and *folclore progressivo* in his writing with the latter defined as a manifestation of the southern rural poor’s nascent social consciousness. Moreover, De Martino had criticized Levi’s view of southern rural culture for many of the same reasons as Muscetta and Alicata. See Ernesto De Martino, ‘Intorno a una polemica. Postilla a considerazioni storiche sul lamento funebre lucano’, in Carla Pasquinelli (ed.), *Antropologia culturale e questione meridionale: Ernesto De Martino e il dibattito sul mondo popolare subalterno negli anni 1948-1955*, La Nuova Italia Editrice, Florence, 1977, p. 223 and Ernesto De Martino, ‘Il folklore progressivo’, in Pasquinelli, p. 144.

and agrarian reform in southern Italy. This point is illustrated in the depiction of Matera in the Communist weekly magazine *Vie Nuove*. On 6 October 1946 the magazine featured an unsigned editorial entitled ‘Matera Città dei Sassi’ in which Matera was dubbed ‘la più disgraziata città di Italia.’ The image of the Sassi that *Vie Nuove* presented clearly evoked Levi’s description in *Cristo*.

Matera’s cave homes were described as ‘abitazioni trogloditiche, primitive’ in which ‘brulica la popolazione dei contadini e degli operai la quale, quando torna dal lavoro, è costretta ad abitare in promiscuità tra uomini, donne e animali.’ Furthermore, the city was described as a symbol of the entire Mezzogiorno:

‘Ecco qua Matera: campeggia in questa pagina col suo biancore calcinato, i suoi sassi di calvario. Le sue pene antiche e recenti, il suo doloroso risentimento. Matera: l’Italia Meridionale.’ In contrast to Levi’s call for autonomous local government to solve the southern question, however, *Vie Nuove* advocated a programme of direct state intervention in line with PCI policy. Accordingly, the editorial called for ‘un progetto concreto per la demolizione dei “Sassi” e la costruzione di nuove case’ which should be realized ‘attraverso un fattivo intervento dello Stato.’ Notably the description of the Sassi featured in *Cristo* was reprinted in *Vie Nuove* under the heading ‘La Testimonianza di uno

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111 *Vie Nuove* was a glossy weekly magazine (*rotocalco*) which juxtaposed features on social and political current affairs with photos of film stars and articles on popular culture. Although it started out as a pedagogical publication intended to provide a Communist counterpart to the *Famiglia Cristiana*, *Vie Nuove* developed into a more commercial magazine in an attempt to compete with its rivals *Epoca* and *Oggi*. Furthermore, *Vie Nuove* was a successful publication within the relevant confines of Italian Communist subculture. Despite being sold exclusively through subscription or by party volunteers, the weekly magazine had a print run of 30,000 in 1946 peaking at 350,000 in 1952. See David Forgacs and Stephen Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2007, pp. 267-268.

112 ‘Matera Città dei Sassi’, *Vie Nuove*, 6 October 1946, p. 3

113 Ibid., p. 3

114 Gianni Puccini, ‘Nuovo corso per il Mezzogiorno’, *Vie Nuove*, 6 October 1946, p. 3

115 ‘Matera Città dei Sassi’, *Vie Nuove*, 6 October 1946, p. 3
scrittore.' Presenting Levi’s image of Matera out of context with the rest of the book, specifically his rejection of direct state intervention, rendered it part of the PCI’s catalogue of stock images of southern backwardness. As a result, the image of Matera presented in *Cristo* was placed within the context of the Communist Party’s call for redevelopment of the Mezzogiorno through a process of economic modernization from above.

Examining local reaction to Levi’s book in the post-war period it is clear that *Cristo* was generally viewed as an attack on southern society. The idea that southern rural culture was a positive value system which could act as a potential antidote to Western civilization’s failings appears to have had little resonance amongst critics in Basilicata and Matera. Instead local commentators believed that the book was a denigration of the South. This suggests that they were reacting as much to opinions about the book in Italy’s public sphere as to the actual text itself. Contemporary regional press reviews offer an insight into local middle-class attitudes towards *Cristo*. Although the book’s artistic merit was widely praised, Levi was accused of denigrating the region and its inhabitants. *Cristo’s* commercial and critical success seems to have added to this sense of injustice. Levi was charged with disseminating a distorted picture of Basilicata to the wider world on the one hand, while commercially exploiting the region’s poverty on the other. Writing in Matera’s weekly *Il Gazzettino* on 7

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116 See Puccini, p. 3 and ‘Matera Città dei Sassi’, *Vie Nuove*, 6 October 1946, p. 3.
117 The image of Matera as Other to ideas of modernity was central to the PCI propaganda film *Nel Mezzogiorno qualcosa è cambiato*. Carlo Lizzani’s documentary presents Matera as a symbol of the southern question. The Sassi are utilized to denounce the abject poverty of the entire South and promote the need for land reform. See Carlo Lizzani, *Nel Mezzogiorno qualcosa è cambiato* (Italy, 1949).
October 1946, the paper’s editor Tommaso Calulli took it upon himself to summarize local reaction to _Cristo_:

Il lancio iniziale di ‘Cristo si è fermato a Eboli’ ha fatto piovere su questo povero mondo Lucano, da tutte le parti del mondo, insulti, parole di pseudo comprensione, incoraggiamenti mistificatori, sprejudicati inaccettabili, consigli e suggerimenti. La nostra povera Lucania, sempre odiosamente bistrattata, è stata proiettata violentamente, di punto in bianco alla ribalta di una celebrità assolutamente non sognata nè tantomeno ambita.\(^{118}\)

In an attempt to gauge local reaction to Levi’s book, Calulli offered the pages of _Il Gazzettino_ to any disgruntled readers wishing to air their grievances towards Levi as well as anyone willing to defend his book.\(^{119}\) Amongst those who took up Calulli’s proposal was Luigi Gambalone, the man upon whom Levi had based the figure of Gagliano’s Fascist mayor Don Luigi. Gambalone contested his portrayal in the book and described _Cristo_ as ‘una serie di quadri belli deturpati’ in which Levi had managed to ‘disprezzare la nostra purezza di vita semplice ed onesta e a sentire il nostalgico ricordo del vizio e della menzogna.’\(^{120}\) Local priest and historian of Matera Marcello Morelli also expressed his displeasure about Levi’s depiction of Basilicata in _Il Gazzettino_. He described the book as ‘non documento d’una realtà obiettiva’, but rather a ‘libro fantastica di pura arte, cioè libro in cui tutto sotto l’occhio deformatore d’un moderno creatore di miti si

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119 Ibid., p. 1
120 Luigi Garambone, _Il Gazzettino. Economico commerciale della Lucania_, 14 October 1946, page number not available (ACS, FCL, busta 103). In an interview from 1956, Gambalone was more forgiving of Levi’s portrait putting it down to artistic interpretation. However, he claimed that Levi’s apparent betrayal of trust had hurt Aliano’s residents: ‘Valore letterario a parte, il libro più che ingiusto lo hanno trovato indiscreto … una forma di scoretta … che disturba un poco l’antica e severa civiltà di questa gente’. Ugo Lombardo, ‘Tra l’autore e i personaggi non corre buon sangue’, _Visto_, 21 August 1954, page number not available (ACS, FCL, busta 104).
altera e prende proporzione mostruose.' Morelli concluded that 'i lucani a leggerlo [Cristo] soffrono come d’uno schiaffo dato loro in pieno viso.' Even a more analytical local review such as Alfredo Toscano’s booklet ‘Dopo aver letto “Cristo si è fermato a Eboli” di Carlo Levi’, which engaged with the book’s political dimension and critiqued Levi’s appraisal of the southern question, concluded that he had sullied Basilicata and southern Italy’s reputation in the eyes of northern Italian and foreign readers despite the author’s noble intentions.

Regional politicians added their voices to the chorus of disapproval towards Cristo. Interviewed in 1947, Communist deputy Luigi De Filpo described Levi as ‘il più cinico e temerario imprenditore di trasfigurazioni liriche e pittoriche dei tempi moderni ... egli è un affossatore e la sua arte maligna e sottile, ha un portentoso potere nebbiogeno.’ When asked his opinion about Levi’s book in the same article the Christian Democrat parliamentarian Emilio Colombo replied that: ‘Cristo non si è fermato a Eboli ... nell’anima del più oscuro dei nostri contadini tanta speranza, tanta volontà di lottare, tanto attaccamento alla propria terra, alla famiglia, alla onestà della vita,

122 Ibid., (ACS, FCL, busta 103)
124 De Filpo’s criticism of Levi has undertones of anti-Semitism with the PCI deputy concluding that ‘poiché [Levi] mostra tanto ardore e tanta pena per i paesi tagliati fuori dalla predicazione evangelica, se ne torni in Palestina, la patria dei suoi maggiori.’ Giuseppe Selvaggi, ‘Un paese aspetta’, Il Sud, 19 October 1947, page number not available (ACS, FCL, busta 103)
Local and regional reaction to *Cristo* arguably reflects Giovanni Russo’s claim that many of the book’s critics were angered because they recognized themselves in the negative depiction of southern Italy’s petit bourgeoisie. However, it also suggests that in many cases local figures were reacting to the image of the South they believed the book had disseminated among Italy’s public sphere rather than the actual text itself. The implication is that *Cristo* played a salient role in constructing and spreading notions of the backward South in the post-war period. In the context of Matera and the Sassi it is clear from press coverage and the numerous reports produced in the context of the first special law that Levi’s brief description played a salient role in focusing media and political attention on the city. For example, writing in 1953 about the rediscovery of the southern question in the immediate post-war period, the Commissione di studio sulla comunità di Matera attributed the intense political and media focus on Matera to the city’s description in *Cristo*. It claimed that ‘in particolare la grave condizione edilizia e sociale della città di Matera si era già imposta da tempo all’attenzione dell’opinione pubblica italiana: dopo le drammatiche, rivelatrici pagine di Carlo Levi nel “Cristo si è fermato a Eboli”, fu nel 1949 che questo interesse cominciò a concretarsi in forma di programme di intervento.’ But Levi did more than

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125 Ibid., (ACS, FCL, busta 103)
126 ‘È facile comprendere ... come il libro sia stato accolto con diffidenza e quasi con rancore in certi ambienti, fino a condannarlo come cattivo e malevolo. Molti sono stati colpiti, molti hanno visto con stupore il loro vero volto riflesso nel volto di qualcuno di quei personaggi descritti dall’autore e hanno avuto paura e meraviglia che si fosse riuscito a sollevare la maschera secolare della loro ipocrisia e a mettere a nudo la cancrena. Ma la calunnia di Carlo Levi, nemico del povero terrone del sud non merita di essere raccolta. Carlo Levi prova non solo carità ma amore per questa umanità derelitta, abbandonata da secoli nelle mani della miseria, della malaria e della morte.’ See Giovanni Russo, ‘Un incontro in Lucania’, *La Voce*, 18 February 1946, page number not available (ACS, FCL, busta 103).
merely focus attention on Matera. He provided two concepts which would directly influence subsequent descriptions of the city post-1945. Matera as Other to notions of modernity and a symbol of the southern question were recurring tropes found in mass media and political depictions of the Mezzogiorno during the scope of this study. These two concepts would come to dominate how Matera was studied and imagined in the post-war era and ultimately influenced the course of the city’s social and urban history.

Conclusion

Speaking in 2012 about the media and political interest in Matera in the immediate post-war period the journalist and historian Leonardo Sacco argued that ‘c'è da dire che Matera era stata “inventata” da Carlo Levi, col Cristo.’128 The book’s commercial and critical success undoubtedly played a salient role in focusing political, intellectual and media attention on Matera from the late-1940s onwards in the context of renewed interest in the southern question. Levi's bestseller was invariably cited as the source text from which political and intellectual interest in the Sassi arose during the scope of this study. But as Sacco implies, the book did more than just focus attention on Matera. It created the notion that the city was representative of southern rural culture, an idea which became familiar to Italy’s book-reading population and political class. Levi’s depiction of Matera, however, was removed from the political context within which it was written, i.e. the values of the Resistance and his aspirations for a state which would make a clean break from Italy’s Liberal and Fascist past. Cristo was released in the same month that Action Party leader, Ferruccio Parri,

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became Prime Minister of the post-war coalition government. The hopes of Levi and the PdA, however, would last just five months. Parri’s government was undermined by the political manoeuvrings of the PCI and the *Partito Socialista Italiano di Unità Proletaria*, as well as by internal divisions within his own party - which ultimately dissolved in 1946.\footnote{Levi outlined his disillusionment over the collapse of PdA in his post-war novel *L’Orologio* (1950) in which he lamented the return to power of what he considered Italy’s *ancien régime*. For a summary of the PdA’s demise see Ginsborg, p. 89. For a discussion of *L’Orologio*’s historical, biographical and political context see Sacco, *L’Orologio della Repubblica.*} Despite Levi’s opposition to direct state intervention and his call for autonomous local government in the South, the PCI and the DC appropriated his image of Matera to promote policies of state intervention from above. Levi had presented the image of a not entirely undifferentiated, immobile and pre-modern Mezzogiorno. Matera was depicted as its symbolic capital. Levi had outlined a programme for the Mezzogiorno’s rebirth based on the values he perceived in southern rural poor. In contrast, the PCI viewed the idealization of rural culture as a potential obstacle to southern Italy’s social and economic development. Moreover, the DC and the PCI constructed the image of a South incapable of generating its own renewal and thus in need of state intervention. Images of Matera played an important role in this process. The model of the city that Levi had created in *Cristo* was transferred into party propaganda to suit the rapidly changing political terrain of the post-war period and had concrete effects at a political level. In political and media sources Matera became a symbol of all that was wrong with the South. This idea influenced the course of the city’s post-war history. The concept that Matera was emblematic of southern agriculture shaped the provisions of government intervention in the city in the 1950s. Generic
development models for the entire Mezzogiorno were applied to a distinct type of agricultural economy. Furthermore, the image of Matera as Other to ideas of modernity was the starting point for notions that the city constituted a national shame. This narrative became a commonplace in Italian media and political circles between 1948 and 1952 and would influence the decision to implement special legislation for the city in the 1950s. The next chapter will examine this process in detail.
Chapter 2: Matera and national shame

Seicentomila abitanti della Basilicata vivono tuttora in condizioni di vita inferiori a quelle dei popoli africani, come prova, dandone la misura, la sempre più grave vergogna dei “sassi” materani ... in queste tane vivono in media sei esseri umani per vano, con punte spaventose, insieme a muli, asini, maiali, pecore, oltre a tutti gli animali di bassa corte. Queste sono, dunque, le abitazioni che stanno ancora là a denotare da quanta miseria sia afflito il nostro paese e di quanta vergogna sia ricoperta questa vostra civiltà occidentale di cui ci parlate continuamente.¹

The above quotation is taken from a parliamentary intervention in 1951 by Michele Bianco, a PCI deputy for Potenza. It is just one of the numerous expressions of national shame that were generated in the context of post-war Matera. The notion that the city constituted a national shame gained a wide discursive currency in Italian political and public spheres in the immediate post-war period.² In the early 1950s an estimated 15,000 people were living in troglodyte dwellings carved out of limestone which, in many cases, had no running water or sewage system. Families shared their airless subterranean homes with farm animals. These distinctive cave homes were brought to national and international attention by their brief, yet evocative, description in Carlo Levi’s post-war best seller Cristo si è fermato a Eboli and the resultant media interest in the Sassi. Expressions of shame over the living conditions witnessed at Matera in contemporary newspaper articles and official reports were almost universally couched in the terminology of nationhood. In the context of the post-war reconstruction effort and a country facing a severe

¹ Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei Deputati, 27 February 1951, pp. 26560-26562
² The term shame is used to translate the Italian word vergogna. Although it can also be translated as embarrassment or disgrace, Silvana Patriarca notes that ‘according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the pre-Teutonic root of shame has a meaning similar to that of the romance languages as it refers to the act of covering or looking for cover.’ See Patriarca, ’A Patriotic Emotion’, p. 148, n. 5. Sara Ahmed also briefly examines the origins of the term shame in the English language in Ahmed, p. 104.
housing shortage, Matera's slums were branded a national shame. The Sassi became a symbol of Italy's southern question which had once again become an important issue in mainstream political discourse. Tackling this so-called vergogna nazionale took on symbolic importance in the context of the new Italian Republic and the start of the Cold War as Communism and Christian Democracy looked to lay claim to notions of national identity.

There have been countless books and articles published on Matera's post-war history. To date, however, no study has examined the patriotic narratives generated in the context of the Sassi in detail. The question of why overcrowded cave homes were seen as an affront to notions of the Italian nation at that specific moment in history has remained unanswered. This is all the more surprising as post-war Matera provides an ideal opportunity for examining the workings of patriotism in a country that is generally considered to ‘lack’ national identity. These patriotic narratives were produced at a point in time when Italian nationalism was considered to be in crisis following twenty years of Fascist rule and the turmoil of foreign occupation and civil war. The expressions of national shame that Matera's cave homes generated suggest that Italian patriotism may have been more prominent in the immediate post-war period than previously thought. This chapter aims to examine the workings of these emotional scenarios, the social and political context that shaped them, the image of the Italian nation they created, and their impact on Matera's social and urban history in the 1950s. First it will sketch the historical milieu within which discourses of national shame were produced. Next it will outline a theoretical framework for examining national shame drawing on recent scholarship from
the history of emotions and the history of nationalism. Finally it will examine a representative sample from the numerous expressions of national shame in the context of post-war Matera found in the Italian press and official documents.

2.1 Historical context

The expressions of national shame examined below were produced in the context of the developing Cold War with the Christian Democrats and the Italian Communist Party looking to establish themselves as the country's two main political parties. The Truman Doctrine was announced in March 1947 with the European Recovery Programme, better known as the Marshall Plan, established in June of the same year. In May 1947 the Italian Prime Minister, Alcide De Gasperi, expelled both the Communist and Socialist parties from the Constituent Assembly, the immediate post-war coalition government. The DC leader's strategy paid off and on 18 April 1948, following a bitter election campaign punctuated by Cold War propaganda, his party achieved a landslide victory collecting 48.9 per cent of the vote. The result marked the division of Italian political and cultural life into two opposing poles and the beginning of almost fifty years of political domination in Italy by the DC. Concurrently, the PCI emerged as the dominant party on the Left. As a result from the late 1940s onwards the DC controlled the 'key state cultural apparatuses: broadcasting, censorship and the body responsible for the performance arts and entertainments, the Sottosegretario per lo Spettacolo.' Conversely, influenced by the Gramscian strategy of attempting to penetrate all aspects of Italian civil

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3 For a summary of the Italian political terrain in the immediate post-war period see Ginsborg, pp. 112-120.
4 The culture of the Left and specifically the PCI is outlined in Forgacs and Gundle, pp. 259-270 and Forgacs, *Italian Culture in the Industrial Era*, p. 105.
life, the PCI built its own independent cultural networks including party newspapers, publishers, libraries and the *Case del Popolo*. As a result, images of Matera and the South produced in the party press were shaped by the ideology of the publication in which they appeared as well as developments in the Italian political landscape in the immediate post-war period.

Matera was one of the key images that the PCI and the DC used to promote their distinctive political strategies in southern Italy. Both parties proposed policies for the South based on modernization through public works programmes and industrialization. These reforms were promoted and justified through images of the Mezzogiorno disseminated through various channels of party propaganda, from print to newsreels and documentaries. Moreover, the different souths that the PCI and DC presented in print and film were filtered through the southern question paradigm and featured a number of shared characteristics. Southern Italy was depicted as economically backward in comparison to the North; it was a vast impoverished territory where society was still characterized by the residue of feudalism. In short, the South was a problem that needed to be solved. To justify the proposal of reform policies in the Mezzogiorno, Italy’s two main parties had to illustrate the perceived economic divide that existed between North and South. The Sassi became one of the primary sources for portraying the Mezzogiorno’s economic and social problems in this context during the immediate post-war years.

Carlo Levi’s description of the Sassi in *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* and its widespread dissemination directly influenced the political focus on Matera. The

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5 Forgacs, *Italian Culture in the Industrial Era*, p. 154
town received an unprecedented amount of political and media attention in the post-war period, but Levi’s image of Matera and the South was removed from the political context within which it was created. His depiction of Matera as the capitale contadina and the embodiment of southern poverty provided post-war Italy’s two main parties with a ready-made cultural reference point which could be adapted to suit their specific ideological needs. Accordingly, representations of Matera and the Sassi produced in the party press reflected political attitudes towards southern Italy as well as the specific historical context within which they were created. Concurrently these images further cemented and disseminated the concept of Matera as a symbol of the southern question.

The Italian Communist Party adopted a two pronged strategy in the South: first, it espoused a policy of economic modernization from above for southern Italy. This was to be achieved through a programme of public investment and agrarian reform with the aim of resolving the perceived economic divide between North and South. Second, it promoted the transformation of southern society through the political mobilization of the southern rural poor. The aim of this second strategy was to create class consciousness amongst southern Italy’s agricultural workforce. In order to achieve these aims the PCI established the Movimento per la rinascita del

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6 See Chapter 1, pp. 38-51.
7 Sidney Tarrow, Peasant Communism in Southern Italy, Yale University Press, London, 1967, p. 256
8 From 1945 to 1962 the Italian Communist Party instigated what Sidney Tarrow has dubbed ‘an organizational revolution’ in southern Italy. It introduced the party section, the secretariat, and the secondary association into Italy’s southern regions and produced an unprecedented level of political participation at a popular level. Party membership grew from 400,000 in 1944 to 2,245,000 by 1947 (278,000 to 430,000 during the same period in southern Italy). See Tarrow, p. 198.
Mezzogiorno in 1947. This was an agglomeration of provincial and regional assemblies organized to push for land reform legislation and build party consensus in southern Italy. It organized demonstrations, regional assizes and coordinated the election campaign of 1948 in the South.¹⁰

At a national level the PCI pursued a strategy of progressive democracy in the immediate post-war period. This policy entailed the party's continued participation in government and the maintenance of its alliance with the DC as part of the post-war Constituent Assembly. However, this position changed following the expulsion of the Left in May 1947 and the start of the Cold War. As Claudia Petraccone notes: 'la fine dei governi di unità nazionale spinse i communisti a considerare nuovamente la questione meridionale come uno strumento di lotta politica.'¹¹ Following the defeat of the Popular Front (a coalition between the Italian Communist and Socialist Parties) in the 1948 general election, the PCI focused its southern strategy on the political mobilization of rural workers. Despite the failure of the coalition between socialists and communists to challenge the DC at a national level, the Popular Front had increased its vote in southern Italy.¹² Consequently, the southern question was seen as a fundamental component of the PCI’s political strategy for building consensus in southern Italy. The South’s renewal was to be achieved through agricultural reform. The Communist Party viewed the feudal residues of the latifondi as the primary cause of southern Italy’s economic stagnation.¹³ According to the PCI leader Palmiro Togliatti, the party needed to

¹⁰ Petraccone, p. 215-216
¹¹ Ibid., p. 220
¹² Ginsborg, p. 35
¹³ Tarrow, pp. 256-257
create a political climate in the South which would allow the southern working class to 'sottrarla all’influenza dei gruppi reazionari che ancora la tengono sotto il loro potere e dirigerla nella lotta per il benessere e per il bene di tutto il paese.'

In order to achieve this aim the PCI sought to organize the southern rural poor according to the framework set out by Gramsci in *Alcuni temi della questione meridionale* (1926), i.e. the unification of the northern proletariat and the southern peasantry under the auspices of the Party.

Togliatti had outlined this strategy in the pages of *Rinascita* in 1944: ‘incominciamo con l’organizzare seriamente queste masse, tanto in formazioni politiche quanto in formazioni economiche più larghe (sindacati, leghe contadine ecc.) e appoggiandoci su queste forze diamo battaglia per la rinascita politica dell’Italia meridionale.’

Following the renewal of the peasant land occupations in the winter of 1949, the PCI organized the *Assise per la rinascita del Mezzogiorno* which were held on 3-4 December 1949 at four different venues: Salerno, Crotone, Bari and Matera. Moreover, in rural areas Land Committees and *Consulate popolari* were established. The aim of these initiatives was to coordinate the numerous land occupations of 1949-1950 in Calabria, Puglia, Campania and Basilicata in an attempt to consolidate what had started out as spontaneous movements and push for agrarian reform in the South.

The PCI’s strategy of organizing the southern rural poor through the renewed occupation of the *latifondi* was a success in the short term. The DC

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16 Amendola, *Gli anni della Repubblica*, p. 283
passed land reform legislation in 1950. However, this came at the price of a number of lives and, in the long term, land reform was one of the means through which the Christian Democrats built its electoral consensus in southern Italy. The Italian police killed three landless peasants in the Calabrian town of Melissa on 29 October 1949 following the occupation of the Berlingieri estates near Crotone. Furthermore, another rural worker, Giuseppe Noviello, was shot by a carabiniere in December 1949 at the town of Montescaglioso in the province of Matera and later died. By the end of 1949 approximately 20,000 landless rural workers had occupied 15,000 hectares of land around Matera and its environs. Faced with the prospect of more violent reprisals against landless peasants Alcide De Gasperi, the Italian Prime Minister, decided to implement a limited land reform programme. The aim was to appease Italy's landless rural poor and reduce the PCI's growing influence in the South. As Paul Ginsborg has argued: 'to the Communist thrust from below for fundamental change in the countryside, the DC responded from above with a reorganization and reformulation of its own making.'

The Italian government passed an agrarian reform bill for Calabria, the so-called Legge Sila, on 12 May 1950. The Legge stralcio, which covered Basilicata, Campania, Sardinia and Puglia in the South as well as the Fucino

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18 Sidney Tarrow argues that the PCI's decision to broaden its electorate in 1948 to include small landowners, artisans, and middle class professionals as part of the Via italiana al socialismo strategy softened the party’s stance on land reform. He contends that the PCI's decision not to back a peasant revolution inevitably led to the transformation of a potentially revolutionary group of landless day labourers into conservative small land owners. See Tarrow, pp. 273-299.

19 Correspondence between the Prefect of Matera and the Ministry of the Interior reveals that Noviello's death triggered popular protest throughout Italy: see ACS, MI, Gabinetto, Fascicoli Correnti, 1950-1952, busta 15, fascicolo 12646.

20 For an outline of post-war land occupations in southern Italy see Ginsborg, pp. 60-63 and pp. 122-127; and Cinanni, pp. 65-68.

21 Ginsborg, p. 140
basin in Abruzzo, the Po delta and parts of Tuscany, was passed on 28 July of the same year.\footnote{22} Under the measures of the reform, uncultivated land on estates over 300 hectares was to be confiscated and redistributed amongst landless workers.\footnote{23} As a result over 417,000 hectares of land was expropriated and distributed to over 120,000 families from 1950 to 1960.\footnote{24} However, these measures were reformist rather than revolutionary and characterized by a number of problems. First, proprietors of great estates were able to avoid the expropriation of land by dividing their property amongst family members. Second, the land that the new peasant proprietors received was often of bad quality making it difficult to establish a working farm. Finally, there were no peasant representatives on the reform boards which controlled the distribution of land.\footnote{25} As a result the \textit{Enti di riforma} became one of the avenues through which the DC built political consensus amongst the southern rural poor.

\footnote{22} The primary focus of the so-called \textit{legge stralcio} was on southern Italy where 13,000 landowners possessed 4.5 million hectares of land. In contrast, four million small landowners and semi-landless workers owned just one million hectares between them. The Puglia-Molise-Lucania land reform area, which covered a total of 1.5 million hectares, was the largest \textit{comprendorio}, i.e. reform territory, established under the provisions of the \textit{legge stralcio}. As the title suggests it included parts of three regions (Puglia, Molise and Basilicata) and extended over eight different provinces (Foggia, Bari, Brindisi, Taranto and Lecce in Puglia; Campobasso in Molise; and Potenza and Matera in Basilicata). The reform area included 129 communes and stretched from the Trigano river in the north to the Adriatic coast in the east and the southern Appenines near Potenza in the west. However, the western half of the Province of Potenza was largely excluded from the \textit{comprendorio}. This predominately mountainous territory was worked by small-land owning farmers and deemed unsuitable for land reform. The majority of the 1.5 million hectares of land expropriated by the \textit{Ente di riforma} was cash-crop producing agricultural land worked by day labourers and owned by absentee landlords: the so-called \textit{latifondo capitalistico}. A total of 42,727 hectares of land was expropriated in the Province of Matera (12.4 per cent of the total provincial territory). In contrast, in the Province of Potenza the land reform board redistributed just 17,081 hectares, or 2.6 per cent of the province. Although land reform transformed the coastal area of the Metapontino from a malarial plain into a successful market gardening \textit{zone}, its results were limited at a regional level. Agricultural reform directly affected just thirteen per cent of the total area of the Puglia-Lucania-Molise \textit{comprendorio}. Moreover, the land was distributed to just ten per cent of agricultural families residing in the reform zone. For a detailed analysis of land reform in Basilicata see Russell King, \textit{Land Reform: The Italian Experience}, Butterworths, London, 1973, pp. 31-123.

\footnote{23} Piero Bevilacqua, p. 135

\footnote{24} Ginsborg, p. 130

\footnote{25} John Foot, \textit{Modern Italy}, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2003, p. 116
Grantees were required to declare their support for the ruling party while in contrast many of those that had participated in the land occupations were refused land. Conversely, the implementation of agricultural reform alienated the agrarian elites of southern Italy, many of whom had previously supported the DC. As Paul Ginsborg notes: ‘The Christian Democrats, therefore, had to construct a new system of social alliances in the agrarian South, based not so much upon traditional domination of the land as upon control of the resources of the state.’ This was partly achieved through the implementation of the Cassa del Mezzogiorno – a development programme for southern Italy. Together with agrarian reform, the Cassa was fundamental in the DC’s construction and maintenance of political consent in southern Italy through the distribution of state investment.

De Gasperi presented a draft version of the Cassa del Mezzogiorno to parliament on 30 March 1950. The bill was passed into legislation on 10 August 1950. The law made provision for the investment of 1,000 billion lire over ten years and was to be financed through funds from the ERP and a loan from the World Bank. The theories of the Associazione per lo sviluppo dell’industria nel Mezzogiorno (SVIMEZ) and the Tennessee Valley Authority’s concept of ‘depressed areas’ influenced the Cassa’s initial phase which focused on pre-industrialization. The aim was to create the structural and economic conditions needed to implement a programme of industrialization in southern

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26 Piero Bevilacqua, p. 135
27 Ginsborg, p. 139
28 Piero Bevilacqua, p. 140
29 For information on SVIMEZ see Petraccone, pp. 221-227. For a detailed discussion of the philosophy behind the Tennessee Valley Authority see David Ekbladh, 'Mr TVA: Grass-Roots Development, David Lilienthal, and the Rise and Fall of the Tennessee Valley Authority as a Symbol for U.S. Overseas Development', *Diplomatic History*, vol. 26 (2002), no. 3, pp. 335-374.
Italy. As a result, the Cassa’s primary focus in its first ten years was on public works including land reclamation, the building of road infrastructure, irrigation and sewage systems. There was no investment in industry until 1957. On paper the Cassa appeared similar to the CGIL’s Labour Plan of 1949 which had put forward a Keynesian programme for economic development. In fact the DC’s development fund for the South, in conjunction with agrarian reform, formed the basis of the party’s political and social hegemony in southern Italy until its liquidation in the early 1990s. This position of power was achieved through mass clientelism. Investment funds were distributed through a complex patronage network as part of a political exchange: state jobs, pensions and welfare contracts were traded for electoral support for the DC. A new political class of brokers made up of local politicians, lawyers and bureaucrats replaced the former landed notables as the mediators between the central state and the local community. Resources, power and influence were transmitted from top to bottom in a hierarchical structure headed by capi correnti, such as Aldo Moro in Puglia, Giovanni Leone in Campania and Emilio Colombo in Basilicata, who controlled the distribution and flow of state resources in their region. The result of the Cassa del Mezzogiorno’s transformation into a patronage machine was twofold. First, the DC succeeded in diffusing the peasant agitations from

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30 Allum, ‘The South and National Politics’, p. 104
31 Foot, Modern Italy, p. 116
32 For an in-depth analysis of these new political elites see Gabriella Gribaudi, Mediatori: Antropologia del potere democristiano nel Mezzogiorno, Rosenberg and Sellier, Turin, 1980, pp. 25-29 and pp. 77-80.
33 For a succinct outline of the networks that distributed state funds in southern Italy see Ginsborg, pp. 178-181. The process of constructing political clienteles in the South in the post-war period is examined at a local level in Percy Allum, Politics and Society in Post-war Naples, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1973; and Judith Chubb, Patronage, Power, and Poverty in Southern Italy: A Tale of Two Cities, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982. For a study of political patronage in Basilicata see Leonardo Sacco’s Il cemento del potere, De Donato, Bari, 1982, which examines the career of the region’s most influential post-war politician Emilio Colombo.
1949-50, and second it embedded the foundations of its long term political consensus in southern Italy. Conversely, the Communist party found itself in the difficult position of opposing reforms which, at least on paper, closely resembled its own proposals for southern Italy. It was in this social and political context that discourses of Matera as a national shame were produced. The next section will outline a theoretical framework for examining these patriotic narratives.

2.2 Studying national shame

The notable media and political focus on post-war Matera was framed within the context of national shame. These numerous expressions of patriotism in a country that is generally considered to have a ‘weak’ sense of national identity provide an ideal test-case for examining patriotic narratives and notions of national identity in post-war Italy. Over the last decade historians of the Risorgimento have increasingly focused their attention on the emotions of national-patriotism. Some exemplary work on patriotic narratives in the Giolittian era has also been carried out. The post-war period, by contrast, has been relatively neglected in this context. This seems to reflect the widely held historiographical consensus that Italy’s ‘lack’ of patriotism was even more marked in the era of the first republic. Nationalism as an ideology, it is argued, had been tainted and discredited by Fascism. Furthermore, military surrender, the loss of Italy’s overseas colonies, the trauma of foreign occupation and civil war had combined to create a crisis of national identity and an apparent

35 For a pathbreaking work in this regard see Dickie, Una catastrofe patriottica.
widespread sense of shame. Consequently, it is argued, patriotism ceased to play a central role in mainstream political discourse until the seismic events of Tangentopoli in the early 1990s and the emergence of Silvio Berlusconi’s *Forza Italia* party. Instead, as Silvana Patriarca has argued, ‘the ideologies of the two main political parties of the [post-war] era, Christian Democracy and the Italian Communist Party, were ostensibly supra-national and the issue of Italian character was marginal in their political rhetoric.’ Christopher Duggan has claimed that the lure of Moscow for the Italian left on the one hand, and the attraction of the United States for the DC on the other, was in part a reaction to Fascism’s focus on nationalism. However, he also contends that this reflected the Italian state’s failure to create a strong sense of national identity in the post-war period. Instead, Duggan argues, the Christian Democrats were more interested in retaining political power than forging a new sense of Italian nationalism. Patriotism as an ideology, it is argued, was no longer central to mainstream Italian politics and was instead primarily associated with far-right and neo-fascist groups. This line of argument, however, arguably reduces ideas of national identity to an ideological programme. It ignores the fact that the concept of the nation is a discursive construct which is being constantly contested and reimagined. Writing about Cold War divisions in post-war Italy John Foot has argued that ‘what was up for grabs was the type of nation itself

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36 Ben Ghiat, p. 337
37 Patriarca, *Italian Vices*, p. 214
39 Patriarca, *Italian Vices*, p. 214
40 See for example Manlio Graziano, *The Failure of Italian Nationhood*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2010. Graziano focuses on Italy’s apparent ‘failure’ to become a nation. His argument ignores that nations are in fact discursive constructs and instead implies an ideal concept of national cohesiveness based on a normative understanding of modernity and the perceived requirements of nationhood.
and the national identity of all Italians. Both Communism and Christian democracy looked to defend or create a particular kind of nation, partly drawn from international models. The intense media and political focus on the Sassi in the 1950s and the associated narratives of national shame provide an ideal laboratory for a micro-analysis of contested notions of Italian patriotism in a Cold War context. Alberto Banti has argued that historians have tended to neglect Italian national identity as an object of study. Although there have been a number of important contributions to the history of Italian nationalism in the last two decades, arguably more work needs to be done in this area. This chapter, therefore, aims to make a small contribution to that field of study in the context of post-war Italy. The following section will outline a framework for examining national shame in the context of post-war Matera. First it will critique the existing literature which has dealt with this topic. Second it will provide a working definition of shame drawing on literature from the fields of psychology and moral philosophy. Third, it will outline a theoretical framework for examining national shame in the context of post-war Matera using methods from the history of emotions and the history of nationalism.

**Existing literature**

Despite the large amount of research on post-war Matera, little work has been done to examine the concept of national shame in any depth. The small amount of existing literature that analyses Matera in this context, moreover, fails to draw on the existing literature on the history of emotions and the history of

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41 Foot, *Modern Italy*, pp. 50-51
nationalism. Writing about post-war Matera, Alfonso Pontrandolfi argues that ‘nella coscienza collettiva della comunità materana ... la realtà ambientale dei Sassi ha rappresentato per un verso, e soprattutto per i ceti medi e borghesi, la vergogna da cancellare.’ However, his book on the Sassi, *Una vergogna cancellata*, provides no further evidence to back up this assertion. The concept of shame is not analysed at any point. Brief reference is made to a number of press reports which dubbed Matera a *vergogna nazionale* in the 1950s, but these expressions of national sentiment are at no point examined. Instead the reader is left with the implied notion that national shame is a fixed concept which requires no further explanation. Finally, the labelling of the Sassi as a national shame appears to have been axiomatic for Pontrandolfi. The inference is that people lived in caves in the 1950s and this situation defied the norms of Italian society. There is no attempt to understand why Matera was dubbed a national shame at that particular point in time and how the rapidly changing post-war historical context shaped the numerous patriotic expressions that the city generated.

Similar oversights can be found in Anne Toxey’s work on post-war Matera. Ostensibly her research addresses the Sassi as a national shame in more depth. Her analysis, however, overlooks the existing literature on shame, the history of emotions and nationalism. As a result these concepts are under theorized. Again the implication is that shame has a universal and fixed meaning and thus requires no further explanation, rather than being a normative idea which is conditioned and expressed differently across time and

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43 Pontrandolfi, p. 11
44 See Toxey, *Materan Contradictions*, pp. 52-56 and 82-85 in particular.
cultures, as the most recent scholarship on the history of emotions contends.\(^\text{45}\)

Toxey's work on contemporary attitudes towards the Sassi amongst a selection of Matera's residents, however, is noteworthy. She argues that narratives of shame, heightened in the 1950s through increased political and media attention, have shaped the predominately negative attitudes towards the Sassi found amongst former residents and their progeny today. Toxey, however, also contends that the same residents were made to feel ashamed for their troglodyte living conditions in the immediate post-war period through media and political focus on the city. The only evidence offered for this assertion is a series of contemporary interviews that the author carried out. This is problematic for a number of reasons. It assumes that attitudes towards the Sassi in contemporary Matera were the same as those from the 1950s. In addition it takes for granted that the public and private memories of the people interviewed have not changed across time and space in the intervening sixty years. The latter point is particularly surprising as Toxey draws on the vast body of existing literature in the field of memory studies to examine contemporary attitudes towards the Sassi.\(^\text{46}\)

Furthermore, Toxey's work neglects to theorise notions of the Italian nation and Italian nationalism. Instead it is inferred that there was a shared and fixed sense of what these concepts constituted for Italians in the post-war era. She continually uses the term ‘nation’ to mean the ‘Italian population’ or ‘Italian people’ and thus neglects to examine the contested nature of patriotic narratives. Recognizing these points is fundamental to any examination of

\(^{45}\) For an outline of the theory of emotional communities see Rosenwein, pp. 821-845.

\(^{46}\) Toxey, *Materan Contradictions*, pp. 60-64
national shame. The various texts produced on Matera in this context should provide an insight into how a certain number of journalists and politicians imagined the Italian nation in the 1950s and why the Sassi were presented as an affront to this idea. This point has been completely overlooked in the existing research. Finally, Toxey claims that the Italian media ‘defiled Matera with shame’ in the post-war period following the publication of *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* and the subsequent interest that the book created in the Sassi. However, her work only makes fleeting references to the key sources that she argues shaped and disseminated discourses of shame associated with Matera in the post-war period: newspapers. As a result it is not clear exactly how notions of Matera as a national shame were created and how the rapidly changing historical and political contexts of post-war Italy informed these discourses. The contested nature of different expressions of national shame is overlooked. Instead the implication is that there was a unified discourse of national shame rather than a fractured and politically contested concept. In addition, Toxey’s claim that a narrative created primarily in the Italian press permeated through the entire Italian ‘nation’ needs to be backed up with a rudimentary examination of newspaper circulation and readership levels at the very least, neither of which are supplied. This chapter, therefore, aims to be a corrective. It will draw on the most recent scholarship in the history of emotions and nationalism to examine the concept of national shame in the context of post-war

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47 Ibid., p. 84
48 At various points throughout her book Toxey uses the term ‘nation’ when she appears to mean ‘the Italian people’. Again the use of such a contentious term in this way suggests that the large body of existing scholarship on nationalism has been overlooked, in particular Benedict Anderson’s influential book *Imagined Communities*. 

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Matera. Furthermore, it will draw on the vast amount of newspaper and archival material which has been hitherto neglected in the existing scholarship.

**Theoretical framework**

For psychologists and social theorists, shame is part of a group of emotions that are social, self-reflexive, self-conscious and have a strong moral element. These include guilt, humiliation, disgrace, and embarrassment.\(^{49}\) Guilt, however, lacks the social component that shame, humiliation, disgrace and embarrassment require.\(^{50}\) These emotions need the gaze of others, be they real or imagined, in order to be triggered. Shame involves the perception of having lost face in front of others and being affected by this occurrence. While guilt focuses primarily on specific misdeeds, shame in contrast contains a negative sense of the self.\(^{51}\) The individual that feels shame experiences painful feelings of inadequacy. Shame occurs at a moment of social consciousness, when an individual perceives the gaze of others. Hence, as Michael L. Morgan argues, rather than the actual opinion of others, shame can be the result of an individual’s estimate of themselves, a projection of how others might see them and how they see themselves.\(^{52}\) It is implicit, therefore, that shame requires an individual to have notions of how they should act, the type of person they ought to be, and that others expect them to be. Their actions can then be judged to have gone against

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\(^{51}\) See Barrett, pp. 25-63.

\(^{52}\) Morgan, p. 15
these perceived values or not, and in the former case may trigger feelings of shame. Psychologists and moral philosophers further subdivide shame into two categories: acknowledged and unacknowledged. The latter, it is claimed, can have severe negative effects at an individual level, while at a collective level it can be used as a tool of social and political control. Shame, however, can also have positive effects according to Michael L. Morgan. It can act as an instrument which shames people into action. As a result, Morgan contends, shame can be used as an important tool of political motivation.

Expressions of national shame occur when the ‘nation’ is judged to have violated its putative values and ideals. Shame in these instances involves the desire to be seen to fulfil a national ideal. The desire for national pride, therefore, is crucial to expressions of national shame. National shame instead exposes the nation’s apparent failure to live up to its perceived values. In order to be triggered, someone needs to catch the nation out, to witness its failed attempt to uphold specific values. As with personal shame, this witness can be real or imagined. The implication is that the eyes of the ‘civilized world’ are on ‘us’, i.e. national citizens. Expressions of patriotic shame are one of the ways through which ideas of the nation are created. Sara Ahmed’s work is exemplary in developing this hypothesis. She argues that expressions of national shame ‘make’ the nation. Ahmed contends that ‘naming emotions often involves differentiating between the subject and the object of feeling.’ For example, claiming that an action or an object is ‘a stain upon the nation’ implies that the

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53 Lewis, p. 742
55 This is Morgan’s central thesis, however, arguably some of the author’s conclusions display a normative model of what Western moral values should constitute.
56 The concept of the ‘nation’ is defined in detail below. See pp. 107-111.
57 Ahmed, p. 13
nation can be wronged. It therefore becomes a subject which can seemingly feel emotion. At the same time expressions of patriotic shame generate the nation as the object of ‘our’ feelings. ‘We’ apparently experience shame on behalf of the nation. Furthermore, Ahmed notes ‘the feeling does not simply exist before the utterance, but becomes “real” as an effect, shaping different kinds of actions and orientations.’\textsuperscript{58} Claiming that something is a ‘stain upon the nation’, therefore, generates the nation as if it were an entity which can feel emotion.\textsuperscript{59}

Ahmed contends that national shame acts as a narrative of reproduction for heteronormative values, i.e. norms based on the belief that heterosexuality is both the normal and preferred sexual orientation. She argues that there are at least two specific ways in which expressions of shame contribute to the construction of the nation in this context. The first instance involves shame produced by what she terms ‘illegitimate others’ such as homosexuals or immigrants who are judged to have failed to live up to and reproduce notions of the national ideal. The second case, in contrast, is when the nation shames itself in its treatment of others. It may be exposed as failing to live up to the values that it purports to hold dear.\textsuperscript{60} The latter example is relevant in the context of post-war Matera. Shame was expressed for the Italian state’s failure to rehouse the estimated 15,000 people living in cave homes in the early 1950s. This reflected fears over the link between morality and housing conditions as will be examined in detail below.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., p. 13
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., p. 13
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., p. 108
Moreover, Ahmed identifies an apparent lack of remorse as a potential source of national shame. She uses the example of the Australian government’s refusal to acknowledge that the country’s indigenous population had been mistreated and the subsequent popular reaction. Witnessing the government’s lack of shame can be in itself shaming: ‘the shame of the absence of shame’ as Ahmed terms it. The demand is for the nation to appear ashamed. The charge is of being shamed by the shameless. Shame expressed over a lack of shame in others is linked to notions of national pride. The implication of this narrative is that if shameful actions in the past are acknowledged then pride can be restored.

Furthermore, Ahmed argues that expressions of national shame can foster a sense of national identity. Recognising the nation’s failure to live up to its perceived ideals is a means through which individuals identify with the nation. A citizen may be ashamed for their country’s failure to meet the standard of its perceived national ideals. The shame expressed underlines the individual’s apparent love for their nation. If notions of the nation are considered to be normative rather than descriptive, as ‘ought to’ concepts, then expressions of shame can be seen as an important means through which nations are imagined. Shame, nonetheless, can produce a sense of belonging through an identity’s failure to live up to an apparent model of national values. Identifying and acknowledging wrongdoing can help to restore national pride which is threatened when shameful acts are perceived and then acknowledged. The ‘we’ who identify and express national shame identify themselves as part of a

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61 Ibid., p. 111
62 Ibid., p. 111
63 Ibid., p. 108
national community with shared values. If ‘you’ are ashamed of certain past action or inaction ‘you’ are a true patriot. Expressions of national shame for past wrongs, therefore, show that ‘we’ are now well-meaning citizens who recognise right from wrong. According to Ahmed acknowledging these failures and their temporary nature allows for a narrative of recovery to begin. The nation, therefore, can return towards embodying the putative values that define its identity in the present.6 The appropriation of the national ‘we’, however, is arguably an important means through which political groups can look to define themselves as ‘good’ patriots and denounce their opponents as ‘bad’ nationalists. These ideologically charged ideas of national identity, therefore, can play an important role in the shaping of political identities.

In her work on shame and the Risorgimento, Silvana Patriarca argues that, given its social and political nature, the study of national shame should be of particular interest to historians. However, she adds that they need to be wary of the ahistorical theories of moral philosophers and psychologists. Instead historians should draw on the burgeoning field of the history of emotions when examining shame – or any other emotion.65 But how should historians study emotional expressions in the past? The primary question raised is whether emotions are innate or cultural.66 There is much disagreement over this point, but Susan J. Matt has noted the essential idea which grounds the growing, yet theoretically problematic, field of the history of emotions:

64 Ibid., pp. 108-110
Historians of the emotions share the conviction that feelings are never strictly biological or chemical occurrences; neither are they wholly created by language and society. Instead feelings are something in between. They have a neurological basis but are shaped, repressed, expressed differently from place to place and era to era.\textsuperscript{67}

The exact object of study when examining emotions in a historical context, however, remains a contentious issue. This thesis argues that it is impossible to tell exactly what people felt in the past. But that does not mean emotional expressions cannot be the object of historical analysis. Emotional activity involves imagining the expectations and reactions of others. This process involves the creation of emotional scenarios which may be genuinely felt but can also be manipulated for a specific purpose. One means for examining these emotional scripts is to try and understand the cultural frameworks which shaped them and the implied moral world and audience for which they were created.

Barbara Rosenwein’s concept of ‘emotional communities’ provides a theoretical framework for analysing narratives of national shame in this context. Rosenwein defines the concept thus:

People lived – and live – in what I propose to call ‘emotional communities.’ These are precisely the same social communities – families, neighborhoods [sic], parliaments, guilds, monasteries, parish church memberships – but the researcher looking at them seeks above all to uncover systems of feeling: what these communities (and the individuals within them) define and assess as valuable or harmful to them; the evaluations that they make about others’ emotions; the nature of the affective bonds between people that they recognize; and the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate, and deplore.\textsuperscript{68}

\textsuperscript{68} Rosenwein, p. 842
Furthermore, Rosenwein argues that people are not fixed in one emotional community, rather they move between different groups depending on the social context. Their emotional expression and judgements are tailored to these diverse circumstances. Thus it can be argued that ‘not only does each society call forth, shape, constrain, and express emotions differently, but even within the same society contradictory values and models, not to mention deviant individuals find their place.’

In order to identify and study emotional communities, historians need to examine the primary documents of the social groups of interest in an attempt to ascertain the language used to express emotion. The context in which emotions were expressed is fundamental to examining an emotional community. As Rosenwein argues: ‘[Emotional expressions] depend on the values and situations that elicit them, on the narratives that people use to make sense of themselves and their world, and on the accepted or idiosyncratic modes of expression that are employed to communicate them.’

The historical context, in which emotional scripts were created, therefore, needs to be established in order to better understand how and why people expressed their emotions in a particular way at a specific moment in time.

Clearly it is impossible to study the emotional expressions of an entire ‘nation’, society, social group, or even emotional community. Historians can only rely on the sources available and examine representative examples. This point, however, should not diminish the importance of studying emotion scenarios historically. Rosenwein notes that ‘we cannot know how all people felt, but we

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69 Ibid. p. 843
can begin to know how some members of ascendant elites thought they and others felt, or at least thought they should feel.\(^71\) In the context of Matera and discourses of national shame this group is almost exclusively limited to a number of journalists and politicians. Broad generalizations about the feelings of all Italians need to be avoided.\(^72\) Instead examining the patriotic narratives that a number of politicians and journalists conveyed in the context of post-war Matera - as well as how they thought others should express national shame - can provide an insight into their ideas of Italian national identity and the norms of the emotional community they aimed to address. It is difficult to gauge the reception and impact that these expressions of national shame had at political, intellectual and popular levels. However the journalists and politicians that generated patriotic narratives in the context of post-war Matera had access to regional and national audiences and their public voices were potentially far-reaching.

Any study of national shame needs to engage with the large body of existing scholarship on nationalism. As noted above, a lacuna exists in the research carried out on post-war Matera in this regard. This chapter will attempt to fill that gap drawing on existing studies of the nation. John Dickie’s work on Italian nationalism is exemplary and provides a theoretical framework for examining nationalist discourse. Dickie defines the nation as ‘a social fiction, indeed a plurality of competing social fictions that are generated within modern societies as an integral moment of the struggle for power and consensus.’\(^73\) Viewing the nation as a discursive construct, Dickie argues, enables historians

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\(^71\) Ibid., p. 258
\(^72\) See for example Toxey, *Materan Contradictions*, p. 85.
\(^73\) Dickie, ‘Timing, Memory and Disaster’, p. 152
to investigate the ideas with which people imagine national identity at specific moments in time, their relationship with the historical context in which they were produced, and their subsequent impact on historical processes.\textsuperscript{74}

However, he contends that national identity needs to be studied on a micro-rather than a macro-historical level to avoid broad generalizations.\textsuperscript{75} Post-war Matera, therefore, provides an ideal laboratory for examining competing nationalist narratives at a local level in the rapidly changing political context of post-war Italy.

Dickie’s work on nationalism builds upon Benedict Anderson’s highly-influential thesis in \textit{Imagined Communities}. Anderson famously defined the nation as ‘an imagined political community … imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.’\textsuperscript{76} Nations, according to Anderson, are groups of people who will never get to know each other personally, but imagine themselves as a cohesive community moving forward through time simultaneously. Dickie, however, argues that Anderson’s work overlooks the numerous ways in which the nation can be imagined. Rather than the notion of a single harmonious imagined community that Anderson envisages, there are, in fact, a myriad of competing and contradictory narratives of what constitutes national identity. As Dickie contends: ‘Benedict Anderson’s famous slogan is right but does not go far enough: nations are ‘imagined communities’, but the process of imagining them

\textsuperscript{75} Dickie, ‘Timing, Memory and Disaster’, pp. 163-164
is a far more diverse and conflictual process than Anderson himself assumes.’

This contention is applicable to post-war expressions of Matera as a national shame. They reveal a loosely shared narrative that the Sassi constituted a national shame but conflicting ideas of the imagined Italian nation against which Matera's cave dwellings were compared, and to whom blame needed to be attributed.

Furthermore, Dickie notes a number of assumptions about nationalism that historians tackling this field need to keep in mind which have been overlooked in the existing literature on post-war Matera. First, it is implicit in theorizations of the nation that everyone knows and agrees on what exactly constitutes the nation. Second, it is assumed that the nation is a tangible entity, a thing, be it a specific culture or ‘race’. One of the primary ways in which patriotic narratives are established and maintained is through delineating the nation’s borders and the Others found beyond the pale. ‘We’ can be set against foreigners and internal enemies in the process of constructing the nation’s timeless characteristics. As Dickie notes: ‘the nation defines itself against impurities and weaknesses, traces of the foreign, which can be projected onto phenomena both inside and outside of the real boundaries of the state.’

Images of the South have provided an internal Other against which notions of the Italian nation have been imagined from unification onwards. The bulk of research carried out on stereotypical images of the Mezzogiorno and patriotic discourse focuses on the Liberal period. The post-war period has been relatively neglected in contrast. Matera provides an opportunity to examine the interface

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77 Dickie, ‘Timing, Memory and Disaster’, p. 152
78 Dickie, Darkest Italy, p. 19
between patriotic narratives and notions of the South after 1945. The Sassi became an important symbol of southern Italian otherness in the immediate post-war period. The city’s cave dwellings came to symbolize different concepts for different groups including an affront to the ideals of the Italian nation, Italy’s post-war housing crisis, the failure of the Italian state to modernize the Mezzogiorno, a remnant of a bygone age, and above all a national shame.

Drawing together the different theoretical threads outlined above, this chapter contends that the ‘nation’ is a myriad of competing and conflicting imagined communities. Expressions of national shame, furthermore, illustrate this point. They involve imagining a set of ideals to which the nation has failed to live up. The patriotic ‘we’ implied in expressions of national shame is an imagined community. It follows, therefore, that expressions of national shame involve competing narratives. The articles and official documents examined below in the context of post-war Matera reveal that many different and conflicting patriotic voices were generated. Similar to patriotic narratives, emotional scripts also need to be thought of in the plural. Expressions of shame change across time and space. This chapter argues that people live and lived in emotional communities which shape the accepted norms of emotional expression in a given social, cultural and historical context. The different emotional communities that influenced references to the Sassi as a national shame will be identified, contextualized and examined in detail in an attempt to understand their motivations and workings.
2.3 An anatomy of national shame

The first time that the term ‘national shame’ was mentioned in the context of Matera appears to have been in Vincenzo Corazza’s 1941 report on the Sassi. This account of housing conditions in Matera’s cave dwellings quotes Arcangelo Ilvento, the vice-director of the department of public health under Fascism, who had dubbed the Sassi a ‘vergogna nazionale’. This source, however, was not widely disseminated and does not appear to be the foundation for post-war patriotic narratives. Instead post-war references to Matera as a national shame in public debate seem to have first emerged in 1948. During a pre-election speech given in the city on 1 April 1948, Palmiro Togliatti branded the living conditions that he witnessed at Matera a disgrace. Similar sentiments were expressed in a number of newspapers and official documents from 1948 onwards. The exact term vergogna nazionale does not appear to have been used in the Italian press until 1951. Notions of Matera as a national shame, however, intensified following the Italian Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi’s visit to the city in June 1950 and the subsequent announcement that the Italian government would implement special legislation for the Sassi. The narratives of

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79 ASM, Prefettura, Atti Amministrativi di Gabinetto (Ricovero 1990), busta 82, fascicolo 661, sottofascicolo A
80 Palmiro Togliatti gave a pre-election speech at Matera on 1 April 1948. The head of the Communist party was the first political leader to visit the provincial capital in the post-war period. The Sassi, Togliatti argued, provided evidence that the Italian ruling class and successive governments had continually neglected the South. Matera’s cave homes, however, did not merely constitute a housing problem according to the PCI leader. They were also a national shame: ‘Non è possibile lasciare che il Paese sia governato da quei gruppi sociali, da quei partiti, da quegli uomini i quali in decenni e secoli, dacché governano l’Italia, non sono stati capaci di far scomparire queste vergogne [the Sassi], queste miserie dei lavoratori, non sono stati capaci di dare a queste regioni la civiltà di cui esse hanno bisogno che è un diritto per tutti gli uomini.’ Using the Sassi as a symbol of the entire South, Togliatti implied that southern Italy was backward compared to other parts of Italy. The Italian Communist Party’s post-war ideas of capitalist versus Bolshevik progress, as outlined below, arguably informed the notions of affluence and backwardness that Togliatti looked to communicate. For the above quotation see I comunisti e i Sassi di Matera, Festa dell’Unità, Matera, 1977, pp. 11-13.
national shame generated in the context of post-war Matera reached their apex in the period 1950-1952. This period was marked by increased political and media calls for state intervention to resolve the city’s housing problems. On 6 March 1951 Michele Bianco, the PCI deputy for Potenza, presented a draft special law for Matera before parliament. The DC government quickly countered with its own provisional bill later the same year and a parliamentary committee was established to discuss the proposed special legislation for Matera. The first special law for the Sassi was passed on 17 May 1952. Political and media references to Matera as a national shame largely disappeared in an Italian context following the implementation of this legislation. The DC claimed to have finally tackled Matera's housing problems and once again the PCI saw its main political rival usurp another post-war initiative that the Communist Party had originally proposed.

Examining expressions of national shame in the context of the Sassi should shed light on the moral worlds and motivations of those individuals who called for government intervention at Matera. Descriptions of the Sassi as a national shame provide an opportunity to carry out a micro-study into notions of the Italian nation amongst a number of post-war politicians and journalists. The focus of this section, therefore, is to examine the different expressions of national shame generated during the scope of this study. Moreover, it will aim to identify and contextualize the emotional communities which shaped these patriotic narratives. A number of questions will be addressed: what do expressions of national shame tell us about notions of Italian national identity in the immediate post-war period? Furthermore, why was Matera seen as a national shame at that point in time; and what impact did discourses of national
shame have on the decision to implement a state intervention programme at Matera?

**The foreigner's gaze**

The critical gaze of foreign nationals is a recurring narrative found in post-war accounts of Matera. As noted above, shame requires the gaze of an ‘other’, be they real or imagined, in order to be triggered. It involves losing face in front of someone else. Shame, therefore, can be the based on an individual’s projection of an external judgement and ultimately reveal their own self-perceptions.

National shame also requires the presence of a witness who observes the nation’s apparent failure to live up to a set of putative ideals. This can be caused through envisaging the opinion of what Sara Ahmed has dubbed ‘international civil society’ as much as a reaction to concrete external criticismand. Examining a selection of patriotic narratives produced in the context of post-war Matera and notions of the foreigner’s gaze will allow for these competing expressions of the nation to be studied in detail.

A recurring narrative found in Italian sources on post-war Matera is that the Sassi became world famous due to frequent visits from foreign journalists and intellectuals who later wrote about the city’s cave homes in the international press. These descriptions, it was claimed, displayed a morbid fascination with the Sassi and their picturesque quality while concurrently denouncing the living conditions as a stain upon Italy’s already damaged international reputation. In a letter addressed to both the Italian Prime Minister

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81 Silvana Patriarca’s work on national shame and the Risorgimento was the main source of inspiration for this section. See Patriarca, ‘A Patriotic Emotion’, pp. 134-151.

82 Ahmed, p. 111
and the Minister for the Interior, the Prefect of Matera, B.D. Iodice, conveyed the perceived level of national and international interest in the Sassi in the early 1950s:

La stampa di ogni corrente, politica e non politica, la cinematografica, la letteratura stessa, dall’argomento dei Sassi Materani ha tratto e trae continui spunti, non sempre felici né utili al paese, che vengono svolti per agitare il problema dal punto di vista sociale, economico, politico e storico, ed ormai è stata richiamata tutta l’attenzione non solo della Provincia o della Regione, ma anche della Nazione e del mondo, sul problema annoso, numerosi sono pure i turisti e forestieri, che s’interessano ormai allo storico problema della città materana, che ne ha il triste privilegio.\(^{83}\)

Iodice’s letter conveyed the belief that the eyes of the world were on Matera in the immediate post-war period and that the Sassi were a focal point for national and international journalists and writers interested in Italy’s southern question. The letter also implies that the media attention on Matera had been detrimental to Italy’s international reputation.

Similar sentiments were expressed in a number of Italian press articles in the late 1940s and early 1950s.\(^{84}\) Writing in 1949 for *Il Giornale d’Italia* about the apparent widespread interest in Matera, for example, Marco Aontenelli claimed that ‘con quel che si è scritto intorno a questo miserabile alveare umano [the Sassi] ... si potrebbe formare una biblioteca.’\(^{85}\) There was, to be sure, unprecedented international press interest in the Sassi during the late

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\(^{83}\) ACS, PCM 48-50, Risanamento Rioni Sassi, I.6.I, no. 77794


\(^{85}\) Marco Aontenelli, ‘Drammatiche cifre del Mezzogiorno. Duemila case per alloggiare gli inquilini delle caverne’, *Il Giornale d’Italia*, 27 October 1949, p. 2. *Il Giornale d’Italia* was a national daily newspaper founded in 1901 by the liberal monarchists Sidney Sonnino and Antonio Salandro. In the post-war period the paper was edited by Giovanni Santi Savarino and although not directly linked to the DC, it supported the party’s moderate policies. See Paolo Murialdi, *La stampa italiana della liberazione alla crisi di fine secolo*, Laterza, Bari, 1995, pp. 54-55.
1940s and 1950s. Foreign curiosity about Matera appears to have been the direct result of Cristo si è fermato a Eboli’s success in English translation. Archival research for this thesis uncovered numerous examples of Anglophone newspaper articles on Matera and the Sassi from 1949 onwards. The majority of these press reports were produced in the context of promoting Marshall Plan funding in Italy, De Gasperi’s visits to Matera in 1950 and 1953 respectively, and the special law for the Sassi passed on 17 May 1952. Similar to Italian press sources, Matera was presented in the English-language media as a symbol of Italy’s southern question. The tone of these articles, however, was generally positive and hopeful. The narrative presented was that the Sassi were an age-old problem which the Italian state, thanks to American investment, had finally taken measures to resolve. International press coverage, together with an English-language documentary film on the Sassi that the Marshall Plan’s propaganda office produced in 1951, appear to have further increased Matera’s international notoriety. Writing in the New York Times in 1954 Herbert L. Matthews contended that ‘Matera has world-wide fame because of its cave houses.’ While it is impossible to ascertain the veracity of Matthews’s statement, it suggests that the Sassi were at least well-known in international media circles.

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87 Romolo Marcellini, Life and Death of a Cave City (Italy, 1951). For further production information see http://www.sellingdemocracy.org/filmlist.html (accessed 22/07/2013) and Bonifazio, Narrating Modernization.
Italian claims that the international media branded Matera a national shame, however, do not reflect Anglophone press coverage of the Sassi in the early 1950s. A large number of English-language articles which cover post-war Matera were located for this research project. These texts describe the Sassi’s living conditions as backward and inadequate to varying degrees, e.g. an article in The Times of London from 1953 refers to the Sassi as ‘a colony which has for long been a blot on the life of the country.’89 The only clear-cut reference in the English-speaking press to Matera as a national shame, however, was found in an article dating from 1955.90 The piece was written to highlight the fact that numerous families were still living in cave homes a number of years after the DC government had implemented special legislation for Matera. In contrast, Italian claims that the foreign press had branded the Sassi a national shame date from the early 1950s. The Italian response, therefore, appears to have been based on internal perceptions and projections of the foreigner’s gaze rather than on actual claims that the Sassi constituted a national shame made in the foreign press.91

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89 From our own correspondent, ‘New villages for cave dwellers. Signor De Gasperi in South Italy, The Times, 18 May 1953, p. 6
91 Although Matera was briefly the focus of international media attention in the 1950s, the existing secondary sources appear to have overestimated the extent to which photographic images of the Sassi were published in the English-speaking press. Marida Talamona notes that the French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson visited Matera in the early 1950s to photograph the Sassi. She claims that these photos were later published in LIFE magazine. A selection of these images was published in the report that the UNRRA-CASAS special commission for the Sassi produced in 1956. See Riccardo Musatti, Federico G. Friedmann and Giuseppe Isnardi, Commissione per lo studio della città e dell’agro di Matera: Saggi introduttivi, vol. I, UNRRA CASAS, Prima Giunta, Rome, 1956. However, no trace of these photos has been found in the archive of LIFE magazine which is now available online. Similarly Paolo Scrivano has claimed that images of the Sassi were published worldwide
The idea that the foreign press dubbed the Sassi a national shame, however, has been repeated in the secondary literature on post-war Matera. For example Anne Toxey has recently argued that following *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*’s success in the English-speaking world Matera ‘came to be labeled [sic] “vergogna nazionale” ... which the anglophone [sic] press reproduced as “the shame of Italy.”’\(^9\) No specific examples or further references are provided to back up this assertion. The salient point about international press coverage of the Sassi, judging from the sources located, is that it intensified following the implementation of the special law for the Sassi on 17 May 1952. Emphasis was placed on the role that foreign aid had played in tackling Matera’s housing crisis. Nonetheless, the perceived foreigner’s gaze is implicit in all of the post-war articles published in the Italian press which refer to Matera’s cave homes as a national shame. The increased international interest in the Sassi appears to have enabled a number of journalists and politicians to create powerful and convincing emotional scenarios and use the concept of national shame for political ends. Examining a number of representative examples in which the implied gaze of the foreigner is addressed explicitly will help to reveal the workings of and motivations behind these patriotic narratives.

The Communist weekly magazine *Vie Nuove* published a two-page spread on the Sassi in 1948 complete with a series of five photos depicting the thus increasing the city’s international fame. He references a series of fifty-eight photos of the Sassi taken by the American photographer Marjory Collins in 1950, some of which were later published in Adriano Olivetti’s periodical *Comunità* but do not appear to have been published elsewhere. No further references are offered to back up Scrivano’s assertion. See Marida Talamona, ‘Dieci anni di politica dell’UNRRA Casas: dalle case ai senzatetto ai borghi rurali nel Mezzogiorno d’Italia (1945-1955), il ruolo di Adriano Olivetti’, in Carlo Olmo (ed.), *Costruire la città dell’uomo*, Einaudi, Turin, 2001, pp. 173-204; and Paolo Scrivano, ‘Signs of Americanization in Italian Domestic Life: Italy’s Postwar Conversion to Consumerism’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 40 (2005), no. 2, pp. 317-340.

\(^9\) Toxey, ‘Reinventing the Cave’, p. 66. See also Toxey, *Materan Contradictions*, p. 52.
homes and lives of Matera's rural poor. In this piece, the poet and writer Alfonso Gatto commented on the perceived behaviour of Italian and overseas visitors to Matera. Gatto was highly critical of what he viewed as the voyeuristic gaze of outsiders who, the article claimed, romanticized the lives of the Sassi’s estimated 15,000 inhabitants: ‘s’accumulano stupore e meraviglia sui Sassi di Matera come se fossero incastonati nella corona di un re barbaro e magnifico che caca seduto sul trono ed è ricco della sua splendida sporcizia.’

Gatto argued that visitors to Matera had little understanding of the hardship that the city's agricultural workers endured. Instead they had an idealised view of the Sassi and their focus on Matera's rustic beauty merely prolonged a solution to the city's acute housing problems. Gatto claimed that ‘i viaggiatori e i curiosi guardono meravigliati i monumenti di questa miseria e dicono "bello". Matera resta per loro una città pittoresca e “folkloristica” da scoprire e da far conoscere perché rimanga gravata dalla nostra pietà.’

Matera’s problems were further exacerbated, Gatto claimed, by the attitude of local officials who were reluctant to support a rehousing programme as they feared the city would lose its scenic quality.

Blame for the living conditions at Matera was attributed to the Christian Democrat government in particular and Italian society in general: ‘chi permette queste tane e queste grotte si chiamino case d’uomini – governo o società che sia – è colpevole e offre agli sguardi caritatevoli e avidi dei curiosi lo stesso

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93 Alfonso Gatto, ‘Monumenti della miseria’, *Vie Nuove*, 19 December 1948, page number not available
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
spettacolo che si vuol proibire.’ 96 Gatto’s article implies, therefore, that Italian society and the Italian government were shameless. They had failed to acknowledge the gravity of Matera’s housing problems. Instead Italy welcomed patronizing outsiders to marvel at the Sassi’s apparent rustic charm. Matera’s problems would not be resolved, Gatto argued, ‘finchè non avremo vergogna di noi stessi.’ 97 The author, therefore, created an emotional scenario in which he accused Italians, and the Italian government, of lacking shame. The apparent morbid fascination of foreign visitors was used to add further weight to this politically charged narrative. The implication of Gatto’s article is that ‘we’, the good patriots, are ashamed of Matera, while the DC government, in contrast, is shameless and therefore unpatriotic and that foreigners are just hopeless romanticizers. The article, thus, illustrates how notions of Matera as a national shame were a means through which political identities and ideas of the nation were forged and contested in a Cold War context.

Gatto’s reaction to foreign depictions of Matera needs to be understood in the context of Communist Party notions of affluence and progress that were prevalent in post-war Italy. The PCI believed that industrial development and prosperity were both positive and necessary as long as they were the products of communism and not the capitalist system. This viewpoint was partly a reaction to the widespread belief in Italy that the fruits of the ‘American Dream’ could be enjoyed in post-war Europe. Consumer goods, running water, and individual homes quickly became concrete aspirations for many Italians. In this context the communist press in Italy depicted the USSR as a terrestrial paradise

96 Ibid.
97 Ibid.
where the consumer goods limited to the wealthy in capitalist society were available to all citizens.98

Capitalist affluence, in contrast, was viewed as inauthentic because it did not improve working people’s lives. Poverty and inequality were seen as evidence of capitalism’s dysfunction. Anything judged to be nostalgic, old-fashioned or picturesque was rejected as decadent, reactionary and a potential barrier to communist progress.99 This viewpoint was exemplified in the rejection of intellectual interest in Italian folk culture - for example in PCI critiques of the work of Carlo Levi and Ernesto de Martino.100 As regards post-war Matera, the accusation that outsiders were more interested in the Sassi’s picturesque qualities than the city’s rural poor is a recurring narrative found in PCI treatment of the city and its cave homes.101 Furthermore the Communist Party called for the destruction of the Sassi to make way for new popular housing.102 The PCI’s notion of affluence and rejection of anything seen as nostalgic helps to contextualize these viewpoints as well as the emotional scenario that Gatto presented to the reader in his article.

Furthermore, in the context of PCI notions of progress, the Sassi were viewed as a prime example of the failure of capitalism. This point is exemplified

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99 Bellassai, p. 168

100 See Chapter 1, pp. 72-73.

101 See for example Nicola Nicoletti, ‘Una significativa voce dalle grotte dell’inferno. I cittadini del Sasso hanno chiesto ad Einaudi di far impiegare in opere di pace i miliardi per il riarmo’, *L’Unità*, 3 January 1951, p. 2. Nicoletti claimed that ‘i forestieri vengono a visitare il nostro Sasso, quelli democratici per rendersi conto della nostra miseria e per darsi consigli sul modo come organizzarci per risolvere i nostri problemi, e quelli reazionari per godersi il così detto “panorama” e per esclamare poi “in fondo non si sta proprio tanto male ad abitare qui”.

102 See for example Michele Bianco’s intervention in *Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei Deputati*, 26 September 1951, p. 30585.
in an article published in the communist daily *L’Unità* on 3 January 1951. The author Nicola Nicoletti described the Sassi as ‘uno sconcio ed un disonore per l’Italia.’ He also accused Alcide De Gasperi of being the latest in a long line of Italian public servants that had governed Italy in the interests of capitalism. The Sassi, Nicoletti claimed, were a monument to the degeneracy of capitalist society: ‘Quando avremo risolto questo problema il Sasso non si chiamerà più Inferno, ma gli metteremo il nome, e lo faremo diventare “Museo delle Meraviglie della società capitalista”.’ Gatto and Nicoletti’s expressions of national shame in the context of the Sassi were linked to the perceived dangers of capitalist society and a rejection of the decadent. The implication in both articles, therefore, was that to be a good Italian patriot was to be a communist.

A very different account of foreign interest in the Sassi can be found in Delio Mariotti’s article ‘La città delle grotte’. It was published in *La Stampa* on 25 July 1950 to document Alcide De Gasperi’s first visit to the city two days previously. The report opened with the description of an impromptu and unauthorised expedition that a number of British Labour politicians had made to Matera during an official stay in Rome. ‘Una curiosità morbosa’, Mariotti claimed, ‘spingeva i deputati laburisti verso questi luoghi che da anni la letteratura internazionale si ostina a presentare come una macchia nella tavolozza del paesaggio italiano.’ Although the journalist argued elsewhere in the article that the Sassi were a national disgrace, he expressed anger at the perceived criticism from foreign sources and mounted a patriotic defence of the fledgling Italian republic. First Mariotti claimed that the Labour deputies had

103 Nicoletti, p. 2
104 Ibid., p. 2
travelled to Matera surreptitiously without informing the Italian government. This behaviour, he contended, was unacceptable. ‘Gli ospiti’, Mariotti argued, ‘devono osservare certe elementari regole di correttezza e non è affatto apprezzabile che un invitato vada per prima cosa a vedere semi-interrati di un palazzo allo scopo di muovere critiche al padrone di casa.’ The implication is that the Labour MPs, and the foreign media too, had broken protocol and purposely travelled to the worst part of the country in order to criticize Italy and the Italian people.

Furthermore, Mariotti questioned the foreign press’s motivation in publishing articles and photos depicting the Sassi. The inference from the text is that Italians had already understood that Matera’s cave homes constituted a national shame and thus did not need foreign visitors to remind them of this fact. In addition Mariotti put forward the idea that the international press had failed to understand the nuanced historical, social and economic factors which had resulted in the construction and continued inhabitation of Matera’s cave homes. For this reason, the journalist argued, it was unfair ‘attribuire alla giovane Repubblica italiana l’onta dei “Sassi”, se consideriamo che il governo De Gasperi ha affrontato la grossa questione del Mezzogiorno proprio nel momento più critico della storia italiana, all’indomani di una disfatta che ha lasciato rovine e debiti.’ Instead the national shame associated with the Sassi, according to Mariotti, should have been blamed on previous governments and the Fascist regime in particular, which had tried to cover up Matera’s housing

106 Ibid., p. 5
107 Ibid., p. 5
problems through press censorship.\textsuperscript{108} The article implies that the foreign press had focused on the Sassi due to a sense of morbid curiosity. This had subsequently resulted in unjustified criticism of Italy and its people on the international stage. Mariotti’s article, however, offered no concrete reference to specific foreign press articles about Matera or the opinions of the British Labour MPs following their impromptu visit to the Sassi. Rather it appears to have been a projection of how ‘international civil society’ viewed Italy and Italians in the context of post-war Matera.\textsuperscript{109} The implication is that the Labour MPs had been emotionally insensitive towards an Italian national shame. They had failed to understand the gravity of the situation and thus got their emotions wrong. The apparent insensitivity that the Labour MPs displayed during their visit to Matera, therefore, augmented the ‘ought to’ force of the emotional scenario that Mariotti presented for the article’s implied Italian audience.

It should be noted, moreover, that Mariotti wrote his article in the context of De Gasperi’s first visit to Matera in May 1950. This event was used to promote the DC’s twin programme for southern Italy: land reform and the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno. Furthermore, De Gasperi announced that the Christian Democrats would finally tackle the problem of the Sassi. In the context of ideas of national shame, Mariotti’s article implies that government intervention at

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., p. 5

\textsuperscript{109} The foreign media’s interest in the Sassi was also directly referenced in Nanno Sampietro’s 1952 article published in the Turin-based newspaper \textit{Il Popolo Nuovo}. The report, entitled ‘I sedicimila dei “Sassi” avranno una casa al sole’, was written to promote the construction of La Martella, an UNRRA-CASAS sponsored village designed to rehouse two-hundred families from the Sassi. Sampietro claimed that ‘i giornalisti americani e svedesi che vengono in Italia, a Roma, immancabilmente scendono a Matera, e a Matera si buttano nei Sassi.’ The article argued that foreign visitors to the Sassi were both enthralled and appalled in equal measure. They found the lives of Matera’s cave dwellers as spellbinding, but at the same time branded the Sassi ‘una vergogna dei nostri tempi, una macchia.’ See Nando Sampietro, ‘Lettere dal Sud. I sedicimila dei “Sassi” avranno una casa al sole’, \textit{Il Popolo Nuovo}, 13 April 1952, p. 3.
Matera would save face internationally and thus restore a sense of national pride.\textsuperscript{110} Emilio Colombo, the DC deputy for Potenza, made a similar point during his speech at Matera following De Gasperi’s first visit to the Sassi. He argued that: ‘in questo periodo così difficile [De Gasperi] ha saputo dimostrare all’Italia e al mondo che vi erano nel nostro popolo disperato ancora tante energie nascoste da poter compiere una opera di ricostruzione che ha meravigliato il mondo.’\textsuperscript{111} Colombo’s speech made it clear that, in his opinion, Italy was a disgraced nation both internationally and at home following twenty years of Fascist rule and the country’s disastrous involvement in the Second World War. The reconstruction process had shown the world that, in fact, Italians were capable of great things. Official sources and press articles sympathetic to the DC government presented the problem of the Sassi as the next step in rebuilding a new Italy and thus restoring a sense of national pride. Mariotti’s article and the emotional scenarios that it looked to communicate to the reader need to be viewed in this context.

Writing about national shame and the Risorgimento, Silvana Patriarca argues that:

\begin{quote}
The foreigner’s gaze had an important role in the very constitution of the patriotic Italians’ self-perceptions and sense of self as a people ... Italian patriots were intimately aware of this external gaze and they somewhat internalized it. Feeling embarrassment and shame at the condition of their country, they saw themselves through the mirror provided by the foreigners’ eyes.\textsuperscript{112}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{110} Mariotti, p. 5  
\textsuperscript{111} Oronzo Valentini, ‘De Gasperi “Esploratore della Lucania” ha riconfermato al Mezzogiorno la solidarietà della nazione’, La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno, 24 July 1950, p. 2  
\textsuperscript{112} Patriarca, ‘A Patriotic Emotion’, p. 139
In the case of post-war Matera, this external gaze appears to have been an Italian projection of what foreign visitors thought about the Sassi rather than a response to the city being dubbed a national shame in the international press. Nonetheless the patriotic narratives examined above reveal the images of the new Republic and of the Italian people that the two journalists in question wished to convey to their readers. These descriptions illustrate that the notions of national shame presented were politically charged, normative concepts that looked to define the values to which the Italian nation should aspire. Both Gatto and Mariotti presented themselves as defenders of Italy’s honour attempting to restore damaged national pride. The emotional scenarios they created, however, were very different. Gatto expressed anger and frustration at the apparent lack of shame towards the Sassi that he perceived amongst Italians and the Christian Democrat government in particular. Mariotti, in contrast, conveyed a sense of wounded national pride. His article can be read as an attempt to reaffirm a sense of belief in the Italian people and the new Republic through the perceived defamation of Italy in the foreign press. The political convictions of each writer and the newspapers that published their articles clearly influenced how they interacted with the perceived foreign opinions of the Sassi and the implied audience for both articles. Moreover, ideological considerations influenced the attribution of blame for the living conditions witnessed at Matera. Both sides of the Cold War political divide implicitly accused each other of failing to express the correct emotions in relation to Matera. The easiest way for each author to illustrate that they were ‘good’ patriots was to show how their political opponents were getting national shame wrong. Despite these differences Gatto and Mariotti conveyed one broadly
shared narrative: the Sassi constituted a national shame for Italians and swift action was needed in order to restore a sense of national pride.

**Housing, morality, and national shame**

Narratives of national shame in the context of the Sassi were also generated through links made between housing conditions and morality in a number of press articles and official documents. Not only were Matera’s cave homes depicted as an abomination to any self-respecting modern country because of their inadequate hygiene levels, it was widely argued that they fostered immorality and social degradation too. The implication was that impoverished families living in a single room would engage in incestuous sexual relations. In addition to the perceived threat of incest there was the fact that people shared their homes with livestock. Disease was thought to be the main threat from people and animals living under the same roof. Post-war descriptions of the Sassi, therefore, echo discourses that were prevalent in the nineteenth century when so-called slum housing was equated with loose morals and social degradation, as outlined in detail below. Examining expressions of national shame and narratives linking housing conditions and social depravity will help

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113 Speaking in an interview carried out in November 1952 the head of Matera’s carabiniere commented that ‘la promiscuità in cui vive la gente ... qui si verificano molti reati portati dalla promiscuità delle famiglie e si è verificato il caso di qualche incesto o vizio omosessuale, questi sono in una certa frequenza, portati appunto dalla miseria che costringe questa gente a vivere nello stesso ambiente.’ See Atti della commissione parlamentare di inchiesta sulla miseria in Italia e sui mezzi per combatterla, *Indagini delle delegazioni parlamentari. La miseria in alcune zone depresse*, vol. VII, Camera dei Deputati, 1953, p. 208.

114 Housing farm animals in the family home, however, was not uncommon for most Italian agricultural families in the first-half of the Twentieth Century and beyond. The death or theft of a mule could render a farming family destitute. Therefore, it was normal for agricultural families to keep their prize possessions inside their homes. See Ginsborg, p. 33. In addition, the UNRRA-CASAS team that carried out a study of the Sassi in the early 1950s believed that cohabitation between people and animals could spread disease, in particular malaria. Although these claims were unfounded, they arguably help to explain references to the perceived danger that farm animals posed to Sassi residents. See Friedrich G. Friedmann, *Miseria e dignità, Il Mezzogiorno nei primi anni Cinquanta*, Edizioni Cultura della Pace, San Domenico di Fiesole, 1996, p. 70.
to shed light on the moral worlds and motivations of a section of Italy's post-war public sphere - or those of the specific commentators in question at the very least. Moreover, contextualising these emotional scenarios should provide a greater understanding of why the Sassi generated such a large amount of patriotic narratives at that specific moment in time.

Writing in the Neapolitan-based and centrist newspaper *Il Mattino* in May 1950, the journalist Gino Spera made reference to the moral and hygienic problems that the Sassi were perceived to embody. He wrote that 1,688 homes in Matera also served as stables. As a result people lived in 'una sconcia promiscuità con le bestie oltre che all'immoralità della vita in comune di uomini e donne, sia pure della stessa famiglia, e non sempre, in un unico vano neanche sufficiente per una sola bestia.' Similar sentiments were expressed a year later in an article from the *Giornale del Mezzogiorno* written to mark the start of Matera's *risanamento* programme. An interior photo of a cave home was accompanied by the caption: 'Impressionante documentazione di una vergogna nazionale che sta per sparire.' The perceived link between housing conditions and morality was used to heighten the sense of national shame that the author looked to convey: 'Ogni mattina la donna fa uscire dai “sassi” l’asino che normalmente vive con gli uomini. Selvaggia promiscuità che offende la dignità civile e morale dell’individuo e crea gravissimi problemi sociali, come la tubercolosi, la mortalità infantile, l’abbrutimento, la degradazione.' The link between housing, health, as well as social and moral wellbeing is explicitly

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117 Ibid., p. 1
made in both texts. The implication is that the Sassi’s housing conditions were an affront to Italian moral values and thus constituted a national shame.

The perceived connection between housing conditions, moral wellbeing and national shame appears to have originated in official circles. Following his visit to Matera in April 1950, Mario Cotellessa (*Alto commissario per l’igiene e la sanità*) wrote a letter to Achille Marazza (*Ministro del Lavoro e della Previdenza Sociale*) and Giulio Andreotti, then undersecretary for state, in which he detailed the housing conditions he had witnessed amongst the Sassi. Cotellessa urged Marazza to explore the possibility of constructing alternative housing at Matera to rehouse the families that were living in ‘primitive condizioni dei cavernicoli dell’età della pietra.’ The Sassi, Cotellessa continued, ‘ci disonora sotto l’aspetto sociale, morale ed igienico.’ The fact that different generations of the one family lived in a single room with their animals appears to have been the primary source of this shame: ‘la casa di abitazione della famiglia materana ed ivi sono contenuti, in un’ impressionante promiscuità: la cucina, i letti dei genitori e figli, i pochi miserì mobili e, separata da un basso muro di tufo, la stalla dell’asino e del mulo.’ The implication from Cotellessa’s letter is that the Sassi embodied the Italian nation’s failure to live up to a set of perceived values. ‘Ci disonora’ implies that the eyes of the world were on Italy and Matera. The ‘us’ suggests that Cotellessa saw himself as part of an imagined community of well-meaning citizens that was able to recognise right from wrong in a national context, i.e. ‘good’ patriots. Acknowledging national shame, as Sara Ahmed has argued, means that a narrative of national recovery can begin. The

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nation can move towards the putative values that define it and national pride can thus be restored.\textsuperscript{121} This process is arguably reflected in Cotellessa’s description of living conditions in the Sassi.

Over two million Italians were unemployed in 1948. Moreover, the country was in the midst of a housing crisis. The Italian government identified the building sector as a means for resolving both problems and passed the \textit{legge n. 3, Provvedimenti per incrementare l’occupazione operaia. Case per lavoratori} on the 28 February 1948. This legislation is better known as the Ina-Casa or Fanfani plan. Over 350,000 housing units were built from 1949-1963.\textsuperscript{122} Writing about the Sassi in a letter to the Minister of Employment and Social Welfare dated 5 May 1950, Giulio Andreotti expressed similar sentiments to Cotellessa and called for new houses to be built at Matera under the Ina-Casa programme. Andreotti described the living conditions at Matera not only as deplorable but as immoral too.

\begin{quote}
In quelle primitive dimore vivono famiglie di braccianti e di contadini molto miseri, spesso composte di numerosi elementi, conviventi in unico angusto spazio, dove la vita domestico-familiare si svolge in immorale promiscuità di sessi non solo, ma anche in antigienica coesistenza con il bestiame da lavoro e con gli arnesi del mestiere.\textsuperscript{123}
\end{quote}

Like the texts cited above, the implication was that impoverished families living in a single room would engage in incestuous sexual relations. Andreotti copied the above phrase verbatim from a letter written on 27 April 1950 by F. De

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{121} Ahmed, pp. 108-110
\textsuperscript{123} ACS, PCM 48-50, Matera, Risanamento dei Rioni dei Sassi: 1.6.1, no. 77794
\end{footnotes}
Giorgis, head of Matera's carabinieri.\textsuperscript{124} In addition De Giorgis had warned of the perceived political dangers that Matera's troglodyte homes had fostered. The letter claimed that the PCI had already begun using Matera's inadequate housing situation in its political propaganda. Furthermore, De Giorgis implied that the Sassi's living conditions were having concrete effects on residents' political and spiritual wellbeing: 'nei "Sassi" ... vivono prevalentemente i comunisti più accesi e gli evangelici più fanatici ed è là che essi svolgono la loro opera con successi non indifferenti, speculando sullo stato di miseria e di indigenza morale e materiale di quella popolazione.'\textsuperscript{125} The immorality that inadequate housing conditions had produced, De Giorgis claimed, threatened to fuel social and religious deviancy. Swift government intervention was recommended in order to counteract the apparent moral, political and spiritual danger that Matera's cave homes posed to the local population.\textsuperscript{126} These apparent fears over the links between housing and morality in official circles were communicated in the months leading up to Alcide De Gasperi's visit to Matera in July 1950. The patriotic narratives created in the context of post-war Matera reached their apex in the period 1950-1952. The newspaper sources collected for this study suggest that the perceived links between housing and morality were one of the factors that provided momentum to the idea that Matera constituted a national shame and saw this concept become a commonplace in political debate in the period 1950-1952.

Expressions of shame over living conditions amongst Matera's cave homes and concern over their impact on residents' social wellbeing were not

\textsuperscript{124} ACS, PCM 48-50, Matera, Risanamento dei Rioni dei Sassi: I.6.1, no. 77794.
\textsuperscript{125} ACS, PCM 48-50, Matera, Risanamento dei Rioni dei Sassi: I.6.1, no. 77794.
\textsuperscript{126} ACS, PCM 48-50, Matera, Risanamento dei Rioni dei Sassi: I.6.1, no. 77794.
limited to Catholic commentators. On 6 March 1951 the PCI deputy for Potenza, Michele Bianco, presented a draft law for the Sassi to parliament. It made reference to the moral danger that he believed the city’s cave homes fostered. The text of the white paper noted that demanding special legislation for a specific town when Italy was experiencing an acute housing crisis could seem foolhardy and unjust. However, he argued that the Sassi’s housing problems urgently needed to be resolved ‘per ragioni di umanità e di dignità nazionale’. Thus the Sassi were not merely a housing problem according to Bianco. They were a source of national shame which needed to be tackled. Bianco presented an emotionally charged description of living conditions at Matera to promote his draft law. Similar to the sources cited above, the text implied that there was a direct link between housing conditions and morality:

Quando si parla dei “Sassi” di Matera bisogna pensare alle bolgie infernali e poi moltiplicarne l’orrore per dieci nella certezza tuttavia di rimanere sempre al di sotto della realtà. Bisogna pensare ad abitazioni che sono le stesse che esistevano cinque mila anni fa; bisogna pensare alle tane che i trogloditi di cinque mila anni fa scavaron con le unghie nella roccia, nella quale si insinuano, le une sotto le altre, in tutte le direzioni, in salita e in discesa, verso il centro della terra … una popolazione che si aggira intorno alle 18 mila anime, e con essa muli, asini, maiali, galline, in un’atmosfera che mozza il respiro ed in una promiscuità di sessi, di età, di uomini e di animali tale da suscitare orrore e ribellione! Onorevoli colleghi! I “Sassi” di Matera costituiscono una piaga che mortifica ed avvilisce ogni più elementare senso di umanità e rappresentano un marchio di infamia per la civiltà e la dignità del nostro Paese! Voi vorrete affrettarvi a cancellarlo facendo buona accoglienza alla presente proposta di legge.

Although less direct than Andreotti’s description cited above, the text of Bianco’s special law presents Matera as pre-modern in order to promote the

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128 Ibid., p. 2
need for direct state intervention. The draft law infers that people of different sexes and generations living in a single room with their farm animals infringed upon the perceived values of the Italian nation. The Sassi constituted a moral issue and a source of ignominy for the fledgling Republic. Moving beyond the rhetorical skills that Bianco clearly employed to try and shame the reader into action, the text of the draft law suggests that the moral norms within which he was operating were remarkably similar to those of the journalists and DC politicians cited above. In order to understand Bianco’s description of the Sassi it is necessary to briefly examine the moral codes that the broad catholic movement and the Italian Communist Party looked to convey to their followers in the post-war period.

The family was a fundamental reference point in post-war Italian politics as Lesley Caldwell has cogently argued. The catholic movement claimed that the family was under threat from communism. They saw the family as one of Italy’s most important institutions and the Christian Democrats as the defenders of tradition. The family, however, was also a fundamental issue for the Italian left. Good communists were expected to defend traditional family values. The family unit was to be valued and protected. It was seen as the foundation of moral and social order. Sandro Bellassai has argued that this stance was in part an attempt to counteract accusations that communism fostered sexual immorality, but he contends that it also reflected the

129 Lesley Caldwell, ‘The Family in the Fifties: A Notion in Conflict with a Reality’, in Duggan and Wagstaff, p. 151
130 Ibid., p. 152
131 This point is reflected in an article in L’Unità from May 1953. A photo depicting a family inside one of Matera’s cave homes accompanied the text which urged female voters to reject the Christian Democrats who, it was claimed, had failed to provide suitable homes for Matera’s agricultural workers and their families. See ‘I d.c. nemici della famiglia’, L’Unità, 9 May 1953, p. 6.
importance that rank and file party members placed on ‘normal’ family life.\textsuperscript{132}

Eliminate capitalism, it was argued, and you would remove the main cause
behind the breakup of families - as evidenced in the depiction of Soviet society
in the communist press. Socialism was equated with healthy family life.
Marriage rates had doubled in Russia, it was claimed, since the establishment of
the USSR and the sanctity of the family had therefore been reinforced.\textsuperscript{133}

Furthermore, the PCI’s attitude towards sexual morality in the post-war
period was conservative. Mixing of the sexes was viewed as dangerous and
unseemly, sexual promiscuity was linked to a lack of character and
homosexuality was seen both deviant and decadent. Loose sexual morals, it was
claimed, marked an individual out as untrustworthy and, as a result, of no use to
the Party. Restraint, it was argued, needed to be shown in the context of sexual
desire. The Party was more important than physical impulses.\textsuperscript{134} The PCI’s
stance towards sexual promiscuity reflected Lenin’s glass-of-water theory.
Lenin rejected sexual promiscuity and instead recommended self-control and
self-discipline amongst comrades. The concept of free love was viewed as a
bourgeois invention and a threat to the moral wellbeing of Party members.\textsuperscript{135}
These points help to contextualize the apparent similarity between Bianco’s
description of living conditions in the Sassi and those produced in official

\textsuperscript{132} Bellassai, pp. 146-147. Alleged links between communism and sexual immorality had been
made in anti-communist circles from the time of the Russian revolution onwards. The
emphasis that the Italian communist party placed on morality was in part an attempt to
counteract claims that Bolshevism fostered deviant sexual practices. See Leo Goretti, ‘Irma
Bandiera and Maria Goretti: Gender Role Models for Communist Girls in Italy (1945-56),
Twentieth Century Communism, (2012), no. 4, p. 20.

\textsuperscript{133} Bellassai, pp. 146-147

\textsuperscript{134} Writing in 1949, Pietro Secchia, vicesecretary of the PCI, declared his opposition to mixed
schools claiming that ‘la paglia accanto al fuoco brucia’. Quoted in Bellassai, pp. 138-139.

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., p. 139
sources cited above. There was, however, ideological divergence regarding the alleged causes of moral decay in post-war Italy.

The DC argued that communism was the main threat to Western Christian values and the sanctity of the family. The accusation that Bolshevism fostered sexual deviancy was a recurring theme in catholic propaganda. The Catholic Church, moreover, adopted an aggressive stance towards communism. On 1 July 1949 Pope Pius XII issued a decree excommunicating any Catholics that collaborated with communist organizations. The PCI, however, acknowledged that the majority of Italians, including communist sympathisers, were catholic. Therefore the party hierarchy decided that it could not afford to attack the central tenets of Catholicism itself without risking the loss of potential voters. Stalin personally instructed Togliatti to refrain from targeting the catholic religion explicitly. Instead he advised the party to highlight how the structure and wealth of organized Christianity contradicted its spiritual message of peace and fraternity. The PCI, therefore, had to formulate a strategy for countering its main opponent without resorting to anti-Catholic rhetoric.136

The Communist Party instead focused its moral outrage on capitalism and the supposed twin enemies of the working class: the Italian bourgeoisie and the United States of America.137 Capitalism was depicted not only as unjust and oppressive but as immoral too. The alleged decadent lifestyle and values of the Italian bourgeoisie as well as the moral degeneracy of capitalist society’s symbolic home, the USA, provided the ‘evidence’ for these claims. The

136 Goretti, ‘Irma Bandiera’, p. 20
communist press routinely described the Italian bourgeoisie as sexually
promiscuous while American society was depicted as being amongst the most
morally repugnant on the planet. Mental health and social problems were
reported to be rife in the USA and were in large part attributed to the
acceptance of loose sexual morals. America, therefore, was depicted as a
degenerate society which illustrated the moral dangers of capitalist civilization.
Communist sources presented the Christian Democrats as internal allies of the
USA and therefore of capitalism. Thus they were represented as a threat to
Italy’s moral wellbeing. The different moral worlds of the DC and the Italian
Communist Party help to explain the links made between housing and morality
in the sources outlined above. Although the causes of alleged moral degeneracy
were divided upon ideological lines, arguably the emphasis placed on the family
unit in the wake of the Second World War, as well as attitudes towards sexual
morality directly influenced the discourses of national shame, housing, and
morality produced in the context of post-war Matera.

Two supplemental factors need to be taken into consideration when
examining the links made between housing and immorality in descriptions of
post-war Matera. They are Europe’s post-war housing crisis, and discourses of
housing, hygiene and morality that had developed in Europe from the
eighteenth-century onwards. The issue of housing in post-war Italy is arguably
crucial to understanding discourses of Matera produced during the scope of this
study. Western Europe faced an acute housing shortage in the immediate post-
war period and the problem was keenly felt in Italy. Housing was one of the

\[138\] Bellassai, pp. 140–145
\[139\] Goretti, ‘Truman’s Bombs’, pp. 159–177
primary social and economic problems that the Italian state faced in the immediate aftermath of World War Two. There had already been a housing shortage in Italy in the early part of the twentieth century. This shortfall, however, was further exacerbated by a number of factors in the post-war period. Over three million homes were believed to have been damaged or destroyed by bombing during the Second World War. Moreover, the Italian population grew by 11 per cent from 1937 to 1952. The return of demobbed soldiers and Italian citizens from former colonies placed further pressure on the existing housing stock. Istat estimated that in 1945 there were 1.38 people for every room in Italy and that by 1947 Italy faced a shortfall of 9 million rooms. Germany and Holland were the only western European countries which faced a greater housing shortage. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the concept of the home played an important role in post-war Italian society. This idea was linked both to perceptions of the country's past and future. The home symbolized perceived notions of Italy's traditional family values as well as the country's move towards 'modernity', be that viewed through a communist or catholic lens. Home ownership became an important aspiration for large sections of Italian society in the post-war period.

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140 According to the *Inchiesta sulla miseria* carried out by a parliamentary commission between 1951-1952 approximately 6,200,000 Italians were living in subhuman conditions in the early 1950s. See Paolo Braghin (ed.), *Inchiesta sulla miseria in Italia (1951-1952)*, Einaudi, Turin, 1978, p. xv.

141 Paul F. Wendt, 'Post Word-War-II Housing Policies in Italy', *Land Economics*, vol. 38 (1962), no. 2, pp. 113-133


Matera's cave homes were depicted in communist and catholic sources as one of Italian civilization’s lowest points.

Official data from the post-war period, however, suggests that living conditions at Matera were ostensibly comparable with many other parts of post-war Italy. According to the 1951 census there were an estimated 218,642 families living in 193,565 substandard dwellings which included baracche and cave homes. The majority of dwellings judged to be inadequate were located in southern Italy and the Islands, but there were also a large number of families living in substandard accommodation in northern and central Italy in rural areas but also in urban peripheries.\textsuperscript{144} The \textit{Inchiesta sulla miseria in Italia e sui mezzi per combatterla} (an interparty parliamentary inquiry into poverty levels in Italy carried out between 1951-1953) calculated that a total of 802,000 families in southern Italy and the Islands were living in poverty.\textsuperscript{145} This data suggests that apart from the dramatic setting of the Sassi and its large agglomeration of cave homes, the standard of living in post-war Matera was the norm in many parts of post-war Italy rather than the exception.\textsuperscript{146}

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{144} In the context of individual cities there were 33,617 families in Rome living in 27,915 homes judged to be inadequate; in Milan 6,114 families were housed in 5,944 substandard dwellings; in Turin there were 1,396 families living in 1,345 inadequate homes; in Genoa there were 5,446 families living in 4,929 substandard homes; and an estimated 2,332 families were living in 2,241 substandard dwellings in Bologna. Moreover, 10,392 families were living in 9,974 substandard dwellings in Catanzaro, and there were 11,371 families living in 10,896 substandard homes in Reggio Calabria. In contrast, in Matera 1,595 families were living in 1,575 substandard homes. See Istituto centrale di statistica, \textit{IX censimento generale della popolazione e rilevazione delle abitazioni. III censimento generale dell’industria e del commercio, 4 e 5 novembre 1951, primi risultati generali dei censimenti : popolazione residente e presente, abitazioni e stanze, ditte, unità locali e addetti}, Abete, Rome, 1954, pp. 121-124.
\item \textsuperscript{145} For data on poverty levels in Italy see Atti della commissione parlamentare di inchiesta sulla miseria in Italia e sui mezzi per combatterla, \textit{Indagini tecniche. Condizioni di vita delle classi misere}, vol. II, Camera dei deputati, Rome, 1954, p. 65.
\item \textsuperscript{146} This point is not meant to downplay the material hardship of life for the 15,000 people living in the Sassi in the immediate post-war period. Instead the data on post-war living standards shows that life amongst Matera’s cave homes was less exceptional than many contemporary
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Furthermore, the links between morality and housing found in post-war descriptions of the Sassi need to be examined in the context of discourses of hygiene and urban planning which first emerged in the eighteenth century. Overcrowding in urban slums was believed to foster not just the spread of infectious disease, but also immorality, crime, incest, fornication and antisocial behaviour. Unsanitary housing was also considered a threat to the sanctity of the home and a potential breeding ground for revolutionary fervour amongst the poor. The concept that housing could shape morality was prevalent amongst philanthropic housing societies, e.g. the Peabody Trust and the East End Dwelling Company in Victorian London. It was argued that the moral character of the indigent could be improved through their organization into family units. The segregation of family members into different bedrooms and the segregation of the sexes were viewed as the solution to this problem. As a result concerns over morality directly influenced house design.

The emergence of links between housing, hygiene, morality and urban planning in an Italian context can be traced to the establishment of public health and sanitation legislation in 1888. This law stemmed from the introduction of sources claimed. The Sassi’s distinctiveness was its large agglomeration of cave homes while its reputation as a national shame was a discursive construct.

Michel Foucault has linked the emergence of discourses of hygiene and morality in urban planning to the establishment of state medicine in the late eighteenth century. This, he claims, resulted in the standardization of medical knowledge; the collection of statistics on local, regional and state levels; the creation of medical officers for individual territories and administrative organizations for regulating doctors. Moreover, Foucault contends that the development of state medicine in late-eighteenth-century Europe had a direct impact on urban planning with the emergence of what he called urban medicine. The growth of urban centres and the development of an urban proletariat in the nineteenth century created social tension between an emerging working class and the bourgeoisie. Discourses of ‘urban fear’, the ‘fear of the city’ and the ‘pathogenic city’ emerged in the same time period. They were linked to concerns over overcrowding, urban epidemics, the construction of factories and workshops and the height of buildings. See Rabinow and Rose, pp. 327-330.

special legislation for Naples in response to the cholera epidemic of 1884 and 1885. The *Legge per la tutela della igiene e della sanità pubblica* sought to quantify all urban centres with more than 20,000 inhabitants. This examination of the city marked a sea change in Italian urban planning. Street names became codified and maps of what had previously been *terra incognita* for civil authorities created dividing lines between affluent districts and so-called slums. Armed with detailed impressions of urban layouts, Italian town planners believed that their work could shape the hygiene and morality of a city for the better. Urban planning and improvement schemes aimed to eliminate economic and moral deprivation as well as provide new housing.149

This had a direct effect on Italian urban planning. It took on an ideological and moral dimension through the emergence of the concept of *sventramento*. Adapted from the medical term for disembowelment, *sventramento* came to mean the demolition of slums and the widening of streets in urban planning and renewal. The term implies that the city is a body. Slums were seen as tumours that needed to be removed surgically. The health and hygiene measures undertaken by the Italian state at the end of the nineteenth century left an indelible mark on the country’s public administration. Public hygiene offices were established, hygiene regulations were introduced into building and the concept of moral hygiene permeated urban planning theories. The availability of light and fresh air became central to ‘hygienic’ urban planning designs from 1888 onwards. The norms of what constituted ‘healthy’

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accommodation were defined scientifically and bureaucratically. Late nineteenth-century Italy also saw the invention of public health engineering with the publication of the magazine *L’ingegneria sanitaria* in 1891. The magazine defined public health engineers as doctors of the city whose ailments they should study and cure. Using the techniques of positivist science, public health engineers studied water supplies, housing conditions and compiled statistics on material conditions with the aim of improving hygiene standards. The model for this procedure was provided by the *Piano di risanamento* introduced in Naples in 1885. The city was studied in detail. A full population census was carried out and the housing conditions of tenements documented.

Guido Zucconi notes that there was an ideological change in Italian urban planning in 1929 under Fascism. Town planners became more concerned with blending the modern and the classical than debates over public health and hygiene. There were also technological changes with the introduction of plans, elevations, and end views rather than the overhead maps previously used. However, the concept of *diradamento edilizio* (literally meaning thinning or pruning) used in the 1930s was simply *sventramento* by another name. Urban planners still believed that their work could *a priori* modify moral and social conditions. In the context of post-war Matera it is notable that the term *risanamento* was used to describe the rehousing programme for the city’s cave dwellers. Although in the context of urban planning this term can be translated as ‘slum clearances’, it derives from a medical term meaning to cure. The implication is that slum clearances were a means of curing the city from its

\[150\] Ibid., pp. 30-33
\[151\] Ibid., pp. 35-153. This concept was still current in the post-war period, as will be seen in the next chapter which examines the implementation of the special law for the Sassi.

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social ills through redevelopment. Based on the sources examined above it seems apparent that discourses linking housing conditions to morality persisted in Italy during the immediate post-war period, albeit refracted through the lens of two ideologies bitterly divided along Cold War lines. Fears over housing conditions and the family were arguably exacerbated by the destruction inflicted during the Second World War and the subsequent housing crisis. Matera’s Sassi provided a canvass upon which these uncertainties could be projected and intertwined with narratives of national shame and divergent political identities. Moreover, the city provided a testing ground for theories of social progress through architecture and urban planning which were implemented through the first special law for Matera in the 1950s.

It is difficult to ascertain the impact that narratives of housing, morality, and national shame had on popular attitudes towards the Sassi at a local level in the 1950s. However, recent interviews carried out with residents that were moved from the Sassi to new housing as part of Matera’s risanamento programme suggest that notions of national shame created in the immediate post-war period have had a lasting impact on local attitudes towards the Sassi. Three different studies found that former Sassi residents were often reluctant and embarrassed to speak about their past lives and in a number of cases denied that their families had ever lived amongst Matera’s cave homes. The implication is that the emotional scenarios created in the 1950s have had a
It is evident that post-war Italy's broad catholic and communist movements constituted two distinct emotional communities. Their moral worlds were ostensibly opposed, but there was a shared belief in the importance of the family and a rejection of loose sexual morals. The causes of Matera's apparent moral degeneracy, however, were attributed to opposing sources. For communists the blame lay with capitalism and the Christian Democrats who were regarded as the political bedfellows of the USA. In contrast, Catholics viewed international communism as the greatest threat to their moral world and references to the dangers of Bolshevism were frequent in official accounts of the Sassi. There was clearly competition amongst the catholic and communist politicians and journalists cited above to appropriate ideas of national shame and use them against their political opponents. By claiming that their political rivals had got their patriotism wrong, each camp could look to legitimate their own reading of Italian nationalism. However, fears over the link between housing and morality shared by the communist and catholic commentators examined suggest that they were also part of a larger supra-political Italian emotional community. Arguably Italy's post-war housing crisis, the emotional and material damage of the Second World War, and discourses of housing and hygiene had a direct impact on reaffirming the value placed on the home and the sanctity of the family for the Italian population. There was a broadly shared narrative about the impact that housing conditions

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152 See Toxey, ‘Via Media’, pp. 73-76; Zuccari, pp. 446-460; and Del Parigi and Demetrio, pp. 26-27.
could have on people's moral wellbeing. In the context of Matera, writers and politicians from different political backgrounds constructed a similar discourse in which the Sassi symbolized post-war Italy's housing crisis. This narrative was given further weight through the links made between housing and moral wellbeing.

De Gasperi’s tears

Matera, con i suoi ‘Sassi lasciò una traccia profonda nell’animo sensibile del Presidente. Tornato a Roma non mancò di esternare la sua commozione e si adoperò in ogni modo per il risanamento edilizio della città lucana. ‘Quei tuguri – disse – quelle tane stringono il cuore’. E ci raccontò in dettaglio il caso emblematico della famiglia del reduce Francesco Contino, da lui visitata ai ‘Sassi’ ascoltandone la storia quotidiana desolante di lavoro durissimo e di sacrifici, affrontata però con una tenacia e una speranza che non dovevano essere deluse.153

This description of Alcide De Gasperi’s first visit to Matera on 23 July 1950 appeared in Giulio Andreotti’s book De Gasperi e la ricostruzione published in 1974. The short work is essentially a hagiography of De Gasperi’s post-war political career, but it is noteworthy that the Italian prime minister's two visits to Matera were used to bookend a section on southern Italy. After years of rhetoric from previous governments, the book argued, De Gasperi had finally managed to tackle the age-old problem of the Sassi.154 Andreotti paid particular attention to De Gasperi’s emotional reaction during his first visit to Matera which, the book claimed, was central to the decision to formulate the special law for the Sassi. References to the Italian prime minister’s emotions, during and after his visit to a number of cave homes in July 1950, are also found in the

153 Giulio Andreotti, De Gasperi e la ricostruzione, Edizioni cinque lune, Rome, 1974, p. 101
154 Ibid., p. 101
contemporary press coverage. The shared narrative of these articles is that De Gasperi’s deep sense of empathy prompted him to draw up special legislation for Matera’s cave dwellers. These reports were framed within the context of national shame and ideas of emotional norms in post-war Italy. Official media coverage of the Italian Prime Minister's visit to Matera in 1950 was used to promote the Christian Democrats’ twin programme for southern Italy. In the context of notions that Matera constituted a national shame, 1950 was also the year in which this concept appeared more frequently in Italian press sources. De Gasperi’s visit appears to have been one of the factors that increased the circulation and regularity of this idea in press sources. This section will examine why the journalists covering the story deemed the Italian Prime Minister’s apparent tears to be significant at that moment in time and the historical context which shaped how and why they communicated this story in the national and regional press.

Writing in 1950 about De Gasperi’s first visit to Matera for La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno, Oronzo Valentini described the Italian Prime Minister’s visible tears to be significant at that moment in time and the historical context which shaped how and why they communicated this story in the national and regional press.

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155 The concept of Matera as a symbol of the southern question became one of the key images used in DC propaganda in the early 1950s to promote the need for agrarian reform and the Cassa del Mezzogiorno. These points are exemplified in the official coverage of De Gasperi’s visit to Matera on 23 July 1950. The living conditions of Sassi residents were used to justify government reforms in southern Italy. See Giorgio Ceccherini, ‘La visita di De Gasperi in Lucania’, Il Popolo, 25 July 1950, pp. 1 & 4 and La Settimana INCOM, Viaggio nel Mezzogiorno. De Gasperi in Lucania (Italy, 1950). Roberto Rossellini also dramatized De Gasperi’s first visit to Matera in Anno Uno, his hagiography of the DC leader. See Roberto Rossellini, Anno uno (Italy, 1950). The PCI press presented a very different account of De Gasperi’s first visit to Matera. An article published in L’Unità on 25 July 1950 claimed that there had been protests against the Italian Prime Minister and that local police had resorted to confiscating a caricature of De Gasperi from the local offices of the Socialist Party. Subsequently a number of prominent Socialist and Communist activists had been arrested. See ‘Violenze della polizia a Matera per festeggiare la visita di De Gasperi’, L’Unità, 25 July, 1950, p. 5. The archival sources reveal that there was an altercation between the local police and local Communist and Socialist Party members. Seven policemen and four civilians suffered slight injuries and eight people were charged in relation to the incident. The archival sources also reveal that 2,015 members of Coldiretti were bussed to Matera to listen to De Gasperi’s speech. This suggests that the visit was closely stagemanaged. See the material on De Gasperi’s first visit to Matera in ASM, Prefettura (Ricovero 90), busta 178, fascicolo 1642, sottofascicolo II.
distress during a visit to the cave home of Vito Andrisano and his family: ‘De Gasperi chiedeva notizie della loro vita, del loro lavoro, chiedeva insisten
temente con un senso di angoscia, quasi volesse imprimerisi nella mente e negli occhi il ricordo indelebile di uno spettacolo che ha avuto profonda eco nel suo animo.’156 A photo of De Gasperi visiting one of Matera’s cave homes accompanied the article. The Italian Prime Minister appears visibly uncomfortable in the shot which depicts the interior of a cave home with the silhouette of a mule in the background. The article noted that during the speech given in Matera’s main square later the same day, De Gasperi referred to the Sassi as ‘un deplorevole avanzo della nostra triste storia di secoli.’157 The implication from the article is that Matera’s cave homes were a national disgrace and that a mixture of empathy and shame had caused the Italian Prime Minister’s emotional reaction.

Delio Mariotti also made direct reference to the Italian Prime Minister’s emotional state upon witnessing living conditions in the Sassi in an article for La Stampa. Mariotti claimed that ‘ci diceva De Gasperi alcune ore dopo la sua visita alla cupa e fantastica città che il problema dei “sassi” afferra alla gola e l’impe
do di risolverlo sommuove il sangue in uno slancio generoso. (Il presidente all’uscita da alcuni tuguri aveva le pupille umide.)’158 The article frames De Gasperi’s apparent tears of compassion in the context of national shame. Mariotti contends elsewhere in the article that the Sassi constitute a national disgrace. The report ends, however, claiming that, with their twin reform programme for the Mezzogiorno, the Christian Democrats have taken

156 Valentini, p. 1
157 Ibid., p. 2
158 Mariotti, p. 5
the first steps in tackling southern Italy’s social and economic problems. Resolving Matera’s housing problems is presented as a key step in this process.\textsuperscript{159}

Reference to De Gasperi’s emotional response during his first visit to Matera was also made in Giovanni Acquaviva’s article published in the \textit{Corriere del Giorno} on 24 July 1951. This piece was written to mark the news that the Christian Democrats had decided to put special legislation for Matera before parliament. The report claims that De Gasperi was moved to tears during his visit to the Sassi.

Lo ricordiamo perfettamente De Gasperi durante le sue pereginazioni al Sud, scendere fin giù nelle grotte dei ‘Sassi’ e toccare con mano la miseria orripilante dei tuguri ove dieci persone con un asino e sette galline alloggìavano nella stessa unica camera il cui tetto faceva da pavimento ad un analogo tugurio sovrastante; lo ricordiamo pallido e quasi scostante per quella sua natura di montanaro, commuoversi fino alle lacrime al cospetto di così abominevole spettacolo.\textsuperscript{160}

The article directly linked De Gasperi’s apparent emotional reaction to Matera’s cave homes to his decision ‘coinvolgere massici interventi statali per eliminare la inqualificabile vergogna dei “Sassi”, nel quadro della rinascita del Mezzogiorno d’Italia proprio negli anni più duri e travagliati del dopoguerra.’\textsuperscript{161}

Acquaviva therefore links De Gasperi’s tears to notions of national shame. Moreover state intervention at Matera is framed in the context of the Christian Democrats efforts to resolve southern Italy’s perceived social and economic backwardness in comparison to northern Italy. The Sassi, it is implied, are a symbol of the southern question which De Gasperi’s government have finally

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., p. 5
\item\textsuperscript{160} Giovanni Acquaviva, ‘De Gasperi e Colombo per la redenzione di Matera’, \textit{Il Corriere del Giorno}, 24 July 1951, p. 1
\item\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., p. 1
\end{enumerate}
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resolved. It is clear, therefore, that the Italian Prime Minister’s apparent emotional reaction to living conditions at Matera was incorporated into official propaganda in the context of promoting the DC’s reform programme for southern Italy.

It is impossible to know how genuine De Gasperi’s tears were during his first visit to Matera. A more fruitful avenue of enquiry, therefore, is to discern the reasons why De Gasperi’s apparent emotional reaction was considered newsworthy in contemporary press sources. In order to do this it is necessary to consider the articles cited above in the historical context of emotional norms and ideas of masculinity in post-war Italy. Tom Lutz has argued that while crying is a universal amongst humans, as with all emotional displays, the meaning assigned to tears changes across time and space.\textsuperscript{162} Crying therefore needs to be contextualized in order to be understood. In particular the age and sex of the person crying are crucial to understanding the meanings assigned to their tears. The types of emotional performance expected from men and women in the given context needs to be examined. In the first half of the twentieth century, rational emotional control was fostered in Western culture, particularly in men.\textsuperscript{163} In an Italian context Mussolini actively looked to rid Italians of what he deemed the defect of sentimentalism. In the lead up to the Second World War Italian soldiers were instructed to keep their emotions in check. The model of masculinity that Fascism looked to foster was of a virile, intense, and emotionally disciplined individual who was willing to use violence.

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., p. 151-153
when necessary and ready to die for his country.\textsuperscript{164} Ruth Ben Ghiat has argued that following the humiliation of military surrender and foreign occupation in the mid-1940s there was a crisis of Italian masculinity. The male identities of a generation that had been raised under Fascism needed to be redefined in the context of a new democratic republic.\textsuperscript{165}

In this context, following twenty years of Fascist rule, Italy’s post-war political leaders had to formulate a new way to communicate to the mass public which distanced themselves from the methods of Mussolini’s regime. The Fascist rhetoric of the superman was rejected and instead political leaders could show signs of physical weakness and tiredness as well as use calm and understanding tones to communicate their political message.\textsuperscript{166} De Gasperi was depicted in party sources and politically sympathetic publications as a modest, pious, patient and meditative individual.\textsuperscript{167} The fact that he hailed from Trentino, formerly part of Austria, meant that De Gasperi was often viewed as having a more ‘northern European’ temperament: he was depicted as being stoic, direct, serious, and economical with his words. Furthermore, the DC leader was presented in party sources as a pious family man: his wife was depicted as a woman of great strength and his daughter Lucia was a nun.\textsuperscript{168}

Italian emotional norms and notions of masculinity prevalent in the post-war period arguably help to explain the significance that sections of the Italian press placed on De Gasperi’s apparent tears of empathy during his first

\textsuperscript{164} Ben Ghiat, p. 342
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., p. 339
\textsuperscript{166} Marzia Marsili, ‘De Gasperi and Togliatti: political leadership and personality cults in post-war Italy’, Modern Italy, vol. 3 (1998), no. 2, pp. 249-250
\textsuperscript{167} For the portrayal of De Gasperi in PCI sources see Goretti, ‘Truman’s Bombs’, pp. 159-177.
\textsuperscript{168} Marsili, pp. 250-253
visit to Matera. It was acceptable, perhaps even welcomed, that a post-war Italian Prime Minister should display public emotion - albeit discreetely. As noted above, however, De Gasperi was depicted in partisan sources as having a stoic character often attributed to the fact that he was a montanaro. The claim that he was moved to cry in public during his visit to Matera, therefore, suggests that this event was viewed as having added significance. Furthermore, the press coverage examined above implies that De Gasperi's tears were motivated by empathy for the living conditions of fellow Italian citizens and the state's inability to tackle the 'problem' of Matera's Sassi. In the context of ideas of Italian nationalism, therefore, the Prime Minister's tears were used to show readers that he was a 'good' patriot.

De Gasperi's visit to Matera on 23 July 1950 had a concrete effect on the city's history. On his return to Rome the DC leader called for a parliamentary committee to draft special legislation for Matera's cave homes to be established. Although, as seen above, the mass media and the PCI had placed pressure on the Christian Democrat government to tackle Matera's housing problems, the Servizio Informazioni's official report on De Gasperi's visit makes direct reference to the fact that 'il Presidente del Consiglio è stato evidentemente impressionato dal problema dei “sassi di Matera”.'169 Moreover, the report notes that 'l'on. De Gasperi si è fatto interprete, quindi, della necessità ed urgenza di una soluzione integrale per sanare una situazione che si presenta assai complessa nei suoi vari aspetti igienici, sociali e morali.'170 The Italian cabinet duly agreed that a committee should be established to draw up special

170 Ibid.
legislation for Matera’s troglodyte homes. Notably, however, the *Servizio Informazioni*’s communiqué appears to have been drafted to provide a summary of De Gasperi’s visit to Matera for press outlets. The exact same text was cited in *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno* just days after the Italian Prime Minister’s visit.¹⁷¹ This suggests that the Christian Democrats were keen to convey the message that their party leader was not only moved during his visit to the Sassi, but he was willing to act on these apparent feelings and thus make a contribution to restoring a sense of national dignity in a country still coming to terms with its apparent crisis of national identity in the aftermath of the Second World War.

**Conclusion**

Expressions of national shame produced in the context of post-war Matera appear to have emerged in April 1948 following Palmiro Togliatti’s pre-election speech in the city. The idea gained momentum in 1950 following Alcide De Gasperi’s visit to Matera and the announcement that the Italian government planned special legislation for the Sassi. The concept of Matera as a national shame reached its height in the early 1950s when political and media calls for government intervention increased. References to Matera as a national shame, however, largely disappeared from political and media sources when the Italian parliament and senate passed the *legge n.619: Rinsanamento dei rioni dei Sassi nell’abitato del comune di Matera* on 17 May 1952. This legislation instigated a large-scale rehousing programme for the city’s estimated 15,000 cave dwellers. In the post-war context of the late 1940s and early 1950s, it is clear that the

different journalists, politicians and public officials cited above had different notions of what constituted Italian national identity. Although the terminology used to express patriotic shame was often strikingly similar, these narratives were at the same time a means through which political identities were formed in the context of the Cold War. Ideas of national shame and pride became part of the wider political battleground in which opposing sides of the ideological divide attempted to appropriate the national ‘we’ and accuse each other of being bad patriots. The moral sensibilities of distinct catholic and communist emotional communities also clearly shaped the different expressions of national shame examined above. Notions of progress, sexual morality, and the sanctity of the family impacted the reasons why and the ways in which national shame was expressed. There were, however, additional historical factors in the immediate post-war period which arguably impacted these emotional norms and produced some shared concerns between catholic and communist emotional communities: the trauma and destruction of the Second World War, the resultant Europe-wide housing crisis, the legacy of Fascism, and the increased emphasis on the sanctity of the family.

Furthermore, the patriotic expressions generated in the context of post-war Matera show that there were different and competing notions of what constituted the nation. It is clear, therefore, that broad generalizations about the feelings of all Italians in this context should be avoided. Instead historians need to examine individual expressions of national shame at a micro-level as well as the parameters of the specific emotional communities which shaped these narratives. This chapter has attempted to uncover the interface between the
competing national identities and the different emotional communities that were generated by and influenced expressions of national shame in the context of post-war Matera. These patriotic narratives created the very thing to which they claimed to belong - the Italian nation – as well as a set of national ideals which the Sassi were judged to have affronted.

The narratives of patriotic shame generated in the context of post-war Matera had a direct impact on the city’s social and urban development. This was exemplified in De Gasperi’s decision to create a commission to draw up draft legislation for Matera following his first visit to the city in April 1950. The government presented a provisional law to parliament on 30 May 1951 which outlined a programme for the construction of 2,000 new homes for the residents of the Sassi over a four-year period. The project was given an initial budget of 5.2 billion lire which would be used to construct apartments and purpose-built agricultural villages in Matera’s hinterland. Notions of national shame appear to have influenced the subsequent parliamentary and senate commissions which debated the DC government’s draft legislation for Matera in spring 1952. During the parliamentary-commission discussions Giulio Spallone, the PCI deputy for Acquila, noted that despite reservations over a number of the draft law’s articles, the Communist Party would vote in favour of the legislation.172 This decision, Spallone explained, was taken ‘perchè ci interessa il

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172 The communist delegates that took part in the parliamentary commission to discuss the draft law for Matera were opposed to the creation of rural villages for the Sassi’s estimated 16,000 inhabitants. Moreover, they queried the budget of four billion lire that the government draft law had allocated for the rehousing programme. In addition, the PCI and the PSI were against the draft law’s provision to repair and reuse a number of homes located in the Sassi. For example Michele Bianco, a PCI deputy for Matera, argued that the Christian Democrat government’s draft law planned to ‘conservare i “Sassi” così come sono oggi, utilizzando il patrimonio utilizzabile.’ Bianco was against this approach because in his opinion the Sassi were ‘una cosa che dovrebbe sparire!’ Therefore he contended that
problema dei “Sassi di Matera”, perché vogliamo cancellare questa vergogna che
'affligge da secoli l'Italia meridionale.'\textsuperscript{173} The Socialist senator Giacomo Mancini
expressed similar sentiments during the discussion of the special law in Italy's
second chamber. He argued that none of the Sassi’s cave homes should be
retained because they were an affront to southern Italy’s sense of pride: ‘avrei
desiderato che nel disegno di legge in esame non fosse stata prospettata la
possibilità di recuperare un certo numero di caverne, per l’onore e la dignità del
Mezzogiorno.’\textsuperscript{174} But ultimately Mancini voted in favour of the special law for
the Sassi because in his opinion ‘le caverne rappresentano il disdoro del
Mezzogiorno e a tale disdoro si deve porre finalmente termine.’\textsuperscript{175} The
interventions made during the parliamentary commission and senate debates
cited above suggest that ideas of national shame directly influenced the decision
to pass the special law for the Sassi. Arguably no party wanted to oppose the
proposed special legislation for fear of being seen as unpatriotic despite a
number of reservations about it provisions. The first special law marked a
defining moment in Matera’s history and transformed the city’s urban and
social fabric forever. The next chapter will examine the implementation of the
first special law in detail.

\textsuperscript{173} Camera dei Deputati, \textit{Commissione in sede legislativa, Commissione VII, Lavori Pubblici}, LXIX, 6 February 1952, p. 574. Narratives of national shame appear to have directly influenced this position. In his own draft law for Matera Bianco had called on Italian deputies to approve the legislation 'per ragioni di umanità e di dignità nazionale' as the Sassi were 'un marchio di infamia per la
civiltà e dignità del nostro Paese.' See Bianco, pp. 1–4.
\textsuperscript{174} Senato della Repubblica, \textit{Risanamento dei “Sassi” di Matera. Discussione del disegno di legge
n. 2262, VII commissione, 8 May 1952. Reproduced in Mario Cresci (ed.), \textit{Matera: immagini e
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., p. 349
Chapter 3: The first special law for the Sassi

Dopo secoli di attesa, il ricordo si perde nella storia dei tempi, dopo che intere generazioni si sono succedute nell’ansia di vedere risolto il problema dei ‘Sassi’ che racchiudono, imprigionando, nella loro aspra e paurosa struttura, gli alloggi di migliaia nostri lavoratori, ecco una luminosa e radiosa volontà di Governo democratico e Cristiano, cancellare quello che indubbiamente costituiva una vergogna per una Nazione civile.¹

The above quote comes from a document that Matera’s provincial administration produced to announce draft legislation for the Sassi. The subsequent enactment of the first special law on 17 May 1952 marked a turning point in the city’s history. No previous legislation had implemented a comprehensive plan to rehouse Matera’s troglodyte population. The so-called Legge Colombo would result in the transformation of Matera’s urban and social fabric. Following the success of Carlo Levi’s Cristo si è fermato a Eboli and the subsequent press and political interest in the Sassi, Matera had attracted the attention of Italy’s public sphere. The Sassi’s cave dwellings had been dubbed a national shame and were commonly presented as a symbol of Italy’s southern question in political and media circles. Resolving Matera’s widely-publicized housing problems thus became an issue of national importance for the Christian Democrat government. At the same time the implementation of the first special law provided the ruling party with an opportunity to showcase its twin reform programme for southern Italy. Matera’s cave dwellers would be rehoused in purpose-built accommodation designed by the leading lights of Italian post-war architecture and town planning. These new housing projects would aim to meet the perceived social, cultural and employment needs of their new inhabitants.

¹ See the report dated 18 April 1951 in ASM, Prefettura (Ricovero 90), busta 82, fascicolo 661, sottofascicolo A.
and dovetail with land reform legislation passed in 1950. Agricultural workers would be moved closer to the land that they worked, day labourers would be transformed into small landowners, and artisans would be rehoused in purpose-built urban neighbourhoods. The special law for the Sassi, therefore, was an attempt to deliver on the promises that Alcide De Gasperi had made during his visit to Matera in July 1950. Narratives of national shame were combined with state paternalism and ultimately political opportunism in what was a significant experiment in post-war urban planning.

That experiment involved a major building and rehousing programme which transformed Matera’s urban and social topography. The first special law legislated for the transfer of residents deemed to be living in uninhabitable housing to new accommodation and ultimately resulted in the gradual abandonment of Matera’s distinctive cave homes. This process was projected to take four years, but had not been fully completed over twenty years later. The original rehousing plans proposed the construction of five rural villages for self-sufficient small landowners, tenant farmers and artisans; two semi-rural suburbs for fixed-wage and day labourers; three urban quarters for artisans and city-based workers; and the renovation of those cave homes deemed fit for habitation. These proposals, however, would be modified when the provisions of the first special law were translated into concrete building projects. Notably the estimated 15,000 Sassi residents whose lives the first special law directly impacted were not consulted throughout the risanamento process. Instead the rehousing programme was applied from above. The lack of local representation
would result in a number of social and economic problems during the special law's implementation.

The existing secondary literature on post-war Matera tends to view the *risanamento* programme as a deliberate manipulation of housing data in order to empty the Sassi rather than renovate the existing cave homes. This policy, it is argued, was carried out in order to gain social and political control over a potentially revolutionary urban population. Moreover, the first special law for Matera is viewed as being emblematic of a wider government strategy which aimed to transform small landowners, tenant farmers, and landless agricultural workers into cheap labour for northern Italian industry. Post-war land reform legislation is judged to have been a deliberate attempt to move agricultural workers from farming into construction and the factory. There has been, however, a surprising neglect of primary source documents pertaining to the *risanamento* programme's implementation in much of the secondary material. The construction work undertaken at Matera following the implementation of the special law needs to be viewed in the context of broader historical processes at a national and international level. Italy faced a major housing crisis in the wake of the Second World War and implemented a major rebuilding programme. Furthermore the country then witnessed the rapid expansion of urban centres due to internal migration and rural exodus in the 1960s. Hitherto there has been a tendency to study post-war Matera at a micro-level without taking wider historical changes in post-war Italy and Europe into consideration. A number of existing secondary sources have cast long shadows over subsequent research and arguably stifled analysis of the *risanamento*
programme.² This chapter will endeavour to be a corrective. It will draw on previously neglected archival material to reassess the first special law and critique the arguments put forward in the existing literature on post-war Matera. As a result at times this part of the thesis will be empirical in its aims and descriptive in its presentation of material, but no less historical for that. It will look to trace the links between the *caso* Levi, narratives of national shame and the southern question, and the political decisions which shaped the special law’s implementation during the course of the 1950s. It will also examine the many problems that the *risanamento* programme encountered.

This chapter is divided into four separate sections which explore the first special law’s drafting and subsequent application. The first section examines the residential-village model proposed in a report on Matera produced in 1950. The concept of transferring the Sassi’s rural workers closer to the land that they worked would dominate the *risanamento* programme and therefore needs to be studied in detail. The second part focuses on the comprehensive study of the Sassi carried out in the early 1950s by an interdisciplinary research team. This project’s findings produced a large amount of housing data on the Sassi which supplemented the regional office of public works’ findings. Moreover, it brought the potential links between the Sassi’s urban layout and the local community’s social bonds to the attention of the architects and urban planners that worked on the *risanamento* programme. Thirdly this chapter analyses the terms of the special law. It looks at the parliamentary debates which shaped the legislation, the provisions of the law itself, and local reaction to the proposed *risanamento*

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² See for example Restucci and Tafuri, Raguso, *Matera dai Sassi ai borghi* and Toxey, *Materan Contradictions*. This point is developed in detail in section 3.4 below.
programme. The fourth section examines the special law’s implementation. It outlines the teething problems that the first special law experienced and the different housing projects that were built. Finally this section re-evaluates the first special law through a critique of the existing secondary literature on the subject.

3.1 The residential village model

The concept of rehousing the Sassi’s agricultural workers in purpose-built rural villages was central to the official intervention programme undertaken at Matera. This urban-planning model stemmed from a European Cooperation Administration (ECA) financed report published in January 1950 by the Basento Valley land-reclamation syndicate. The study, entitled Il problema dei Sassi di Matera, was compiled by the rural economist Nallo Mazzocchi Alemanni in collaboration with the ECA official Enzo Calia. This report is significant in the context of Matera’s post-war urban development as the concepts that it put forward directly influenced the first special law for the Sassi and the subsequent Piano Regionale Generale for Matera. The ECA report situated the caso Matera in the wider context of restructuring agriculture at a regional level. It argued that the stagnation of southern Italian agriculture was due to the fact that rural workers lived in urban centres and had to travel long distances on a

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3 Nallo Mazzocchi Alemanni (1889-1967) graduated in agricultural economics. As part of his studies he carried out research in Italy’s then colonial territories in Somalia and Eritrea. He subsequently worked for the Italian Colonial Ministry and was part of the Commissione per lo studio agrologico della Tripolitania in 1913-1914 and travelled extensively in Africa. From 1920-1923 he was the director of the Istituto agricolo coloniale italiano di Firenze and then in the 1930s worked as the inspector general of the Opera nazionale combattenti (a veterans association which employed demobilized soldiers in public works programmes). Mazzocchi Alemanni worked as the technical director of the bonifica intergrale scheme in the Pontine Marshes in the 1930s and then in the 1940s oversaw a project to settle the Sicilian great estates. For further biographical information see: ARCHIVIO NALLO MAZZOCCHI ALEMANNI (1889-1967), http://www.animi.it/archivio_mazzocchi-alemanni.htm, (accessed 21/06/2013).
daily basis to reach the land that they farmed. Therefore, it was argued, time and energy that could have been used working the land was wasted.\textsuperscript{4} The report contended that the long distances between farmland and urban centres meant that the possibility of including other family members (women, children and the elderly) in agricultural work was greatly reduced. For Mazzocchi Alemanni and Calia these factors resulted in reduced levels of agricultural productivity in southern Italy. Their report presented Matera as a typical example of this economic model.\textsuperscript{5}

A three-pronged solution for resolving the Sassi’s housing problems was proposed. The details of this model need to be briefly summarized as they would influence subsequent rehousing plans implemented at Matera. First, the report put forward the construction of three agricultural villages located 10-12 kilometres outside of Matera at Timmari-Picciano-Rifeccia, Venusio, and Torre Spagnola. They would rehouse 1,460 small farmers and artisans.\textsuperscript{6} These locations were chosen because, according to the report, they reflected where the majority of Matera’s small landowning farmers and landless workers owned, rented or worked agricultural land. The urban planning proposals

\textsuperscript{4} Writing in 1950 about the need to populate the southern great estates, Mazzocchi Alemanni estimated that southern agricultural workers spent 400-500 hours per annum travelling to and from their farmland. As a result he claimed that 200 million hours of potential working hours were being lost each year. See Nallo Mazzocchi Alemanni, ‘Insediamento umano nei territori latifondistici’, in Eugenio Zagari (ed.), Mezzogiorno e agricoltura, Giuffrè Editore, Varese, 1977, pp. 137-150.

\textsuperscript{5} ‘Il caso di Matera offre un tipico esempio della necessità di risolvere il problema di quel deterioro accentramento contadino.’ The details of Mazzocchi Alemanni and Calia’s report on the Sassi are reproduced in the former’s article ‘Il problema dei “Sassi” di Matera avviato verso una definitiva soluzione’, Agricoltura italiana, (1951), no. 7, pp. 171-177.

\textsuperscript{6} The report contends that ‘una razionale e realistica soluzione dei problema dei Sassi deve basarsi su di una visione organica del problema, che è contemporaneamente urbano e rurale, igienico e economico, intimamente connesso con quello della trasformazione agraria di tutto il territorio materano. E poiché ha fondamento della trasformazione fondiaria della regione è ormai riconosciuto che sta la costituzione di “Borghi residenziali” come lo strumento più adatto a determinare l’indispensabile popolamento stabile delle campagne.’ This quote is reproduced in Restucci and Tafuri, p. 40.
suggested for resolving the Sassi’s housing problems, therefore, were meant to improve the town’s agricultural economy. Moreover, all three agricultural zones were connected to Matera via pre-existing roads. Thus, in theory, the agricultural workers transferred to the new villages would have more time to concentrate on farming and additional family members could also carry out farm work.\(^7\) These villages would also provide the essential services needed to create a self-sufficient urban centre, such as schools, medical facilities, food supplies and a church, which would convince rural workers that the new housing projects were viable.\(^8\) Second, the report outlined the construction of two suburban residential quarters at Piccianello and Cappuccini to rehouse the estimated 685 Sassi artisans and braccianti whose employment was directly linked to Matera’s historic urban centre. These two sites were selected because of a pre-existing bus service to the town centre. This would mean that new residents would not be isolated from their workplace. Finally, Mazzocchi Alemanni and Calia proposed the renovation of the estimated 501 cave homes judged to have met the required hygienic and structural standards and the permanent closure of the 1,641 homes that the report deemed to be uninhabitable.\(^9\) Renovations would, it was recommended, be carried out by homeowners themselves with financial incentives from the state. The report, however, aimed to transcend the agricultural and housing context of Matera. It hoped that the rehousing model proposed for the Sassi could be part of ‘la soluzione del più generale problema di un logico e razionale insediamento

\(^7\) The 1,460 families to be rehoused in rural villages would be divided accordingly: Timmari-Picciano-Rifeccia (350 small farmers, 150 landless workers, 50 artisans: 550 families in total); Borgo Venusio (200 small farmers, 150 landless workers, 60 artisans: 410 families in total); and Borgo Torre Spagnola (300 small farmers, 150 braccianti, and 160 artisans).

\(^8\) Mazzocchi Alemanni, ‘Insediamento umano’, p. 143

\(^9\) Mazzocchi Alemanni, ‘Il problema dei “Sassi”’, pp. 171-177
The use of Matera as the testing ground for innovative and experimental urban planning designs and theories, which it was hoped could be implemented in other parts of rural Italy, is a recurring feature in the various post-war studies of the city. Matera’s perceived national importance seemed to provide urban planners and architects with an opportunity to test their ideas on instigating social and economic development through architecture and town planning strategies.

The borghi rurali model was the most innovative aspect of Mazzocchi Alemanni and Calia’s report in terms of urban planning. Anne Toxey has argued that the study’s plans to rehouse the majority of Sassi residents in rural villages were loosely based on the bonifica integrale model employed under Fascism, most notably in the drainage and repopulation of the Pontine Marshes in the 1930s. Mazzocchi Alemanni had worked on this vast project in his role as the inspector general of the Opera Nazionale Combattenti. His urban-planning model for Matera, however, contrasted with the Agro Pontino project in one crucial aspect. Instead of proposing separate farmhouses, service villages (which provided warehouses, grain silos, administrative offices, a church and a police station) and the civic and administrative centres constructed under

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10 Ibid., p. 176
11 This project saw a vast malarial plain drained and farms created for assignees moved from the Emilia-Romagna and Veneto regions. The implication of Toxey’s argument is that post-war government intervention at Matera was residually Fascist in tone. This point is not developed any further, however, and feels somewhat forced. See Toxey, Materan Contradictions, p. 89.
12 Mazzocchi Alemanni was not the first person to suggest rehousing Matera’s cave dwellers in rural accommodation. Following his visit to the city in 1902 Giuseppe Zanardelli had recommended relocating the Sassi’s residents to the countryside where they worked. Moreover, Alfredo Angeloni’s 1927 public works programme, ‘Per la più grande Matera’, and Vincenzo Corazza’s 1941 report on Matera’s cave homes had both outlined plans for rehousing the Sassi’s agricultural workers in rural housing. However, these three unrealized initiatives had planned to build individual farmhouses rather than the rural villages that Mazzocchi Alemanni and Calia proposed. See Pontrandolfi, pp. 17-31.
Fascism in the 1930s, which were later adopted by the Puglia-Lucania-Molise land reform board, the plans for Matera put forward the concept of residential villages. Mazzocchi Alemanni argued that town planning needed to take local conditions into consideration. The model used in the Pontine Marshes project, it was claimed, would not be suitable for southern Italy as rural workers were used to living together in urban centres. Residential villages were proposed instead with the belief that they would foster social bonds and increase agricultural productivity.¹³

There were, however, a number of problems with Mazzocchi Alemanni and Calia's report which would be carried into the first special law for the Sassi and emerge when subsequent studies of Matera had been carried out. First the report had failed to examine the complex and idiosyncratic character of land ownership and tenancy at Matera in detail. Land holdings tended to be small in size and fragmented across the complex patchwork of farmland close to the provincial capital. Many small proprietors and tenant farmers owned or rented property in different zones close to the provincial capital. Consequently a lot of agricultural workers needed to travel between the various plots of land that they farmed. In addition, not all of the small farms and plots of land near Matera were owned or rented by families living in the Sassi. Property was also farmed by agricultural workers from nearby villages and towns. This point would become clear following more detailed studies of land holdings at Matera carried

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¹³ Mazzocchi Alemanni gives a detailed explanation for his preference of the residential village model instead of separate farmhouses and service villages in Mazzocchi Alemanni, 'Insediamento umano', pp. 137-150.
out in the early 1950s. As a result the locations chosen for the proposed rural villages did not always correspond to areas that Sassi residents farmed.

Mazzocchi Alemanni and Calia’s report, in addition, failed to provide a detailed plan for the transformation of agricultural land into the farms and supplemental plots needed to create self-sufficient families for the proposed rural villages. Landless workers would have no motivation to move to isolated towns unless they received land to farm or were assured that there would be consistent employment as fixed-wage labourers. A subsequent study of local agriculture carried out in the mid-1950s revealed that seventy-seven per cent of Matera’s 38,000 hectares of arable land was divided between small landowners, tenant farmers, and sharecroppers in modestly-sized farms and rented properties. Thus it was unclear where the additional land needed to create larger self-sufficient farms and provide land for casual day labourers would be found. These points were not addressed in the ECA report despite the fact that the Christian Democrat government was drawing up land reform legislation in 1950.

How can these apparent oversights be explained? A closer examination of the data that Mazzocchi Alemanni and Calia provided on the Sassi’s housing

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14 A report on Matera’s agricultural economy produced in November 1952 for the land reform board suggests that land holdings were divided between numerous small-holding and tenant families, many of whom were from neighbouring towns such as Altamura. See ASM, Prefettura (Ricovero 90), busta 82, fascicolo 662, sottofascicolo B.  
15 Fedele Aiello’s study of land holdings at Matera carried out in the mid-1950s found that seventy-seven per cent of the city’s 38,000 hectares of available agricultural land was divided between small landowners (16,900 hectares), tenant farmers (10,500 hectares) and sharecroppers (1,800 hectares). Agriculture at Matera appeared to correspond to the latifondo contadino model theorized by Manlio Rossi-Doria in which large land holdings had been divided into small units. See Fedele Aiello, ‘Dai Sassi alle borgate’, Nord-Sud, (1955), no. 5, pp. 62-88; and Manlio Rossi-Doria, Riforma agraria e azione meridionalista, Edizioni Agricole, Bologna, 1948, pp 1-51.
conditions reveals that these statistics were taken directly from Luca Crispino’s 1938 report on Matera.\textsuperscript{17} This suggests that the ECA-sponsored study was based on pre-existing data rather than a close examination of the city’s social and economic conditions during the period 1949-1950. A report produced by the head of the local carabinieri in April 1950 provides alternative statistics on Matera’s demographics and employment which appears to reinforce this point. The report suggests that Matera’s population had increased between 1938, when Crispino’s report was carried out, and 1950 when Mazzocchi Alemanni and Calia produced their study.\textsuperscript{18} Thus, Mazzocchi Alemanni appears to have applied his model for developing southern agriculture onto Matera without carrying out a detailed study of local economic and social factors. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that Mazzocchi Alemanni and Calia consulted Sassi residents in the drafting of their report. This offers a supplemental explanation for their failure to understand the complex nature of land holdings at Matera. The implication from Mazzocchi Alemanni and Calia’s report is that local residents did not have the required understanding of agricultural economics and were incapable of contributing to the restructuring of the local economy. Rather this process would need to be carried out from above by experts. This paternalistic attitude towards local residents would characterize the majority of reports that were produced on the Sassi in the post-war period as well as the risanamento programme.

\textsuperscript{17} Crispino, pp. 3-32.
\textsuperscript{18} See Giovanni Stingone’s report entitled Matera – Risanamento dei rioni dei “Sassi”. Servizio informazione speciale dated 17 April 1950. ASM, Prefettura (Ricovero 90), busta 82, fascicolo 661, sottofascicolo A.
Notably in 1950 Mazzocchi Alemanni had presented a paper at the Italian economic, demographic, and statistical society’s conference. In this study he argued that relocating agricultural workers to *borghi rurali* situated closer to the land that they farmed was essential for increasing agricultural productivity in southern Italy. The report on Matera arguably provided an opportunity to map out these theoretical ideas in the context of what, in the early 1950s, was considered the archetypal southern Italian rural city.\(^\text{19}\) Writing in 1951 about the first special law for Matera, Mazzocchi Alemanni argued that ‘sarà quanto mai fecondo per la soluzione del più generale problema di un logico e razionale insediamento umano per entro i depressi territori latifondistici.’\(^\text{20}\) As a result a generic model for increasing agricultural productivity in southern Italy was applied to a distinctive local case which, through media and political attention, had become emblematic of a putative concept of southern Italian agriculture. This illustrates the impact that notions of Matera as a symbol of the southern question had on the city’s post-war history. The city was seen as a laboratory for resolving the social and economic problems of the entire Mezzogiorno. Despite their report’s limitations, the urban-planning model that Mazzocchi Alemanni and Calia put forward for rehousing the Sassi’s agricultural workers in *borghi rurali* would shape the provisions of the first special law for Matera. The study’s oversights, however, would prove to be problematic when the special law was implemented in the mid-1950s as will be examined below in detail.

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\(^{19}\) See Mazzocchi Alemanni, ‘Insiemiamento umano’, pp. 137-150.
\(^{20}\) Mazzocchi Alemanni, ‘Il problema dei “Sassi”’, p. 176
3.2 The Study Commission

In 1951 the *Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica* (INU) commissioned a comprehensive study of the Sassi. The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration-Comitato Amministrativo Soccorso ai Senzatetto (UNRRA-CASAS) financed the project.\(^{21}\) Over the next two years the *Commissione di Studio della città e dell’agro di Matera* examined the economic, geographic and demographic conditions as well as the historical development of Matera’s cave dwellings. The study was incorporated into a wider UNRRA-CASAS project to build the purpose-built village La Martella in Matera’s agricultural hinterland. This scheme was projected to rehouse 200 families from the Sassi closer to the land that they worked. The Study Commission’s findings served as a blueprint for the urban planners and architects that designed La Martella’s urban layout and house design.\(^{22}\) Friedrich G. Friedmann, a lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Arkansas, led the project.\(^{23}\) He was joined by a team of seventeen researchers and consultants who contributed to the study.\(^{24}\) A vast amount of

\(^{21}\) For a history of UNRRA-CASAS activities in post-war Italy see Talamona, pp. 175-204.

\(^{22}\) La Martella’s troubled history and development are examined in detail in the next chapter.

\(^{23}\) Friedrich G. Friedmann studied Literature and Philosophy in Rome in the 1930s before fleeing to London and later North America in 1940 to escape racial persecution. He returned to Italy in 1950 having been awarded a Fulbright scholarship to study the philosophy of Italy’s peasantry and carried out field work in Basilicata and Calabria. At the end of 1950 Friedmann received additional funding from the Rockefeller Foundation which allowed him to prolong his research into southern Italy’s rural poor for another nine months. Following this period of study he published the article “The World of “La Miseria”” in which he examines the worldview of southern Italy’s rural culture which drew heavily on Carlo Levi’s portrayal of the peasantry in *Cristo*. For a full biography of Friedmann’s early life see Friedmann, *Miseria e dignità*, pp. 13-33; and Friedrich G. Friedmann, “The Origins of “La Miseria””, in David A. Rees (ed.), *The Ethnographic Moment: correspondence of Robert Redfield and F.G. Friedmann*, Transaction Publishers, New Jersey, 2006, pp. 1-9.

\(^{24}\) In addition to Friedmann, the Commisone’s research team consisted of Giuseppe Insardi: Geography; Francesco Nitti: Medieval and Modern History; Federico Gorio and Ludovico Quaroni: town planning; Rocco Mazzarone: demographics and hygiene conditions; Lidia De Rita: Psychology; Giuseppe Orlando: Economics; Gilberto Marselli: Economics and Rural Sociology; Alberto Giordano: Criminology; Tullio Tentori: Cultural Anthropology; Eleonora Bracco: Prehistory and Paleontology. Moreover, Rigo Innocenti, Riccardo Musatti,
data on the Sassi was gathered which UNRRA-CASAS planned to publish in full, however, only a preliminary report and three official volumes were ever officially issued.  

Friedmann and his team hoped that their work could contribute to improving the living conditions of Sassi residents while concurrently safeguarding local rural culture. It was argued that a development programme from above risked destroying the community’s pre-existing cultural and social bonds. Instead the Study Commission directly consulted Sassi residents during its field work. The local population was surveyed in an attempt to understand the economic and psychological needs of the families that would be transferred to La Martella. Moreover, Friedmann and his team contended that

Venerando Correnti, Tommaso Ventura and Giovanni Vitrani worked as consultants on the project and Giovanni Margolot acted as the group’s secretary.

See Musatti, Friedmann and Isnardi; Francesco Nitti, Una città del Sud, vol. II, UNRRA-Casas Prima Giunta, Rome, 1956; and Tullio Tentori, Il sistema di vita della comunità materana. Riassunto di un’inchiesta etnologica, UNRRA-Casas Prima Giunta, Rome, 1956. Albino Sacco, who worked as an assistant for the Study Commission, claims that the DC dominated management of UNRRA-CASAS decided not to publish the remaining six studies because the researchers involved were linked to Adriano Olivetti’s Comunità movement. Instead, Sacco contends, the material was transferred to Bari and subsequently mislaid. See Bilò and Vadini, pp. 50-51.

Speaking in 1985 about the Study Commission’s aims Friedmann argued that ‘il nostro problema principale era come costruire un insediamento nuovo in modo tale da migliorare le condizioni di vita degli abitanti, e in specie le condizioni igieniche, senza distruggere quelle forme di cultura che erano diffuse da secoli nei Sassi.’ See Friedmann, Miseria e dignità, p. 70. The philosophy behind the Study Commission’s research appears to have drawn directly from Friedmann’s work on southern rural culture. He argued that any development programme for southern Italy needed to protect the positive aspects of southern peasant culture. See Friedrich G. Friedmann, ‘The World of “La Miseria”’, Partisan Review, (1953), no. 20, pp. 218-231. The article was later translated into Italian and published as Friedrich G. Friedmann, ‘Osservazioni sul mondo contadino dell’Italia meridionale’, Quaderni di Sociologia, (1957), no. 3, pp. 148-161.

local residents should be allowed to choose the new community’s political, social and economic structures rather than these elements being imposed from above. The Study Commission’s work was the only instance in which Sassi residents were directly consulted about their transfer to new housing. The *risanamento* programme, in contrast, would be carried out without the input of the 15,000 that it directly impacted. There was, however, a paternalistic undertone to the work that Friedmann and his team carried out. The Study Commission contended that not only could La Martella’s architectural and urban planning design preserve the pre-existing social ties they had located in the Sassi, but it could actually improve them.29

INU and UNRRA-CASAS published the *Commissione*’s preliminary findings in 1953. The report provided data on the Sassi’s housing conditions and demographics as well as an employment profile of residents. According to Friedmann and his team there were 15,052 people living in the Sassi in 1951. Of the 6,276 people in employment 3,254 worked in agriculture, 2,417 in industry, 171 in commercial activities, and 434 in services. The report concluded that there were a total of 3,329 dwellings in the Sassi. A total of 158 cave homes were deemed inhabitable, 1,676 in need of redevelopment work, 509 dwellings could be converted into storerooms or stables, and 986 homes were judged to

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28 This point is made explicitly by Friedmann in his description of his research team’s primary aims: ‘quale tipo di organizzazione potrebbero scegliere le nuove comunità, quale forma e direzione potrebbero assumere le loro attività culturali, sociali, politiche, non stava a noi naturalmente di decidere; a questi interrogativi dovevano rispondere i membri di queste comunità.’ See Federico G. Friedmann, ‘Un Incontro: Matera’, in Musatti, Friedmann and Isnardi, p. 13.

Therefore, the Study Commission contended that, in terms of hygienic and infrastructural considerations, less than half of the Sassi’s homes would need to be abandoned permanently. Although Matera: uno studio claimed that the Commissione’s findings informed the first special law’s provisions and its subsequent implementation, in fact the risanamento programme drew on supplemental housing data that Matera’s Office of Public Works produced. The decision to apparently overlook the housing statistics that Friedmann and his team had generated would become a major topic of debate in secondary sources that examined the first special law’s implementation.31

Another salient aspect of the Study Commission’s findings was psychologist Lidia De Rita’s research into the Sassi’s vicinato system. Vicinato was the name given to the numerous shared courtyards found amongst the Sassi. The single entrance into many of Matera’s cave homes opened out onto an enclosed piazza that was shared between different residents. But the term meant more than just a communal outdoor space where domestic chores were carried out and children played; it also referred to the social ties and norms that existed between the different families which lived side by side in different parts of the Sassi. The vicinato system was significant in terms of the first special law because the numerous architects and town planners that worked on the risanamento programme idealized this social and urban system. Moreover, they attempted to recreate the perceived symbiosis between social bonds and urban layout in the new housing projects that they designed. The vicinati were viewed as an organic example of how architecture and urban planning could stitch

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30 This data is taken from Matera: uno studio, pp. 26-31.
31 This point is discussed in further detail in section 3.4 of this chapter.
together a community’s social fabric. This social and urban system was viewed as a blueprint for fostering the type of community ties which had been lost in modern cities, but had survived amongst the Sassi. The romanticized view of Matera’s vicinati amongst town planners and architects reflected broader urban planning trends in post-war Italy. Anti-urban sentiments and theories of decentralization were prevalent in Italian town planning circles. Urban planning was seen as a means for recovering the social ties that had been lost in large urban sprawls. These ideas were based on Italian interpretations of Lewis Mumford and Ebenezer Howard, whose work on regional planning was first published in Italian in the immediate post-war period. Erwin A. Gutkind’s concept of the ideal community being a homogenous entity founded on social cohesion was also prevalent amongst Italian architects and urban planners in the 1950s. This helps to explain the interest that town planners and architects working on the risanamento programme had in Matera’s vicinati. The Study Commission’s research into the vicinato system and its ability to foster strong social ties, however, produced ambiguous results. Lidia De Rita carried out a

32 The idealization of the vicinato system is exemplified by Federico Gorio who worked on the La Martella project: ‘Quanti urbanisti e quanti sociologi cercano invano la pietra filosofale dell’unità di vicinato, cioè di quell’ideale nucleo di più famiglie che l’affiatamento sociale, oltre che il destino della convivenza, tiene in sesto; e questo fanno con lo scopo finale di riscostuire nei nuclei urbani quel tessuto connettivo che la nostra civiltà con un grave processo di autonecrosi ha inesorabilmente distrutto. Allora ci si accorge che la vita nei Sassi di Matera, esempio raro, è organizzata secondo una fitta struttura di legami primari, socialmente e topograficamente individuati e circoscritti, che la suddividono in tante unità di vicinato, esattamente come tessuto organico è diviso e al tempo stesso costruito in cellule e precisamente come gli urbanisti e sociologi vorrebbero cementate le loro città.’ Federico Gorio, ‘Il villaggio La Martella. Autocritica’, Casabella, (1954), no. 200, pp. 31-38. See also Luigi Piccinato’s description of Matera’s vicinati in his article ‘Matera’, Urbanistica, (1953), no. 15-16, pp. 142-151.


34 Mazzoleni, p. 332
psychosocial and sociometric study of four different vicinati in the early 1950s. She aimed to ascertain the impact that the built environment had on social bonds between different family units living in a vicinato.\(^{35}\)

Her preliminary findings suggested that the social cohesion which the vicinato system was believed to foster had been all but eroded due to economic hardship. Instead she concluded that the Sassi’s social ties had been replaced with petty jealousies, gossip, and intrusiveness. Moreover, there were class, gender and generational tensions amongst the sample of families studied.\(^{36}\) De Rita argued, however, that intervention from above could be enough to redevelop the community spirit that had once been apparent amongst Sassi residents.\(^{37}\) The implication was that the new rural villages and urban quarters planned for development under the auspices of the first special could not only recreate but strengthen the social bonds that the vicinato system had previously fostered. The numerous town planners and architects that worked on the risanamento programme shared this philosophy. The belief was that urban

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\(^{35}\) De Rita based her research methods on the work of the psychotherapist Jacob L. Moreno who, in the 1930s, had formulated a qualitative framework for examining social bonds amongst New Yorkers. De Rita’s fieldwork at Matera was published as Lidia De Rita, ‘Controllo sociometrico di vicinati di una comunità lucana’, Bollettino di Psicologia applicata, (1954), no. 4-5, pp. 149-186; Lidia De Rita, ‘Il vicinato come gruppo’, Centro sociale, vol. 2 (1955), no. 1, pp. 3-10; and Lidia De Rita, ‘I Sassi sotto inchiesta’, Civiltà delle macchine, (1956), no. 2, pp. 26-32.

\(^{36}\) See De Rita, ‘Controllo sociometrico’, pp. 149-186.

\(^{37}\) She argued that: ‘il vicinato come gruppo ha avuto una sua funzione precisa ed indubbiamente positiva per molti aspetti; oggi sembra averla persa nel disorganizzarsi generale del vecchio mondo, ma forse uno dei mezzi per ricostituirlo più solidamente e in un’atmosfera rinnovata e democratica la vecchia trama sociale del mondo contadino è quello di non lasciar naufragare il vicinato, di valorizzarlo e potenziarlo invece come gruppo sociale per meglio agire attraverso di esso. Sarà più facile in tal modo assecondare la spinta al rinnovamento delle nuove generazioni senza lasciare che diventi un motivo di rottura le cui conseguenze morali possono essere molto dannose; solo così si aiuterà meglio e più naturalmente il mondo contadino a risolvere con le sue stesse forze i suoi grandi problemi.’ De Rita, ‘Il vicinato come gruppo’, p 10.
planning and architecture provided the means to create an ideal community and promote social improvement.\textsuperscript{38}

3.3 The first special law

Five days after De Gasperi’s first visit to Matera on 23 July 1950 the DC leader announced that the Italian government would take measures to resolve the housing situation he had witnessed in the city. Emilio Colombo was asked to establish a parliamentary commission that would draw up plans for the \textit{risanamento} of Matera’s cave homes. On 2 April 1951 Colombo presented a draft law to the Italian Prime Minister. It closely resembled Mazzocchi Alemanni and Calia’s 1950 report. The draft law recommended the same three-plank strategy for resolving Matera’s housing problems. Thus it made provision for rural villages to rehouse the Sassi’s agricultural workers closer to the land that they farmed, suburban residential quarters for artisans and urban workers, and the renovation of cave homes considered fit for habitation. A budget of four-billion lire would be allocated to implement the project. The data that Colombo provided on housing conditions and employment, however, was directly copied from the ECA-sponsored report on the Sassi.\textsuperscript{39} As a result the housing statistics that Colombo’s bill presented were taken from a study carried out in 1938 and not from contemporary data. This exemplified one of the \textit{risanamento}
programme's continued problems: draft rehousing plans based on information that was out of date leading to practical problems when later implemented.

The submission of Colombo's draft law prompted a local propaganda campaign in Matera itself. The proposed bill was hailed as the first step in tackling what Italian politicians and the public sphere had considered to be a national shame. The PCI, however, had put its own provisional law for the *risanamento* of the Sassi before parliament on 6 March 1951. This draft bill had been penned by Michele Bianco, Communist deputy for Potenza and a native of Miglionico near Matera. Anne Toxey has recently claimed that both draft laws offered similar solutions for resolving the widely-publicized housing problem at Matera. In fact, Bianco’s draft law contrasted with the government bill on a number of key points. Instead of building rural villages Bianco had suggested transferring the estimated 2,142 troglodyte families living in substandard accommodation to purpose-built council houses in Matera itself. Furthermore, no explicit provision for renovating existing houses in the Sassi was given. Rather, the PCI’s draft law implied that existing dwellings declared uninhabitable should be demolished. In addition, while the government draft law had a budget of four-billion lire, Bianco in contrast had projected an expenditure of eight billion lire to complete his urban rehousing project. Despite these discrepancies the introductory texts of both draft laws were

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40 The DC produced posters to celebrate the provisional drafting of the special law for Matera. See ASM, Prefettura (Ricovero 90), busta 82, fascicolo 661, sottofascicolo A.
41 Toxey, *Materan Contradictions*, pp. 90-91
42 Bianco claimed that it would be more cost effective to demolish the 501 homes which, according to Crispino's 1938 report, would need renovation work to render them fit for habitation. See Bianco, pp. 1-4.
similar in tone and content and concurred on one point: the Sassi constituted a national shame which required prompt and comprehensive state intervention.

A cross-party parliamentary legislative committee was established in the early months of 1952 to discuss the draft law’s terms and conditions. It met between February and March of the same year. The proceedings reveal that Matera’s cave dwellings were considered an issue of national importance in the early 1950s. It was agreed by all interlocutors that the Sassi were a national disgrace and that Matera’s housing problems needed to be tackled as soon as possible. That was the only issue, however, on which there was cross-party consensus. There were divergent opinions on how the *risanamento* programme should best be carried out. But these different viewpoints were not divided evenly along party or ideological lines. Instead the debate revealed a number of underlying practical concerns regarding the proposed urban renewal programme at Matera.

The main issue that divided committee members was the construction of purpose-built rural villages. The PCI representatives argued against the transfer of Matera’s rural workers to outlying agricultural settlements. Michele

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43 Anne Toxey has argued that two urban renewal models were discussed in the context of the special law for Matera: a systematic rehousing programme versus the renovation of existing homes. In fact the second issue was only briefly mentioned during the parliamentary committee’s discussions on the special law. Emilio Colombo outlined that the renovation of homes in the Sassi deemed fit for habitation would be based on the cost of supplying them with essential services: water supply, sewage system and electricity. Isolated homes would not be renovated if providing the services listed above cost more than building new homes for residents. Moreover, Michele Bianco frequently called for the whole-scale destruction of the Sassi during his parliamentary interventions on the subject which suggests that a potential renovation programme was not his main priority regarding special legislation for Matera. See Toxey, *Materan Contradictions*, pp. 90-91. For the parliamentary committee discussions cited see Camera dei Deputati, *Commissione in sede legislativa, Commissione VII, Lavori Pubblici*, LXIX, 6 February 1952, p. 574; Camera dei Deputati, *Commissione in sede legislativa, Commissione VII, Lavori Pubblici*, LXX, 8 February 1952, p. 578; and Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei Deputati, 26 September 1951, p. 30585.
Bianco, who had drafted the PCI’s special law, was the most vocal opponent of the *borghi-rurali* model. Although not opposed to this concept in principle, he argued that the decision to rehouse the majority of the Sassi’s cave dwellers in rural villages had been made without a close examination of the city’s social and economic characteristics. Moreover, local residents had not been directly consulted and would have no representatives on the proposed committee that would implement the special law. Transferring Matera’s estimated 2,000 agricultural families to rural accommodation, Bianco contended, would only be successful if they were allocated adequately-sized plots of farmland and were consulted about their housing needs. According to his calculations, however, the land reform board would have just 1,000 hectares of expropriated land to distribute at Matera amongst the estimated 1,500 families set to be re-housed in the three agricultural settlements. This would leave a large number of residents landless and dependent on securing temporary farm labour at the closest urban centre, i.e. Matera. Thus, Bianco argued, the planned rural villages would not be a viable option at Matera. Instead he proposed building 1,500 urban homes and 685 rural dwellings.44

Giulio Spallone, PCI deputy for Abruzzo, also argued against the construction of rural villages for the Sassi’s agricultural families. He maintained that there were few unified farms close to Matera. Rather the city’s agricultural land was divided into small landholdings and rented properties. These plots

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were scattered in various locations across the city’s agricultural hinterland. Spallone added the point that *braccianti* had no fixed workplace. Therefore, he argued that transferring small landowners, tenant farmers and day labourers to rural villages would not reduce the amount of time they spent travelling to and from their workplace and thus increase agricultural productivity as the government’s draft law claimed. Land allocation was again deemed to be the key issue regarding the viability of the rural-village model. Spallone argued that if the land reform board could not guarantee agricultural land for Matera’s small farmers and landless workers, then the planned rural settlements should be scrapped.\(^4\)

Concerns over the suitability and viability of rural villages to rehouse the Sassi’s agricultural workers, however, were not limited to opposition benches. Giovanni Perlingieri, DC deputy for Benevento, and Francesco Moro, Christian Democrat representative for Verona, were equally opposed to implementing this urban-planning model at Matera. Pierlingieri argued that Matera’s fixed-wage labourers, day labourers and tenant farmers had no fixed relationship with the land they worked and preferred the convenience of urban living to life in the countryside. Both DC deputies argued that rural workers would need to be guaranteed an adequate plot of farmland before being transferred to the proposed new settlements.\(^5\)


Furthermore, the Communist Party was concerned with the proposed rental charges set out in the government's draft law. Under these provisions the Istituto Case Popolari di Matera would set rents based on the price of construction and maintenance of new properties. Citing examples in the provincial towns of Miglianico and Stigliano, Michele Bianco feared that many families would struggle to pay the rents imposed. Instead he suggested that housing management should be controlled by Matera’s municipal council. A guarantee would be needed to assure that rents on new homes were fixed at an affordable rate. 47 Pierlingieri and Moro echoed Bianco’s concern over potential rental prices in the urban and rural housing projects as set out in the DC’s draft law. 48 There appears, however, to have been no consultation with Sassi residents on this or any of the special law’s provisions. The issue of rental prices for new residents would become a problem once the first special law was implemented in the mid-1950s.

Emilio Colombo defended the terms of his draft law. He argued that the construction of urban dwellings would only resolve the local housing problem. Instead the transfer of rural workers to purpose-built villages within a 10 kilometre radius of Matera would allow the government to concurrently tackle an economic problem. Citing Mazzocchi Alemanni and Calia’s report, Colombo maintained that moving Matera’s rural workers closer to their land would increase the city’s agricultural productivity.


48 Camera dei Deputati, Commissione in sede legislativa, Commissione VII, Lavori Pubblici, LXX, 8 February 1952, p. 581
draft law argued that the agricultural reform board would have 3,500 hectares of land to distribute at Matera. Colombo made it clear that it would not be possible to transform all of the Sassi’s landless agricultural workers into small farmers. They could instead be employed by the small farming businesses created in the context of the projected rural villages. 49

Despite reservations about aspects of the draft law for the Sassi, the Communist Party ultimately voted in favour of the bill. Following discussions in the Italian Senate the first special law was passed on 17 May 1952. Similar to the land reform issue, the PCI found itself in the difficult position of potentially opposing legislation that it had originally proposed. In the case of Matera, however, the Communist Party chose to support the DC government’s intervention, albeit with some caveats. It seems likely that a more nuanced understanding of the issues in Matera was overridden by the city’s symbolic importance. PCI deputies had frequently referred to the Sassi as a national shame in parliamentary discussions and the concept was central to Michele Bianco’s own draft special law for Matera. 50 Opposing the first special law would arguably have left the Communist Party vulnerable to accusations from their political opponents of being unpatriotic. The decision, therefore, was made to reluctantly support the Legge Colombo.


50 Speaking in parliament on 20 February 1950, the PCI deputy Mario Alicata referred to the Sassi as a ‘vergogna di una nazione civile, vergogna di uno Stato moderno.’ See Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei Deputati, 20 February 1951, pp. 26316-26330. See also Michele Bianco’s parliamentary intervention on 27 February 1951. Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei Deputati, 27 February 1951, pp. 26560-26564.
The first special law had three main criteria. First, the transfer of families living in homes deemed uninhabitable to new accommodation; second, the renovation of those houses considered fit for habitation and the provision of essential public services; and third, the creation of rural villages to rehouse agricultural workers.\textsuperscript{51} A programme for implementing the risanamento programme was to be drawn up within a period of two months by the Prefect of Matera, the local mayor, the head of the regional council, the president of the Puglia-Lucania-Molise land reform board, and the head of the regional agricultural authority. This plan was meant to outline in detail the number of families that would have to be transferred to new housing as well as those homes which needed to be renovated. The provisional outline would then have to be approved by the Ministry of Public Works, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Finance. Furthermore, only those families living in houses deemed uninhabitable on 1 January 1951 would be eligible to be rehoused in new accommodation. The decision over which families to relocate would be made by a commission headed by the local mayor and which included representatives of the local prefect’s office, the land reform board, the local office for public works, the agricultural authority, and the local INA-CASA office.\textsuperscript{52} Michele Bianco’s draft law had included a provision to have two Sassi residents as part of the housing commission. This initiative, however, was rejected by the parliamentary legislative committee that drew up the special

\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana}, 18 June 1952, pp. 2206-2208.  
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., pp. 2206-2208
As a result the *risanamento* programme was carried out without the consultation of the 15,000 people whose lives it directly impacted.

Local political reaction to the first special law was predictably divided along ideological lines. A press release from the local administration (the council, mayor and chamber of commerce) thanked De Gasperi and Colombo for the draft bill claiming that ‘così sarà un triste ricordo il problema dei Sassi, che per secoli ha mortificato moralmente e socialmente questa città.’

Furthermore, on 4 April 1951 the DC’s provincial office affixed a number of posters to publicize the presentation of the draft law for the Sassi to the Italian Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi. The text claimed that ‘Il secolare problema della redenzione dei Sassi nei suoi complessi aspetti morali e sociali è affrontato con decisione e con alta visione umanitaria dal Governo, e si pone fra le realizzazioni più imponenti della Democrazia Cristiana.’ The PCI, in contrast, countered noting that Michele Bianco had first put forward draft legislation for Matera. Writing in *L’Unità* Michele Guanti claimed that the DC had simply appropriated Bianco’s legislation for political ends and would fail to keep its promise to implement the bill. Similar to the DC government’s land reform bill, therefore, the Communist Party once again found itself in the difficult position of criticizing a state intervention programme that it had originally proposed.

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53 Raguso, p. 35
54 ASM, Prefettura (Ricovero 90), busta 82, fascicolo 661, sottofascicolo A
55 ASM, Prefettura (Ricovero 90), busta 82, fascicolo 661, sottofascicolo A
It is difficult to gauge popular reaction to the first special law amongst Sassi residents, but police reports, official documents and newspaper accounts provide some fragments of local opinion, albeit filtered through official and political channels. Official reports suggest that Sassi residents greeted the first special law with a sense of cautious optimism. In a letter to the Prefect of Matera dated 5 April 1951 the local police commissioner, Dr. L. Russo, claimed that the announcement of special legislation for Matera’s cave dwellings ‘è stato favorevolmente commentato ed apprezzato da tutta la cittadinanza.’ Writing later the same month, however, the local prefect contended that the local population were sceptical about the government’s promise to implement the special law. Official documents, moreover, reveal that a number of local residents took part in popular protests in the early 1950s calling on the Italian government to provide them with new housing. For example, during Mario Cotellessa’s visit to Matera in his role as Alto Commissario per l’Igiene e la Sanità in April 1950, an estimated 100 women blocked the official’s car in an attempt to make him visit their homes. Furthermore, in March 1952 a small group of women from the neighbourhoods of Casalnuovo and Madonna della Virtù presented a petition to the local mayor calling for the construction of 2,000 homes and the risanamento of the Sassi. These protests suggest that there was popular pressure from a number of local residents to provide alternative accommodation for Matera’s cave dwellers. A similar viewpoint was expressed

57 See ASM, Prefettura (Ricovero 90), busta 82, fascicolo 661, sottofascicolo A.
58 He claimed that the ‘progetto di legge presentato, appassiona l’opinione pubblica in modo particolare pur rimanendo alla superficie un atteggiamento di diffidente attesa verso il Governo.’ See ACS, MI, Gabinetto, Fascicoli permanenti, Atti, busta 210, relazioni mensili 50-52.
59 See ASM, Prefettura (Ricovero 90), busta 80.
60 See ASM, Prefettura (Ricovero 90), busta 82, fascicolo 661, sottofascicolo A.
by a local Sassi resident during an interview published in *L’Unità* in 1952. The unnamed woman told Aniello Coppola that ‘vogliamo i diritti umani e una casa igienica come la Costituzione parla e vogliamo vivere in pace ... vogliamo fuggire da questo “sasso”’.\(^6\) Tullio Tentori found similar sentiments amongst Sassi residents during his research for the Study Commission in the early 1950s. The people interviewed called for improved housing to replace the humid and overcrowded living conditions of their cave homes. One resident described his house as ‘veramente un’abitazione da cani e non da persone civili’ while another declared that ‘come vedete dormiamo nell’acqua ed anche le bestie vivono come la mia famiglia. Di fronte a un popolo civile. Vergognatevi autorità.’\(^6\) These reactions suggest that narratives of national shame and modernity generated in the context of post-war Matera may have influenced popular attitudes towards the Sassi amongst a number of residents. Anne Toxey has argued that notions of national shame were a means through which the local population was persuaded to move to new housing. She contends that as a result Sassi residents shunned their former homes in favour of the promise of modern housing.\(^6\) Tentori, in contrast, argued that there was a new sense of social justice amongst Matera’s poorest inhabitants in the post-war period. Sassi residents, he contended, believed that they were entitled to better housing conditions and had begun to voice their opinions openly. Ideas of national shame and modernity generated in the context of post-war Matera may have impacted notions of what constituted acceptable housing for the Sassi residents that Tentori questioned in the early 1950s. At the same time, however, it is

\(^6\) Aniello Coppola, ‘La vita delle donne nei Sassi di Matera’, *L’Unità*, 24 April 1952, p. 6
\(^6\) Tentori, pp. 25-27
\(^6\) Toxey, ‘Via Media’, p. 73
important to acknowledge the agency of those people interviewed who called for improved living standards for themselves and their families. Speaking in 1985 Friedrich Friedmann claimed that the work of the Study Commission in the early 1950s clearly showed that the majority of Sassi residents were enthusiastic about the idea of moving to and owning their own homes and farm land. In contrast, he argued, it was middle-class landlords who rented out cave dwellings as well as local shop keepers who were opposed to the transfer of Sassi residents to new accommodation. They feared that the risanamento programme would result in a loss of income.64 This suggests that there were class divisions over the implementation of special legislation for the Sassi with local residents pushing for new housing and landlords opposed to development plans for financial reasons. It would, however, be mistaken to make sweeping claims about the amount of popular support for the state rehousing programme at Matera and the subsequent special law amongst Sassi residents. The evidence is fragmentary and in many cases has been filtered through official documents and the party press. It does seem clear, however, that a section of the estimated 15,000 people living in Matera’s cave homes had called for the state to provide them with new housing. There was, however, little or no consultation with the families that the special law would directly affect once legislation was implemented. Apart from the Study Commission’s work and the PCI deputy Michele Bianco’s call for two Sassi residents to be included on the special law’s housing commission, there appears to have been no political will to consult the local population. Instead the risanamento programme was implemented from

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64 Friedmann, *Miseria e dignità*, p. 70
above. This oversight reflects the paternalistic nature of state intervention at Matera. The implication of this approach is that government officials and national politicians assumed that the local population would be unable to make any noteworthy contribution to the *risanamento* programme. Rather the modernisation of Matera was the responsibility of the Italian state. This arguably reflected the widely-held notion in post-war Italian politics that the South was incapable of reforming itself. Images of Matera as a symbol of the southern question and a national shame contributed to shaping this narrative post-1945. This idea appears to have directly influenced the city's post-war history. In practical terms the lack of consultation with Sassi residents would result in a number of infrastructural and social problems for the new housing projects when the first special law was implemented in the 1950s. These difficulties will be examined in the next section.

### 3.4 Implementing the *risanamento* programme

Following the approval of the first special law for Matera on 17 May 1952 the city's Office of Public Works (OPW) produced a provisional report on how the legislation would be implemented. The data on housing conditions that the

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65 During interviews carried out with three former Sassi residents in 1987, Angelo Del Parigi and Rosalba Demetrio noted that: ‘quando nella conversazione con le fonti si tocca il tasto del risanamento dei Sassi, del grande programma di costruzione di rioni e borghi rurali volute dalla legge 619 del ’52, le risposte si fanno evasive, gli sguardi più schivi del solito, gli atteggiamenti tradiscono un certo imbarazzo. Stati d’animo autentici, manifestati della volontà altrui, quasi non si avesse il diritto o non ci si ritenesse degni di pensare e di dire la ‘propria’ sulla questione.’ See Del Parigi and Demetrio, p. 27. The implication is that local residents did not feel that they could voice their opinion on the *risanamento* programme. This arguably reflects the fact that Sassi residents were not consulted during the implementation of the special law and felt excluded from the decision making process.

report laid out shaped early plans for the amount of rural and urban housing that would need to be built to rehouse families living in substandard housing. The OPW compiled its report collating data from the local prefect’s office, the local mayor, the president of the regional council, the local land reform office, the agricultural inspection authority and the UNRRA-CASAS sponsored Study Commission. The report concluded that there were 3,374 homes located in the Sassi. Of these just 43 were deemed to be inhabitable, 859 were judged to be in need of renovation and 2,472 were considered uninhabitable. In addition, the OPW draft programme included data on the employment profile of the 2,581 families living in Matera’s cave homes. An estimated 1,653 of this total carried out work connected to Matera’s urban centre: artisans, small business owners, and construction workers. The report, therefore, recommended that these families should be rehoused in three urban neighbourhoods. The remaining 928 families, in contrast, worked primarily in agriculture. Data on the subdivision of these agricultural workers into small landowners, tenant farmers, fixed-wage labourers and casual labourers was not provided in the OPW plan. However, the report made provision for the transfer of these 928 agricultural families to purpose-built rural villages in Matera’s hinterland: 36 families would be transferred to the village of Venusio, 55 to Santa Lucia, 200 families to La Martella, 139 families to Timmari-Picciano, 118 to Murge and Torre Spagnola, and 380 landless families to semi-rural villages close to Matera.67

The OPW claimed to have taken the availability of agricultural land into consideration when drawing up plans for the location and size of rural villages.

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67 Of these projects only the villages of La Martella and Venusio would be completed during the scope of this study. For the data reported above see Lubrano, p. 4.
It claimed that 900 hectares of demesne land at Lucinano-Picciano outside Matera would be expropriated and then be made available for distribution to landless workers. The OPW report made it clear that many of the families to be rehoused in rural villages already owned or rented land in Matera’s agricultural hinterland. The size of the proposed rural villages, however, was not set in stone. The report made it clear that its results would be subject to the availability of appropriate agricultural land. It is clear from the OPW report that its findings were provisional. There was a clear acknowledgement that the rehousing programme would need to be flexible and that a more accurate study would have to be carried out before a final decision on the number of cave homes to be permanently closed could be made.68

In 1952 the Ministry of Public Works entrusted the architect Luigi Piccinato with overseeing Matera’s rehousing programme. Piccinato was asked to draft a comprehensive town planning programme for the city, i.e. the Piano Regionale Generale (PRG).69 UNRRA-CASAS had started constructing the village of La Martella prior to the special law’s enactment and Alcide De Gasperi inaugurated the project on 17 May 1953.70 In October of the same year the Ministry of Public Works launched an architectural design competition to tender submissions for the remaining rural villages and urban quarters to be built under the terms of the special law. The winning designs were announced

68 See Lubrano’s 1952 report.
69 See the series of letters between the Prefect of Matera, the Ministry of Public Works and the Regional Office for Public Works found in ASM, Prefettura, Atti Amministrativi di Gabinetto (Ricovero 1990), busta 82, fascicolo 662, sottofascicolo B. For an outline and discussion of Piccinato’s PRG for Matera see Piccinato, pp. 142-151; Raguso, pp. 51-63; Restucci and Tafuri, pp. 67-70; and Leonardo Sacco, ‘Matera ’61’, in Giorgio Baglieri, Marcello Fabbri and Leonardo Sacco (eds.), Cronache dei tempi lunghi: Basilicata e mezzogiorno verso gli anni 60, Lacaita, Manduria, 1965, pp. 406-412.
70 Chapter 4 examines the construction of La Martella in detail.
in November 1954. However, only three urban neighbourhoods and one rural village were completed under the auspices of the first special law. The construction process and early lives of these housing schemes proved to be problematic. Examining these projects individually will help to shed light on the first special law’s implementation and its limitations which will then be re-evaluated in detail.

**Serra Venerdì**

Serra Venerdì was the largest urban neighbourhood built under the umbrella of the first special law. The residential quarter was designed to provide 828 new homes and 62 additional buildings for essential services, including 37 shops. It was built on a hill overlooking the UNRRA-CASAS village La Martella. In 1954 a national competition was held to tender designs for Serra Venerdì. Luigi Piccinato and Luisa Anversa Ferretti were entrusted with drawing up the blueprint for the project’s urban layout. Housing design and the construction contract were awarded to a team of architects and engineers which included Leonardo Favini, Luigi Aversa, Roberto Pontecorvo, Renzo Giorgetti and Aldo Pinto. There was an attempt to reflect some of the distinguishing features of regional design in Serra Venerdì’s housing. The shape of windows and loggia and the type of blinds and fireplaces chosen were loosely modelled on local architecture.\(^7\)

Building work on the residential neighbourhood started in May 1955 and there were 430 families living there one year later. Emilio Colombo, the DC

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\(^7\) See ‘Il quartiere “B” Serra Venerdì, *Casabella continuità*, (1959), no. 231, pp. 25-28 and ASM, Genio Civile, Versamento VII, busta 94. For an appraisal of the project’s architectural merits see Raguso, pp. 113-120.
deputy for Potenza and the region’s most influential politician, oversaw the official opening ceremony in May 1956. This formal inauguration was covered in the national press and featured in an official newsreel. Serra Venerdi’s second lot of 260 new houses was officially inaugurated on 22 December 1957.\footnote{Altri seicento alloggi popolari a Matera nuova tappa per il risanamento dei Sassi’, Corriere del Giorno, 22 December 1957, p. 5. An official newsreel was dedicated to the inauguration ceremony held at Serra Venerdi and Lanera on 22 December 1957. See La Settimana INCOM, Scompaiono i “Sassi”, (Italy, 1958).}

Despite the government fanfare which accompanied Serra Venerdi’s inauguration, however, the project was beset by a number of problems from the outset. Archival sources from 1956-1958 reveal that residents complained to the local prefect and the local Genio Civile office about faulty fixtures and fittings in their homes, leaking rainwater during bad weather, blocked sewage systems, inadequate storage space and a lack of public amenities. The neighbourhood’s road and footpath infrastructure was incomplete and there was no street lighting. There were reports of ground-floor flooding and the degradation of the existing road network.\footnote{A letter from the Associazione Autonoma degli Inquilini del Rione Serra Venerdì dated 28 September 1956, just four months after the project’s official inauguration, outlined the housing problems listed above. Moreover, a letter from Dr. Salvatore Masciandro, president of the Istituto autonomo per le case popolari Matera, to the local council, prefect and genio civile office documented the problems with Serra Venerdi’s road infrastructure and revealed that many of the earlier housing problems had persisted into 1958. See ASM, Genio Civile, Versamento VII, busta 21. For further documentation on Serra Venerdi’s infrastructural problems see ASM, Prefettura (Ricovero 90), busta 82, fascicolo, 668, sottofascicolo 6.}

Furthermore, residents complained about the amount of rent that they were expected to pay for their new homes and the separate rate for nearby allotments.\footnote{Article 13 of the first special law had fixed rental prices on new homes built to rehouse Sassi residents at 0.5 per cent of the building cost. See Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, 18 June 1952, pp. 2206-2208.} Many families relocated to Serra Venerdi had owned their former cave homes in the Sassi or had paid lower rents compared to their new accommodation. The transfer to more expensive housing created financial hardship for the majority of residents who were
employed in manual labour or were pensioners with modest incomes. Official documents show that 137 of the 536 families at Serra Venerdì were in arrears with their rent in June 1957. Eviction notices were served to the indebted parties later the same month. Over the next year a number of residents only managed to avoid eviction thanks to last-minute financial assistance from family members and local public figures. Local officials were faced with the prospect of evicting people that had been transferred from the Sassi less than a year earlier. In addition there was growing civil unrest amongst residents coupled as well as political agitation from the PCI. In February 1958 rents at Serra Venerdì were reduced by 30 lire per month following direct intervention from the Minister for Public Works. The Sassi commission’s failure to recognise that increased rental prices would be an issue for families transferred to new housing at Serra Venerdì reflects the fact that there was no consultation

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75 A petition dated 20 July 1957 from approximately 50 local residents calling for lower rental prices argued that ‘i sottoscritti abitavano le note case del Sasso e per tali case pagavano un irrisorio affitto di poche migliaia di lire all’anno. Invece ora devono pagare da 3 alle 6 mila lire al mese, e per causa di disoccupazione, di malattie, di invalidità, di pensioni minime … si vedono costretti a non pagare la pigione.’ See ASM, Prefettura (Ricovero 90), busta 82, fascicolo 671, sottofascicolo 3. For detailed information on rental payments at Serra Venerdì see ASM, Prefettura (Ricovero 90), busta 82, fascicolo 671, sottofascicolo 1; and ASM, Prefettura (Ricovero 90), busta 82, fascicolo 671, sottofascicolo 3.

76 See, for example, a report from Matera’s police commissioner entitled ‘Serra Venerdì (Matera) – Sfratto di assegnatari di alloggi’ about the attempted eviction of four families on 31 July 1957. ASM, Prefettura (Ricovero 90), busta 82, fascicolo 671, sottofascicolo 3. This incident was also covered in the local newspaper Basilicata. See the article ‘Intimati a Matera 150 sfratti agli abitanti di Serra Venerdì’, Basilicata, 2 August 1957, p. 4. Additional documentation on threatened evictions from Serra Venerdì is contained in ASM, Prefettura (Ricovero 90), busta 82, fascicolo 671, sottofascicolo 2.

77 Local members of the PCI organized a public meeting at Serra Venerdì on 22 July 1957 in opposition to the threatened evictions. See report from the local police in ASM, Prefettura (Ricovero 90), busta 82, fascicolo 671, sottofascicolo 3. Moreover, a number of articles on the issue were published in L’Unità. See ‘Lo sfratto incombe su 50 famiglie del rione Serra Venerdì di Matera’, L’Unità, 26 June 1957, page number not available; Giuseppe Palmieri, ‘Hanno ricevuto le intimazioni di pagamento 44 assegnatari delle case popolari di Matera’, L’Unità, 30 June 1957, page number not available.

78 See letter dated 20 February 1958 from the Minister of Public Works to the Prefect of Matera and local genio civile in ASM, Prefettura (Ricovero 90), busta 82, fascicolo 671, sottofascicolo 3.
with Sassi residents. Instead state intervention at Matera ignored the social and economic exigencies of the local population.

**Lanera**

Lanera was the smallest of the three urban neighbourhoods built under the terms of the first special law for the Sassi. It was planned to provide 353 residential homes, 30 public buildings and 19 shops on a site close to the city’s sixteenth-century castle overlooking the Piano. The quarter’s design was awarded to the architect Mario Coppi and the engineer Marcello Fabbri. In contrast to the reinforced concrete used at Serra Venerdì and Spine Bianche, Lanera’s designers incorporated the use of local building materials and techniques, such as tufa rock and adobe bricks, into the design of their three-storey apartment blocks. Construction work on Lanera started in 1956 and on 22 December 1957 Emilio Colombo, the then Minister for Agriculture, and Giacomo Sedati, undersecretary at the Ministry of Public Works, visited Matera to officially inaugurate the project. This event was covered in the national press and was the subject of an official newsreel. In a letter to Adone Zoli, the then Italian Prime Minister, the Prefect of Matera argued that Lanera’s upcoming inauguration was of national significance ‘in quanto essa rappresenta la concreta attuazione di un impegno del Governo.’ The media coverage of this

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79 See Doria, pp. 47-52; and ‘Altri seicento alloggi popolari a Matera nuova tappa per il risanamento dei Sassi’, Corriere del Giorno, 22 December 1957, p. 5.
80 For an in-depth discussion of Lanera’s urban layout and design see Raguso, pp. 140-143.
81 See ‘Altri seicento alloggi popolari a Matera nuova tappa per il risanamento dei Sassi’, Corriere del Giorno, 22 December 1957, p. 5 and ‘Sorgono moderni villaggi di villette intorno all’inferno di pietra. Presto i “sassi” di Matera saranno abbandonati dagli uomini’, Il Giornale del Mezzogiorno, 2-9 January 1958, p. 3. An official newsreel was dedicated to the inauguration ceremony held at Serra Venerdì and Lanera on 22 December 1957. See La Settimana INCOM, Scompaiono i “Sassi” (Italy, 1958).
82 In addition, Matera’s prefect argued that visits from erstwhile Italian Prime Minister’s (De Gasperi and Antonio Segni) had ‘determinato tali favorevoli ripercussioni di carattere
event showed that Matera was still deemed to be of national importance in terms of government propaganda and promoting the *intervento straordinario*. In contrast to the infrastructural issues and resulting social tensions experienced at Serra Venerdi in the late 1950s, the primary source material on Lanera suggests that the project experienced fewer teething problems. In October 1959, however, local residents sent a petition to Emilio Colombo complaining about the lack of a public oven and the fact that the proposed green space had been left unplanted leading to sand blowing into their homes during bad weather.83 Despite the fact that Lanera had featured in government propaganda to promote the DC’s development programme for southern Italy, the neighbourhood fell into a state of neglect in the late 1950s.

**Spine Bianche**

Spine Bianche was the last of the three urban quarters built under the auspices of the special law to be completed. The project, located to the north west of Matera, was designed to provide 687 houses for 3,500 people as well as 24 shops, 24 artisan workshops, municipal buildings a church, a market and a crèche. The project’s urban layout was awarded to a team of architects headed by Carlo Aymonino. Moreover, Giancarlo De Carlo, Mario Fiorentino, Felice Gorio, Hilda Selam and Vito Sangirardi were entrusted with the building design.84 An attempt was made in Spine Bianche’s overall plans to recreate and

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83 See ASM, Prefettura (Ricovero 90), busta 82, fascicolo 668, sottofasciolo 4.
84 The other architects involved in drawing up Spine Bianche’s urban layout were C. Chiarini, M. Girelli, S. Lenci and M. Ottolenghi. See Sergio Lenci, ‘Esperienza nella progettazione del quartiere Spine Bianche a Matera’, *Casabella Continuità*, (1959), no. 231, pp. 21-22. For information on Spine Bianche’s housing design see the Ufficio del Genio Civile’s report dated 25 August 1959 in ASM, Genio Civile, Versamento 0, busta 62.
foster the social ties of Matera's vicinati. Construction was started in 1955 and the first lot of houses were handed over to new residents in 1959. The public buildings and the neighbourhood’s road network, however, were still unfinished when the village was inaugurated. A second lot of houses and the remaining amenities were finally completed in 1964 but Spine Bianche quickly fell into a state of disrepair due to the lack of public services that the local council provided to the new neighbourhood.

It is significant that no national politicians took part in Spine Bianche’s inauguration and there was no national press coverage of this event in contrast to the fanfare that had greeted the official opening of Matera’s other new urban neighbourhoods. By 1959 Matera had lost its symbolic importance in terms of promoting government intervention in southern Italy. Land reform and the southern question had decreased in political importance with the onset of Italy's economic boom and a period of rural exodus as millions of Italians swapped agriculture for life and work in one of Italy's rapidly growing urban centres. This process resulted in a change in political focus and meant that, in the context of official propaganda, the risanamento programme's political currency had all but disappeared and by 1959 Spine Bianche, like the risanamento programme, had become an anachronism.

85 Writing in Casabella Continuità Sergio Lenci, one of the architects that worked on Spine Bianche, revealed that the Sassi’s viciniti had captivated his team of architects and that they had proposed building a series of houses with closed courtyards in an attempt to preserve the traditional social bonds of Matera’s cave dwellers. See Lenci, p. 21.
86 See the interview with Oronzo Vincenzo Manicone, one of Spine Bianche's original residents, in Doria, p. 57.
87 For an account of Spine Bianche's degradation see Doria, pp. 55-59.
88 This point is developed in detail below. See pp. 208-211.
Venusio

Borgo Venusio was the second rural village built to house agricultural workers from the Sassi under the terms of the special law for Matera (the first village, La Martella, is the subject of the next chapter). Luigi Piccinato was awarded the design contract for the project. Venusio was to be built 7.5 kilometres from Matera next to a partially abandoned village that the Opera Nazionale Combattenti had constructed in 1927 to house demobbed soldiers. The new project at Venusio planned to rehouse 66 agricultural families living in the Sassi closer to the agricultural land that they worked. In addition the village would provide municipal buildings, a post office, a police station, a doctor’s surgery, seven shops, a crèche, a social centre, a primary school and a Catholic church.89

Alcide De Gasperi laid the first stone at Venusio in an official ceremony on 17 May 1953 following the inauguration of the UNRRA-CASAS sponsored-village La Martella. UNRRA-CASAS was entrusted with overseeing the construction work at Venusio which started in 1954. The 66 houses were completed in 1956 but the project was beset by a number of problems. There were delays in completing Venusio’s public buildings, road network, water and sewage systems, and in the provision of electricity.90 Moreover, there were problems securing the estimated 350 hectares of land to be allocated to families relocated from the Sassi.91 As a result Venusio was still uninhabited in the early

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89 See the report ‘Per la costruzione degli Edifici Pubblici del Borgo “Venusio” a Matera’ in ASM, Genio Civile, VII Versamento, busta 117.
90 In a letter dated 17 July 1955 to Emilio Colombo, Matera’s prefect wrote that ‘l’esecuzione di dette opere [public buildings and essential services] è indispensabile per poter procedere all’assegnazione delle case coloniche, altrimenti le case stesse costruite e complete rimarranno chiuse per parecchio tempo.’ See ASM, Prefeturra (Ricovero 90), busta 82, fascicolo 663.
91 See the letter to Emilio Colombo from the Prefect of Matera dated 30 January 1956. The prefect wrote that the ‘trasferimento delle famiglie in quella zona [Venusio] si presenta
1960s and a number of buildings were subsequently illegally occupied. The project was fully completed in the 1970s, but its houses were instead allocated to non-agricultural workers.\textsuperscript{92} In the 1960s an additional 62 houses were built at the rural village Picciano and 121 new homes at the semi-rural quarter Agna as part of the \textit{risanamento} project, but the projected rural villages at Santa Lucia and Torre Spagnola would never be constructed following the land reform board’s failure to secure the agricultural land needed to render the projects viable.\textsuperscript{93} As a result the \textit{borghi rurali} model that Mazzocchi Alemanni and Calia had put forward was abandoned and instead the \textit{risanamento} programme became an urban housing project. The decision to discard the rural-village model reflects the failure to understand the complex pattern of landholding at Matera. This oversight stemmed from the lack of consultation with local residents who worked in agriculture. Instead a broad model for restructuring southern Italian agriculture was applied to a specific local context. This point arguably reflects the impact that notions of Matera as a symbol of the southern question prevalent in post-war Italy had on the \textit{risanamento} programme for the Sassi. The city was seen as emblematic of a generic idea of southern Italian agriculture and therefore provided a testing ground for theories on how to reorganize and modernize the Mezzogiorno’s agricultural economy.

\textsuperscript{92} Sacco, \textit{Matera contemporanea}, p. 53
\textsuperscript{93} Notably the houses built at Picciano A and B were never officially allocated to families from the Sassi but a number of buildings were and continue to be illegally occupied. See Doria, pp. 67-69.
Re-evaluating the first special law

The implementation of the first special law for Matera was beset by a series of problems as outlined above. There had been a failure to secure the agricultural land needed to create the five viable rural villages that the special law had provisionally planned to build. There were also delays in completing the three urban neighbourhoods built under the terms of the *risanamento* programme and then problems with the housing and essential services provided to new residents. Why were there so many problems with such a high-profile development project? The explanations offered in the existing secondary literature on the *risanamento* programme fail to adequately explain the project’s shortcomings. Manfredo Tafuri’s writing on post-war Matera has been highly influential on recent secondary literature. He attributes the first special law’s limitations to deliberate ideological decisions that the DC government made. However, Tafuri’s work is ideologically driven and neglects to examine a number of important primary source documents on the first special law’s implementation. This oversight has been compounded in a number of subsequent secondary sources on the *risanamento* programme which have accepted Tafuri’s arguments *a priori* without consulting the relevant archival material to test his contentious claims. It is apposite, therefore, to reassess the

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94 Manfredo Tafuri is considered to be one of Italy’s most important post-war architectural historians. In 1974, in conjunction with the architect and academic Amerigo Restucci, Tafuri produced a short book on the history of the Sassi in the context of the OPW’s public competition for restoring the Sassi. The book provides a detailed and comprehensive account of the Matera’s post-war history despite its relative brevity. However, the work’s ideological position and the arguments that it puts forward have arguably cast too long a shadow over subsequent research. Tafuri was a member of the Italian Communist Party. This point has not been taken into consideration in recent secondary literature. Instead Tafuri’s arguments have too often been accepted *a priori* when supplemental analysis of relevant primary source material was needed to test some of his more contentious conclusions. For an intellectual biography of Tafuri see Andrew Leach, *Manfredo Tafuri: Choosing History*, A&S Books, Ghent, 2007.
first special law’s implementation in the context of Tafuri’s work on Matera. This will shed light on the reasons behind the project’s many limitations.

First, Tafuri argues that the wholesale transfer of Sassi residents to new housing and the closure of their cave homes were avoidable. He claims that these decisions were made for political reasons. Local and national bureaucrats, it is argued, deliberately overlooked the data that Friedmann and his team produced on the Sassi. The Study Commission had concluded that there were 3,329 dwellings amongst the Sassi. Of these 158 were deemed inhabitable, 1,676 could be renovated and reused, 986 were uninhabitable and 509 could be adapted for other purposes (such as stables or warehouses). In contrast, the OPW report upon which the implementation of the special law was based had decided that there were 3,374 homes amongst the Sassi. Just 43 houses were deemed fit for habitation, 859 were suitable for renovation and 2,472 were considered uninhabitable. Tafuri contends that the OPW’s decision to declare the majority of Sassi homes unfit for living was taken for political reasons. He argues that by ‘spostando la massima parte dei fondi di stanziamento verso la creazione di borgate esterne, si punta alla dispersione e alla frantumazione di un nucleo sociale politicamente combattivo.’

This argument has been repeated in two recent books on post-war Matera which draw heavily on Tafuri’s work.

There are, however, a number of problems with this contention. First, there is no evidence in the primary source material on the special law’s implementation that the Study Commission’s data was deliberately discarded. Rather archival sources suggest that the provisional decision to rehouse Sassi

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95 Restucci and Tafuri, p. 60
96 See in particular Raguso, p. 38 and Toxey, Materan Contradictions, pp. 88-90.
residents living in homes deemed fit for habitation was the result of urban planning and economic factors rather than ideological concerns. It was considered too expensive to provide essential services to isolated homes in parts of the Sassi that would need to be largely abandoned. This point explains the difference in housing data that the OPW and Study Commission produced.\textsuperscript{97} Tafuri brands the OPW’s argument specious and claims that the special law acted merely as a pretext for the ‘cosciente distruzione del Sasso.’\textsuperscript{98} However, primary sources illustrate that the debate on the renovation of the Sassi’s cave homes, and how best this process should be carried out, continued throughout the 1950s. The OPW’s 1952 report on how to implement the \textit{risanamento} programme was provisional and subject to change. This point is exemplified in the OPW’s 1956 study of the Sassi. It found errors in its 1952 study and provided alternative data on the number of cave homes that would need to be abandoned and those that could be renovated.\textsuperscript{99} This suggests that the decision to empty the Sassi was not firmly established from the approval of the special law onwards as Tafuri contends. Rather the \textit{risanamento} programme was a reactive process characterized by revisions and on-going discussion amongst the civil servants tasked with implementing its provisions.

\textsuperscript{97} See Lubrano’s 1952 report.
\textsuperscript{98} Restucci and Tafuri, p. 60
\textsuperscript{99} Writing in 1956, the chief engineer of Basilicata’s OPW underlined the fundamental need to reassess living conditions in the Sassi based solely on hygienic criteria and not on the urban planning considerations put forward in the OPW’s original 1952 report. Only at that point, he argued, could a final decision on how many existing caves homes would need to be permanently closed be made. This point illustrates that the \textit{risanamento} programme was not unilateral or guided by a single ideological thrust. Rather it appears that the first special law was a complicated process in which civil servants reacted to on-going demographic and urban developments. See G. Travaglini, ‘La prima fase del risanamento dei “Sassi” di Matera. Orientamenti per il completamento dell’opera sulla base dell’esperienza acquisita’, Ufficio del Genio Civile di Matera, Provveditore regionale alle OO.PP. per la Basilicata, 5 November 1956, in ASM, Prefettura (Ricovero 90), busta 82, fascicolo 674, sottofascicolo 3.
Furthermore, the claim that the DC deliberately emptied the Sassi in order to transfer a politically engaged and combative community across the surrounding countryside is problematic. It presumes that the estimated 15,000 inhabitants of Matera’s cave homes were a socially and politically cohesive group. This viewpoint elides the generational, gender and class tensions which appear to have existed amongst Sassi residents in the early 1950s.100 Moreover, Tafuri seems to ignore the fact that the reports of sporadic protest at Matera in the immediate post-war period were directly linked to calls for new housing. His argument overlooks the political agency of those local residents who wished to leave the Sassi and move to new accommodation. Tafuri’s claim that the Sassi’s agricultural and rural workers were part of a socially and politically integrated community appears to be based on an idealized concept of a pre-industrial Gemeinschaft rather than the fragments of evidence on life amongst the Sassi found in primary source material.101 Tafuri also ignores the political pressure from the PCI to transfer residents to new accommodation. Speaking about the Sassi in parliament in 1951 the PCI deputy Michele Bianco, who had presented the first draft law for the Sassi to parliament, had declared that ‘vi è qualcosa da distruggere nella mia terra, e cioè i “Sassi”’.102 Similar sentiments are found in additional parliamentary interventions on the topic from

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101 This point is all the more surprising given that Restucci and Tafuri chastise the different urban planners and architects involved in the risanamento programme for romanticizing the Sassi’s vicinati, but then appear to have made similar claims themselves regarding the apparent sense of political solidarity amongst Matera’s cave dwellers prior to the special law’s implementation. See Restucci and Tafuri, p. 48.

102 *Atti Parlamentari*, Camera dei Deputati, 26 September 1951, p. 30585
No call for the renovation of the Sassi has been found amongst contemporary politicians that discussed the special law's provisions. Instead the political will on both sides of the Cold War divide was that Matera’s cave homes constituted a national shame and should be permanently abandoned. This viewpoint was not limited to the Christian Democrats as Tafuri implies.

Second, Tafuri claims that the failure to locate agricultural land for the projected five rural villages outside Matera, and the subsequent decision to abandon this concept in favour of building urban dwellings, were part of a broader government strategy. He argues that the *risanamento* programme at Matera reflected the DC’s attempts to force agricultural workers off the land and into the building trade with the final aim of creating a cheap labour force for northern Italy’s expanding industrial sector. Tafuri provides no additional sources to back up this contention. Again this analysis of the special law’s implementation has been repeated *a priori* in a number of recent secondary sources. The argument that Matera was part of a larger economic plan to create a cheap labour force for northern industry, however, is debatable for a number of reasons. Primary sources pertaining to the *risanamento* programme reveal no trace of a broader conspiracy to derail the allocation of agricultural

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103 See for example Mario Alicata’s intervention on the Sassi: Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei Deputati, 20 February 1951, pp. 26316-26330.

104 Tafuri argues that the special law’s implementation ‘exemplified the role that the great industrial capital had assigned to underdevelopment: the underdeveloped area was managed as a pool of reserve labour for industrialized areas. To achieve this the agricultural vocation of the south was stressed, the service sector was artificially expanded, and a policy of public works instigated to stimulate consumerism in the south ... public works and building functioned as a means of containing unemployment and providing training for agricultural groups that would later on be encouraged to migrate to developed areas. There they would form a reserve force, enabling producers to keep wages low.’ Manfredo Tafuri, *History of Italian Architecture, 1944-1985*, The MIT Press, London, 1989, pp. 24-25. These points are also made in Restucci and Tafuri, p. 67 and p. 70.

land to Matera’s landless workers. Rather they suggest that the implementation of the first special law was uncoordinated and reactive. The decision to plan rural villages for Matera’s cave dwellers was based on flawed research that Mazzocchi Alemanni had produced. This generic model for rejuvenating southern agriculture was applied to a territory which had come to symbolise the southern question but which had a complex land-holding structure. It is clear from the existing primary sources that the land reform board attempted to expropriate and purchase the necessary land needed for the projected five rural villages, but the holdings close to Matera were a patchwork of plots and not the great estates found in other parts of southern Italy, e.g. the Berlingieri estate in the Metapontino.\(^\text{106}\) When it became clear that the land needed to create viable rural villages in Matera’s hinterland was unavailable, the concept of *borghi rurali* was abandoned in favour of urban dwellings.\(^\text{107}\) The reform board’s failure to understand the nature of land holding at Matera, however, reflects the fact that local residents were not consulted during the implementation of the first special law. The complex nature of land holding at Matera was misunderstood or ignored completely. Instead development models for the entire Mezzogiorno were applied from above to a specific economy without taking local factors into account. This reflects the impact that notions of Matera

\(^{106}\) The Metapontino is located on the Ionian littoral. This coastal region stretches for 60 kilometres between the provinces of Taranto and Matera covering an area of 80,000 hectares. Before land reform, the Metapontino had been divided into eight different estates, the largest of which, at Policoro, covered 6,500 hectares. The remaining land had been owned or rented by rural workers who lived in one of the nearby inland villages. Until the eradication of Malaria in 1950, however, the Metapontino had been largely uninhabited with approximately 93 per cent of land used for pasture and cereal cultivation and large tracts of woodland retained for hunting. See King, *Land Reform*, pp. 141-142.

\(^{107}\) See the report from the Sassi Commission meeting held on 16 October 1955 and the report from Matera’s prefect to the Ministry of the Interior: ‘Relazione in merito all’attuazione della Legge 17-5-1952, nr.619 per il risanamento dei rioni “Sassi” di Matera’ dated 27 February 1955. ASM, Prefettura (Ricovero 90), busta 82, fascicolo 662, sottofascicolo B.
as a symbol of the southern question generated in the immediate post-war period had on the city’s subsequent urban and social history. A generic economic model for the entire imagined Mezzogiorno was applied to an individual regional case.

Furthermore, it is clear that the DC implemented a limited land reform programme in an attempt to quell civil unrest amongst landless agricultural workers and halt PCI gains in rural Italy. The claim that Matera’s risanamento programme was part of a wider strategy to provide cheap labour for northern Italian industry, however, reflects the PCI’s critique of post-war land reform and appears to be ideologically driven. It implies that the DC government engineered post-war Italy’s vast rural-to-urban migration through a limited land reform programme. This viewpoint fails to consider the broader historical context of Italy’s post-war economic boom and ignores the agency of those people who chose to move to urban centres. Many Italians elected to abandon agriculture for the lure of higher wages, the consumer world of the city, and the idea of a better life in northern Europe and Italy’s industrial triangle. Italy’s entry into the EEC in 1957 and the policies of the Common Market agricultural policy, established in 1962, were additional factors behind the decline in agricultural cultivation in southern Italy. While Dutch farmers were subsidized by up to $700 by the European Agricultural Guarantee and Guidance Fund,

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108 See for example Gerardo Chiaromonte, Agricoltura, sviluppo economico, democrazia, De Donato, Bari, 1973. Writing in 1953 about communist propaganda regarding land reform, the social democrat Andrea Rapisarda claimed that the PCI was spreading the idea that ‘il governo intende trasferire i braccianti dai malsani agglomerati urbani ai villaggi rurali soltanto per distruggerne la solidarietà di classe e trasformarli in contadini egoisti’ adding that ‘il giudizio implica una condanna dello sfollamento dei Sassi.’ This point is notable as the same argument would later be echoed in Tafuri’s assessment of the first special law. See Andrea Rapisarda, ‘La riforma agraria in Lucania. Burocratici e pioneri’, Il Mondo, 14 March 1953, p. 5.
Italian farmers in contrast received just $70. As a result there was little incentive to continue working the land for many Italians of the boom generation. As Paul Ginsborg notes: 'even if a proper agrarian reform had been carried out, with widespread land redistribution on a more rational basis, with improvement of agrarian contracts and with extensive state aid to the new landowners, the “bone” of the rural South would still have had to shed a significant proportion of its population.' Tafuri, therefore, arguably overlooks the broader social, historical and cultural context in which Matera’s risanamento programme was carried out when drawing up his conclusions.

The fundamental problem with Tafuri’s reading of the risanamento programme is that he appears to have decided on his main arguments before examining the relevant primary documents. His claim that the first special law was a deliberate strategy to empty the Sassi, and was part of a broader DC strategy to push agricultural workers off the land and into cities and factories, has substituted the analysis of archival material. This oversight has been repeated in a number of subsequent secondary sources which have uncritically cited Tafuri’s claims. As a result the existing literature on post-war Matera has created a narrative in which the risanamento programme’s shortcomings are explained as the result of deliberate and methodical decisions which the DC government made. The Manichean reading of Matera’s post-war history, in which the PCI are the heroes and the DC the villains of the piece, is reductive and borders on the ahistorical. This approach is deeply flawed yet surprisingly

110 Ibid., p. 231
prevalent in the historiography of post-war Matera. In contrast, this chapter has attempted to provide a corrective to this reductive methodology and instead reassess Matera’s first special law through a critique of the existing secondary material and the relevant archival sources. Primary source material suggests that the special law’s implementation was anything but systematic. Rather it was reactive, beset by a lack of coordination, official disagreements, the failure to consult the local population, and ultimately waning political interest at a national level once the Sassi’s value in terms of political propaganda had diminished in importance. This suggests that in official circles the first special law for Matera was more important in symbolic terms as an image of progress for official propaganda than as an actual reform programme.

**Conclusion**

By the time the second special law for the Sassi was passed on 21 March 1958, allocating a further two billion lire to the *risanamento* programme, an estimated 1,300 cave homes had been closed and their residents moved to new accommodation. A brief report from October 1958 showed that 828 homes had been built at Serra Venerdì, a further 333 at La Nera, and 257 houses at Spine Bianche were ready to be allocated with a further 66 under construction. In addition a total of 66 houses had been completed in the rural village Venusio and 167 new homes had been built and allocated at La Martella. However, La Martella would experience numerous problems, the Venusio project would prove to be a failure, and the residential-village model would be abandoned in favour of constructing additional urban quarters. As a result the *risanamento*

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111 ASM, Prefettura, Atti Amministrativi di Gabinetto (Ricovero 1990), busta 82, fascicolo 674, sottofascicolo 1. For more information on the construction of La Martella see Chapter 4.
programme would become an urban resettlement scheme. At a micro-level this decision can be attributed to the land reform board’s failure to acquire the necessary plots needed to create functioning agricultural villages. The rural village model that Mazzocchi Alemanni had put forward had failed to understand the complex nature of land holdings at Matera. This oversight stemmed from the fact that the local population that worked the land had not been directly consulted. As a result the initial provisions of the first special law were based on a flawed understanding of local agriculture and were modified accordingly once this became apparent. At a macro-level the years of Italy’s economic miracle saw the rapid growth of urban centres and industry, social transformation, and rural exodus. Millions of Italians chose to leave agriculture for economic and social reasons and the issue of land reform diminished in political importance. In the context of Matera this point is exemplified by the fact that there was no official inauguration of Spine Bianche. The Sassi’s symbolic and political currency began to fade in the years of the economic miracle.

Despite the numerous problems recounted above, the Christian Democrats had used Matera’s *risanamento* programme to promote its post-war reform programme in southern Italy. In the early 1950s the Sassi were perceived in political and intellectual circles as a symbol of the southern question which had once again become an important political issue. Tackling Matera’s housing problems, therefore, allowed the DC to claim that it had implemented concrete measures to resolve southern Italy’s social and economic

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112 Between 1955 and 1971 an estimated 9 million Italians moved from one region to another as rural-urban migration grew rapidly. See Foot, *Modern Italy*, p. 138 and Ginsborg, p. 219.
113 Pontrandolfi, p. 154
problems. The purpose-built rural village of La Martella was central to government propaganda promoting the DC’s initiatives in the South. It aimed to provide modern housing for 200 families living in the Sassi and move them closer to the agricultural land that they worked. In official sources the project became a symbol of the Mezzogiorno’s rebirth in the early 1950s in contrast to the Sassi’s cave dwellings. The La Martella project, however, was beset by numerous problems and shortcomings. The next chapter will examine La Martella’s complex history in detail.
Chapter 4: La Martella: a model for southern Italian development

The village of La Martella in Basilicata became a model for southern Italian development in the early 1950s. This purpose-built agricultural village, situated 7 kilometres from Matera, was constructed between 1951 and 1954 by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration-Comitato Amministrativo Soccorso ai Senzatetto (UNRRA-CASAS) and the Sezione speciale per la riforma fondiaria di Puglia, Lucania, Molise. La Martella was originally planned to re-house two hundred families from the Sassi. Inaugurated exactly one year later by the Christian Democrat Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi, his party used the project as an example of the impact that the intervento straordinario and Marshall Plan aid had made in southern Italy. Owing to the intellectual and media focus on the Sassi’s squalid living conditions in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Matera had been dubbed a national shame and come to symbolize the inadequate housing conditions in post-war Italy and in particular the Mezzogiorno. In contrast, La Martella, with its Neorealist architecture and social-town planning designed by a team of innovative architects under the auspices of the industrialist Adriano Olivetti, was presented as a model for southern Italy’s socio-economic development. Images of the village were

1 Marroni, p. 1 (emphasis in original)
2 For the sake of brevity, and to avoid repetition, the Ente di riforma fondiaria Puglia e Lucania will be referred to as the Ente di riforma, land reform board or agricultural reform board.
juxtaposed with those of Matera in official sources to illustrate the progress that
the DC had made in resolving the Sassi’s substandard housing conditions and by
implication the southern question. Despite the image of La Martella portrayed in
the mass media, the project failed to live up to its billing and had fallen into a
state of disrepair by the early 1960s.

There is, undoubtedly, a large body of literature on La Martella owing to
the project’s historical importance. The existing body of research on the village,
however, has primarily focused on the project in the context of political, urban
and architectural history. Hitherto the village’s role in promoting government
reform in the Mezzogiorno has been ignored. In particular, the depiction of La
Martella in official documentary films has been completely overlooked in the
existing literature on post-war Matera. As one of the first post-war development
projects for southern Italy to be inaugurated, La Martella was a historically
significant enterprise which played a salient role in the promotion of the Cassa
per il Mezzogiorno and agrarian reform in the mid-1950s. The village was
meant to serve as a pilot project for the rehousing of Matera’s estimated 15,000
cave dwellers which would then be replicated in other ‘depressed areas’
throughout Italy. As a result it provides an insight into the normative social
values that the DC looked to promote through its post-war southern reform
programme in the 1950s, specifically the sanctity of the family which was linked
to housing conditions. Furthermore, the existing literature on La Martella’s

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3 See for example Maristella Casciato, ‘Neorealism in Italian architecture’, in Sarah Williams
Goldhagen and Réjean Legault (eds.), Anxious Modernisms. Experimentation in Postwar
17-18; Paolo Francesco Francione, La Martella. Il più bel borgo rurale d’Italia, Antezza,
Matera, 2009; Raguso, pp. 69-98; Restucci, pp. 266-272; Restucci and Tafuri, pp. 43-46;
Sacco, Matera contemporanea; Talamona, pp. 173-204; Chisena, pp. 183-190.
history has tended to view the DC’s southern reform programme, and in particular land reform, as part of a systematic strategy of social control which aimed to transform landless rural workers into small farmers dependent on the state. La Martella is viewed as a high-profile example of this strategy in action. This chapter will look to reassess these points drawing on previously neglected archival sources.

In the overall context of this thesis, examining La Martella’s depiction in official sources will shed further light on how and why Matera became a symbol of the southern question in post-war Italy and how this concept was appropriated for political ends. If, as the opening quotation suggests, Matera was perceived to be emblematic of southern Italy’s economic and social problems and La Martella as a potential antidote, analysis of the post-war housing project should help to illuminate stereotypical perceptions of the Mezzogiorno in political and media circles in 1950s Italy. Owing to its high-profile role in promoting the *intervento straordinario*, the history of the La Martella project offers historians the opportunity to examine the concrete effects that notions of Matera as a symbol of the southern question had on the city’s urban and social development. For these reasons the decision was made to include a case study of the village as a separate chapter in this research project. The chapter will endeavour to investigate how and why representations of La Martella were used to promote the DC’s programme of state investment and land reform in southern Italy in the 1950s. Moreover, it will look to examine the impact that this political and media focus had on the project’s development. This will be carried out through the analysis of previously neglected archival sources including official newsreels and documentaries, newspaper articles as
well as police and prefect reports. Notably La Martella’s residents are largely absent from existing studies of the village. Using letters of protest and petitions from residents found in the state archive at Matera, this chapter hopes to make a modest contribution to including their perspectives in the village’s historical narrative. The chapter starts with a concise history of La Martella’s planning and construction. Second, it focuses on how the village’s inauguration was depicted in the mass media. The third section examines images of Matera and La Martella in documentary films produced by the Centro Documentazione in the 1950s to promote government reform southern Italy. The fourth and final section outlines the various problems encountered during the early years of the La Martella project and their impact on the nascent community’s development.

4.1 A brief history of Il Borgo La Martella

La Martella was originally conceived as an UNRRA-CASAS pilot project to rehouse 200 of the Sassi’s poorest families. In November 1950, UNRRA-CASAS established the Commissione per l’incremento economico e sociale headed by Guido Nadzo and Adriano Olivetti. The committee’s aim was to examine the

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4 Guido Nadzo was an official in UNRRA-CASAS and the European Cooperation Administration’s Housing and Public Works Italian division. For additional information on Nadzo’s activity in Italy see Talamona, pp. 173-204. Adriano Olivetti (1901-1960) was an industrialist, entrepreneur, urban planner, publisher and writer. He was born into a wealthy Piedmontese family. His father’s company Olivetti manufactured electrical instruments and later specialised in the production of typewriters. Adriano Olivetti became interested in politics at a young age and was a contemporary of Piero Gobetti and Carlo Rosselli. In 1924 his father sent him to the US to observe the industrial methods used in the country’s leading factories. In 1933 Olivetti became managing director of the family business and later president of the Olivetti Company in 1938. Drawing on his interest in urban planning, Olivetti launched a number of social housing and urban planning schemes for his company’s employees at its plant in Ivrea. In the post-war period Olivetti combined his interest in politics and urban planning. He founded the magazine Comunità in 1946 and re-launched the town planning periodical Urbanistica in 1949. Moreover his publishing house Edizioni Comunità published a number of influential works on architecture and town planning. Olivetti became a member of the Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica in 1938 and its president in 1950. Moreover, he became a member of UNRRA-CASAS’s housing committee in 1951 and later became the organization’s vice president in 1959. These activities were a springboard
socio-economic and urban conditions of a select number of ‘depressed areas’ in detail. The results would then be used to plan building and social-assistance programmes tailored to the socio-economic needs of each study area. UNRRA-CASAS received five billion lire from the European Recovery Programme (ERP) to carry out this work. Three pilot studies were to be undertaken: an agricultural village at La Martella; a fishing village called Porto Conte at Nurra in Sardinia (which was never completed); and Orto Nuovo - a residential village for artisan families at Cutro in Calabria. The overall aim of these projects, which Riccardo Musatti profiled in the pages of Olivetti’s quarterly cultural and political periodical *Comunità*, was to plan and construct a number of ‘borghi residenziali dotati di tutti i servizi essenziali alla vita di una nuova comunità autonoma ... in base a un approfondito studio delle condizioni ambientali e con criteri informati alla più aggiornata tecnica urbanistica e architettonica.’

Rehousing 200 of the Sassi’s poorest residents at La Martella would be the first UNRRA-CASAS project planned and carried out according to these guidelines.

Following De Gasperi’s first visit to Matera in July 1950, however, the UNRRA-CASAS project was co-opted into the wider reform programme for the Sassi. During a meeting held on 26 January 1951 between UNRRA-CASAS and Emilio Colombo it was suggested that La Martella become part of the broader

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5 For a history of the UNRRA-CASAS projects at Nurra and Cutro see Talamona, pp. 187-190.
7 The relationship between the Christian Democrats and UNRRA-CASAS is outlined in Bernardi, pp. 161-201.
state initiative to resolve Matera's social and economic problems. Negotiations during April and May of the same year saw the *Ente di riforma* agree to collaborate with UNRRA-CASAS on the La Martella project. The land reform board agreed to make a financial contribution to the village’s construction and maintenance as well as providing between five and six hectares of newly expropriated agricultural land to the village’s future residents. As a result the construction of the village was organized and financed by two different bodies. UNRRA-CASAS was responsible for the planning, financing and building of the projected two-hundred dwellings, the kindergarten, the social centre, artisan workshops, accommodation for the doctor and midwife, secondary roads as well as installing the village's internal water distribution and sewage systems. The building costs would be covered by an ERP Counterpart Fund of 760 million. The *Ente di riforma* (funded by the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno), instead, was entrusted with financing and building the parish church and rectory, the police station, local shops (post office, tobacconist, café, trattoria and guesthouse), the local council offices, the nursery, school buildings, the doctor’s surgery, electrical power lines, the link to the Puglian Aqueduct and the village’s main-road infrastructure. The estimated cost of this work was 225 million lire.

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8 *Relazione sulla borgata di “La Martella” – Matera*, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), UC-17 - La Martella; ARC Identifier 4319707 / MLR Number UD 1262; File Unit from Record Group 469: Records of U.S. Foreign Assistance Agencies, 1942-1963; Department of State. International Cooperation Administration. Mission to Italy. Production and Technical Assistance Division.

9 See letter from Gustavo Colonnetti, president of the Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche and technical director of UNRRA-CASAS, to Aldo Ramadoro, president of the *Ente di Riforma fondiaria Puglia e Lucania* dated 9 April 1951. NARA, UC-17 - La Martella; ARC Identifier 4319707 / MLR Number UD 1262; File Unit from Record Group 469: Records of U.S. Foreign Assistance Agencies, 1942-1963; Department of State. International Cooperation Administration. Mission to Italy. Production and Technical Assistance Division.

Despite the optimistic tone of the official literature produced to promote La Martella, the involvement of two separate bodies in the finance, construction and maintenance of the village would later result in a number of the project’s early problems.\footnote{See in particular the booklet produced by the Mutual Security Agency (the renamed Economic Cooperation Act which administered Marshall Plan funding) entitled \textit{Il villaggio La Martella} to mark La Martella’s inauguration. The pamphlet outlined details of the village’s planning, finance and construction and hailed the project as evidence of cooperation between UNRRA-CASAS and the land reform board.}

In July 1950 the Centro Studi sull’Abitazione, at the behest of UNRRA-CASAS, had entrusted local architect Ettore Stella and UNRRA-CASAS engineer Gian Battista Martoglio to draw up plans for the proposed village. Following Stella’s untimely death in February 1951 a group of Rome-based architects and engineers, made up of Ludovico Quaroni, Piero Maria Lughi, Michele Valori, Federico Gorio and Luigi Agati, were employed to oversee La Martella’s design.\footnote{See \textit{Relazione sulla borgata di “La Martella” – Matera}, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), UC-17 - La Martella; ARC Identifier 4319707 / MLR Number UD 1262; File Unit from Record Group 469: Records of U.S. Foreign Assistance Agencies, 1942-1963; Department of State. International Cooperation Administration. Mission to Italy. Production and Technical Assistance Division.}

A site seven kilometres outside Matera had been identified for the proposed village and was approved by UNRRA-CASAS on 16 February 1951. The location was chosen in an attempt to create an autonomous community still linked to Matera. The village was to be situated equidistant from the provincial capital on agricultural land redistributed by the reform board. The aim of this initiative was to reduce the hours that Matera’s agricultural workers spent travelling to and from their workplace and thus increase agricultural productivity.\footnote{Quaroni’s presentation ‘Il borgo La Martella visto dal capo dei progettisti’ to the Italian Camera di commercio is reproduced in Antonio Terranova, \textit{Ludovico Quaroni: La città fisica}, Laterza, Rome, 1981, pp. 57-63.}

As outlined in Chapter 3, the idea of building agricultural villages to house the Sassi’s inhabitants had been put forward in an ECA financed report...
from 1950 for the Basento Valley land-reclamation syndicate. The study highlighted the long distances travelled by the Sassi’s smallholders and landless workers to and from agricultural land in Matera’s hinterland. Instead the report recommended transferring the estimated 1,100 day labourers and 1,000 small landowners that lived in the Sassi to purpose-built rural villages closer to the land that they worked. The remaining 900 artisan families would be re-housed in specially-built residential districts close to Matera’s urban centre. Despite pressure from the Ente di riforma to build individual farmhouses instead of the centralized agricultural villages favoured by UNRRA-CASAS, the decision was made to go with the latter in an attempt to maintain the Sassi’s social ties. Quaroni and his colleagues based their design on the findings of the Commissione per lo studio della città dell’agro di Matera carried out by Friedrich Friedmann and his team of researchers in 1951. An attempt was made to recreate the collectivity of the Sassi on a social level in La Martella’s architecture and layout. Speaking about the design of La Martella, Quaroni noted it aimed to produce ‘una articolazione di superfici, volumi e colori in qualche modo non costituire un trauma per chi aveva abbandonato, con le miserie igieniche, la felice qualità plastica dei Sassi e la sua disponibilità alla vita associata degli abitanti.’ The village was designed with curved streets which coalesced in a town centre situated at the top of a hill. Provision was also made in La Martella’s plans to build communal ovens on each street echoing one of the Sassi’s

14 Mazzocchi Alemanni and Calia’s report is examined in Chapter 3 of this thesis. See section 3.1.
15 See Nallo Mazzocchi Alemanni and Enzo Calia, Il problema dei Sassi di Matera, Consorzio di bonifica della Media Valle del Bradano, 1950, pp. 4-8.
16 Terranova, p. 58
17 See section 3.4 in Chapter 3 for further information on the work of Friedmann and his team.
18 Terranova, p. 59
distinctive social and urban features. La Martella’s urban design was influenced by Adriano Olivetti who sought to develop ‘un modello di sviluppo urbanistico capace di far convivere le nuove scienze del territorio con l’attenzione al progresso e alla qualità della vita del singolo e della comunità.’

This philosophy was based on the industrialist’s admiration for the Tennessee Valley Authority which had promoted the democratic participation of the people affected in its development programmes at a grass-roots level.

During the planning stages residents of Matera’s cave dwellings were asked to choose their preferred house design from three available possibilities. The winning design was then subdivided into two categories: semi-detached houses for agricultural workers and distinct houses for artisans. The first category featured a kitchen-dining area, three bedrooms, a bathroom, a washroom, a storeroom, a barn, a hen-house, and a shed for a horse-drawn cart. Notably a small surveillance point, accessible from inside the main structure, was built beside each barn. It was large enough for a bed and had a hole in the wall at head height. The aim of this feature was to allow residents, who had hitherto housed their animals in their homes, to guard against potential rustling. The artisan houses were almost identical in design but had a workshop instead of a barn. Moreover, each house had a courtyard as well as an allotment of 750 metres squared.

Construction of La Martella’s road infrastructure started in September

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20 Casciato, p. 38. For a discussion of the Tennessee Valley Authority’s philosophy see Ekbladh, pp. 335-374.
21 See Relazione per S.E. Il Ministro dei LL.PP. sul Borgo La Martella in agro di Matera, 20 March 1952, NARA, UC-17 - La Martella; ARC Identifier 4319707 / MLR Number UD 1262; File Unit from Record Group 469: Records of U.S. Foreign Assistance Agencies, 1942-1963; Department of State. International Cooperation Administration. Mission to Italy. Production and Technical Assistance Division. For a detailed discussion of La Martella’s architecture see Raguso, pp. 77-88.
1951 with the building of the first one-hundred houses getting underway in July of the same year. Pietro Campilli (Minister of the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno), local DC leader Emilio Colombo, and Leland Burrows (vice-president of the ECA in Italy) officially inaugurated work on the village on 9 September 1951 - seven months before the enactment of the Special Law for the Sassi. The image of La Martella as a model for southern Italy’s future development was already present in press coverage of this event. In the official government press release to ANSA dated 8 September 1951, the laying of the first stone at La Martella was described as the start of ‘un programma di lavori di grande importanza per il risollevamento delle popolazioni agricole meno abbienti del Mezzogiorno.’

By December 1952 the village’s road network was complete while a number of public buildings, including the cinema and the church, as well as the first batch of houses, were built in the summer of 1953. Despite the fact that only forty-nine houses had been completed and the construction of a number of important public buildings had yet to start, De Gasperi inaugurated La Martella on 17 May 1953. The Italian Prime Minister handed over the keys to the village’s first inhabitants in a public ceremony preceded by the formal ‘closing’ of their troglodyte homes. Later De Gasperi addressed approximately 30,000 people at an election rally held in Matera’s Piazza Vittorio Veneto. These two events played an important role in the promotion of the government’s southern reform

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22 See ASM, Prefettura, Atti Amministrativi di Gabinetto (Ricovero 1990), busta 83, fascicolo 675, sottofascicolo 14. The story was covered in a number of newspapers which adopted a similar tone and message: Luigi Limongelli, ‘Il risanamento di Matera si associa alle redenzione delle campagne Lucane’, Il Popolo, 11 September 1951, p. 12; Marroni, pp. 1 & 3; and Gino Spera, ‘Ritorno alla vita civile’, Il Mattino, 10 September, 1951, p. 1. Moreover, an official booklet outlining the scope and location of the project was produced to mark the inauguration of work on La Martella. See Ente per lo sviluppo della irrigazione e la trasformazione fondiaria in Puglia e Lucania, Borgata Rurale La Martella: Per il risanamento dei Sassi di Matera, Laterza, Bari, 1951.

23 Friedmann, Miseria e dignità, p. 74
programme ahead of the general election on 7 June 1953. The next section will examine the depiction of De Gasperi’s election rally and La Martella’s inauguration in the national media focusing on how and why the image of La Martella was used to promote the DC’s reform policies in southern Italy.

4.2 La Martella in official sources

De Gasperi’s visit to Matera in 1953 received widespread coverage in the Italian national media and represents a high-profile moment when Matera was the focus of political and press attention. The examination of these media sources is crucial to understanding the role that Matera and La Martella played in promoting the Christian Democrats’ twin reform programme for southern Italy.

The historian and journalist Leonardo Sacco has argued that De Gasperi’s involvement with the La Martella project was in fact minimal and that the DC took undue credit for a project that UNRRA-CASAS had pioneered. While De Gasperi and the DC may indeed have had a limited role in the planning and construction of La Martella as Sacco suggests, the Italian Prime Minister’s visit was a key moment in promoting the project nationally and internationally and his name would become indelibly linked to the village. The fact that De

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24 Interviewed in 1993 the former ECA official Vincent Barnett claimed that La Martella had been built ‘partly for the symbolism of it, you know. The revivification [and] the renaissance of the South were bringing people out of their caves and into modern cities.’ This suggests that the La Martella project played a significant role in terms of official propaganda promoting reforms in southern Italy. Interview by Eric Christenson and Linda Christenson with Dr. Vincent Barnett (European Cooperation Administration Program Chief Italy), August 19, 1993.

25 Interview by author with Leonardo Sacco on 20 November 2011.

26 A plaque placed outside La Martella’s post office and dedicated to De Gasperi was unveiled during a public ceremony presided over by Emilio Colombo and Aldo Ramadoro, head of the land reform board, on 5 September 1954. The plaque’s text attributes the village’s construction to the recently deceased DC leader and featured no mention of UNRRA-CASAS’s role in the project: ‘Ad Alcide De Gasperi, Eminentissima statista, ricostruttore dell’Italia artefice di questo solatio borgo sorto dal buio dei Sassi i Martellesi qui lo ricordano grande italiano e credente in Cristo in perenne riconoscenza della sua opera di civiltà cristiana esempio e
Gasperi chose to inaugurate La Martella, notwithstanding the fact that the village had begun its life as an UNRRA-CASAS initiative, suggests that the project was perceived to be of national significance in the promotion of the DC’s southern reform programme.

La Martella was officially opened on 17 May 1953 in the run up to the general election held one month later. The choice of date for the inauguration ceremony was not casual as the special law for the Sassi had been passed exactly one year earlier. De Gasperi returned to Matera, however, in what was one of the lowest points of his political career. The DC had seen its support fall significantly from 48.5 per cent of the polls in the 1948 general election to 35.1 per cent in the local elections of 1951-1952. At an international level De Gasperi was dealing with the question of Trieste, while in domestic politics the Italian prime minister had come under fire from the opposition and some members of his own party for the enactment of the so-called legge truffa on 13 March 1953. This change in electoral law meant that 65 per cent of parliamentary seats would be allocated to any party that obtained over 50 per cent of votes.27 Local opposition to the legge truffa in the Province of Matera manifested itself in strikes by braccianti affiliated to the CIGL and the PCI between December 1952 and January 1953. On 5 January 1953 over 2,000 people in the town of Irsina in the Province of Matera marched behind a banner which read Abassa il Governo, Abassa De Gasperi, Non vogliamo la riforma della legge elettorale. Police used tear gas and fired shots to break up the demonstration. Scuffles between the authorities and protestors left a number of people injured including several...
carabinieri.\textsuperscript{28} Opposition to the legge truffa, however, was not restricted to the PCI stronghold of Irsina. A letter from the Prefect of Matera to the Italian Ministry of the Interior, dated 30 March 1953, noted that 240 of the 605 workers employed on the construction of La Martella had held a 30 minute strike in protest against the new electoral law earlier the same day.\textsuperscript{29}

The Christian Democrats had suffered disastrous results in the local elections of 1951-1952 where its share of votes in southern Italy had dropped from the 48.5 per cent of 1948 to 30.3 per cent.\textsuperscript{30} Togliatti had also accused De Gasperi and his party of neglecting to finish the numerous public works projects undertaken since the establishment of the southern development programme in 1950 claiming that: ‘avete [the DC] abbandonato la val d'Agri e andate in giro posando dappertutto la prima pietra ma senza mai ultimare i lavori.’\textsuperscript{31} Thus, the Italian Prime Minister’s visit to Matera to inaugurate La Martella provided the ideal opportunity to respond to Togliatti’s accusations. By tackling the much publicised problem of the Sassi through the construction of a purpose-built agricultural village, the DC could claim to be addressing the longstanding and broader problem of the questione meridionale. La Martella’s inauguration,

\textsuperscript{28} For accounts of the widespread popular protest against the legge truffa in the Province of Matera see the various police reports dated from December 1952 to April 1953, in ASM, Prefettura, Affari di gabinetto (Ricovero 1990), busta 134, fascicolo 1147, sottofascicolo 3, Provincia di Matera, elezioni politiche, Discussione alle Camere della nuova legge elettorale e manifestazioni di protesta contro la nuova legge. The same file contains a rich amount of documentation on the protest at Irsina including details of charges later brought against 36 protestors.

\textsuperscript{29} See letter dated 30 March 1953, in ASM, Prefettura, Affari di gabinetto (Ricovero 1990), busta 134, fascicolo 1147, sottofascicolo 3, Provincia di Matera, elezioni politiche, Discussione alle Camere della nuova legge elettorale e manifestazioni di protesta contro la nuova legge.

\textsuperscript{30} For information on the local elections of 1951-1952 see Ginsborg, pp. 141-143. The immediacy of the Trieste question is underlined by the headline in the Communist daily L’Unità the day after De Gasperi’s visit to Matera: ‘Tracotanti affermazioni di Tito “l’Italia non avrà mai i Trieste”’, L’Unità 18 May 1953, p. 8.

therefore, was used to promote the work of the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno and the land reform board with the aim of winning back the votes lost in southern Italy at the local elections of 1951-1952 prior to the upcoming general election in June 1953.

Official sources covering De Gasperi’s second visit to Matera presented the event as a triumphant return. Three years on from his first visit to the city the Italian Prime Minister had kept his promise about resolving the *questione materana*. These themes are found in La Settimana INCOM’s newsreel *Panorama pre-elettorale. De Gasperi a Matera. Meda a Milano. Bonomi a Frosinone* which covers De Gasperi’s pre-election rally at Matera.\(^{32}\) The opening shot is a panorama of a packed Piazza Vittorio Veneto (Matera’s main square). The crowd hold banners in support of De Gasperi and the Christian Democrats. The voice-over informs the viewer that the assembled crowd: ‘Applaudano al presente e all’avvenire. Oggi De Gasperi ha chiuso i primi Sassi. Ha assegnato le prime 50 case del borgo La Martella.’\(^{33}\) An image of children cheering and applauding cuts to a mid-shot of De Gasperi standing on a stage under the banner: ‘Democrazia Cristiana: al servizio dell’Italia. A Matera si inizia il miracolo del superamento delle zone depresse’. This shot cuts to a montage of crowd scenes and close-ups in which De Gasperi speaks to the assembled audience. The voice-over summarises the salient points of the Italian Prime Minister’s speech: ‘Tutti i comuni della Lucania, dice, adesso avranno acqua e fognature. Sono stati spesi 47 miliardi in sette anni. Noi non formuliamo promesse mirabolanti.

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\(^{32}\) For the history and dissemination of official newsreels and documentaries see section 4.3 below.

Promettiamo cose di cui prevediamo la soluzione.'³⁴ Produced in the context of the forthcoming general election, the newsreel’s rhetorical message is explicit: the Christian Democrats are the party that deliver concrete solutions to Italy’s post-war problems. The transfer of 50 families from the Sassi to La Martella was used in official sources to illustrate this point.

Coverage of De Gasperi’s visit to Matera and La Martella in the Christian Democrat organ *Il Popolo* adopted a similar structure to the newsreel footage examined above. Two distinct images of the South were juxtaposed: the impoverished, backward and primitive Mezzogiorno of the Liberal and Fascist eras and the rapidly developing post-war South of the Christian Democrats. These two concepts were represented by the Sassi and La Martella respectively. Similar to their description in Carlo Levi’s *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli,* *Il Popolo* depicted the Sassi as Other to ideas of modernity. Matera’s iconic cave dwellings were presented as an embarrassing monument to the Italian state’s persistent neglect of southern Italy. Sixteen thousand men, women and children, it was claimed, were still residing in prehistoric conditions at the end of the Fascist ventennio. Families lived and died in cavernous homes which they were forced to share with their livestock.³⁵ In contrast to past failures *Il Popolo* presented De Gasperi as ‘il salvatore del Mezzogiorno’ who ‘con un colpo solo ha cancellato un antico oblio vergognoso.’³⁶ By closing a number of Sassi and rehousing the residents in new accommodation, the Christian Democrat newspaper claimed

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³⁴ Ibid.
³⁵ ‘Per tanti secoli il popolo di Matera ha accumulato meste giornate all’insegna della sofferenza e dell’inedia; per venti anni, durante la dittatura, dei “sassi” non si parlò agli italiani; essi ignorano che a Matera era sopravvissuto un frammento dell’età paleolitica e che 16 mila uomini donne e bambini con le mule e le loro casse ad un passo del letto, vivevano e morivano in buchi scavati nella roccia viva, come i nostri antenati nelle epoche tramandate dalla leggenda.’ Sandro Bevilacqua, ‘Il borgo “La Martella” ha accolto i primi abitanti’, *Il Popolo*, 18 May 1953, p. 1.
³⁶ Ibid., p. 1
that De Gasperi was tackling a national shame which no previous Italian
government had been able to resolve. La Martella’s inauguration was
portrayed as the first step in this process; it was presented as a concrete
element of the government maintaining its election promises.

Despite the fact that La Martella was incomplete on 17 May 1953, *Il Popolo* presented the project as a model-agricultural village and prototype for southern Italy’s future development. First, the article noted that the nascent community was served by a specially-built road network and water infrastructure. Second, the feature underlined that the new villagers were involved in the selection of what kind of housing had been built. In contrast to the Sassi’s inhospitable cave dwellings, the houses at La Martella were described as the epitome of a modern home complete with, amongst other features, three bedrooms, a dining room, a bathroom and an allotment. Third, the village was furnished with the essential public services needed in a functioning rural community: municipal buildings, a church, a post office, a

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37 ‘Traducendo in realtà di azione politica e sociale una legge provvidenziale, il presidente del consiglio De Gasperi ha assistito alla chiusura delle prime grotte dei “sassi”, una piaga sinistramente famosa di questa città ed ha solennemente riaffermato l’impegno preso nel luglio 1950: l’opera di risanamento di una delle zone più infelici della penisola, abbandonata per secoli ad un destino di tristezza e di miseria, di disperazione e di morte, come appare in un celebre racconto, continuerà gigantesca e appassionata.’ Ibid., p. 1

38 The coverage of De Gaperi’s inauguration of La Martella was mirrored in the weekly newspaper *Il Giornale del Mezzogiorno* as well as the monthly magazine *Vita contadina in Puglia, Lucania e Molise*. Both publications present Matera and La Martella as symbols of the past and the future of southern Italy respectively. Moreover, La Martella’s inauguration is used as an example of the Christian Democrat government maintaining its promises. See Giacomo Etna, ‘Da Eboli Cristo riprende la Marcia’, *Il Giornale del Mezzogiorno*, 25 May 1953, pp. 2 & 4 and *Vita contadina in Puglia, Lucania e Molise*, June 1953, pp. 8–9. Unfortunately distribution figures for both publications have not been forthcoming. La Martella’s inauguration was also covered in the English press which echoed the Italian coverage cited above. See ‘New Village for Cave Dwellers. Signor De Gasperi in South Italy’, *The Times*, 18 May 1953, p. 6 and ‘Rehousing Italy’s Cave-Dwellers. Government’s Land Reform in South’, *The Manchester Guardian*, 19 May 1953, p. 7.


40 Ibid., p. 1
police station, a nursery, an elementary school, a vocational training workshop, a social assistance office, agricultural warehouses, and a general store. Finally, La Martella’s description in *Il Popolo* made it clear that the village’s construction was a direct result of cooperation between the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno, the agricultural reform board and UNRRA-CASAS, i.e. the Christian Democrat government and US financial assistance.

During his speech at Matera, De Gasperi highlighted the importance of ERP funds to government reform in southern Italy. The Italian Prime Minister noted that ‘gli aiuti americani hanno contribuito alla risoluzione di molti problemi.’ In the context of the upcoming election, however, the DC leader underlined that this investment would dry up if Italy changed sides in the Cold War: ‘non si può abbandonare la collaborazione politica internazionale, se non rinunciando ad una cooperazione soprattutto finanziaria ed economica.’ While the DC presented itself as the party which continued to deliver reform in southern Italy, in contrast, the opposition parties on both the Left and the Right were described as obstacles to the Mezzogiorno’s continued development: ‘Non solo dall’estrema sinistra, ma anche dalla destra, si tenta di rallentare lo sforzo di ricostruzione, di rinascita: questo è un tradimento e chi lo compie ne dovrà

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41 ‘Nel borgo – esso realizza una delle più superbe imprese del Governo democratico nel campo sociale e porta una luce di speranza in tante vite finora sgomente da un’inguaribile tristezza – trovano sede la delegazione comunale, la chiesa canonica, l’ufficio postale, la caserma dei carabinieri, l’asilo-nido e quello infantile, la scuola elementare, i laboratori per l’istruzione professionale, il centro per l’assistenza sociale, il centro aziendale con silos e magazzini, il centro zootecnico, l’autorimessa con officina, le botteghe artigiane e i negozi di prima necessità.’ Ibid., p. 1

42 ‘Il borgo della Martella – è una vera e propria cittadina innalzata con fondi dello stato con una spesa di miliardi – è stato realizzato con finanziamenti della Cassa per il Mezzogiorno, tramite l’Ente di Riforma Puglia e Lucania per gli edifici pubblici, e con finanziamenti dell’Unrra-Casas per le abitazioni.’ Ibid., p. 1

43 Ibid., p. 1

44 Ibid., p. 1
pagare le conseguenze.'\textsuperscript{45} In the context of the coming election and the onset of the Cold War, therefore, Matera and La Martella were used as symbols of the Mezzogiorno’s past and the future. Through the depiction of the village’s inauguration the Christian Democrat leadership looked to communicate the message that it was delivering a concrete answer to the southern question. Furthermore, this solution was being achieved through the combined efforts of government reform and the ERP.\textsuperscript{46}

Predictably the Communist daily \textit{L’Unità} offered a conflicting account of La Martella’s inauguration and De Gasperi’s pre-election rally at Matera. In contrast to the triumphalism found in official sources, Giorgio Amendola’s front-page article, ‘Un inutile viaggio elettorale’ provided the Communist Party with the opportunity to launch a counter-offensive against Christian Democrat propaganda.\textsuperscript{47} The coverage of La Martella’s inauguration suggests that the village was of political importance in the context of the upcoming general election. \textit{L’Unità} accused the DC of using public money to stage manage the election rally at Matera. The article claimed that employees of the Cassa per il

\textsuperscript{45} Testimonianza di fraternità nazionale per le popolazioni dei “Sassi” lucani’, \textit{Il Popolo}, 18 May 1953, p. 1

\textsuperscript{46} A monthly report from the chief of the local \textit{carabiniere}, Salvatore Auriemma, to the Prefect of Matera dated 27 May 1953 suggests that the official propaganda campaign surrounding La Martella’s inauguration had an immediate impact at a local level in the build up to the general election of the same year: ‘Il partito democratico cristiano ha particolarmente sfruttato come propagandistico l’inaugurazione del nuovo borgo rurale “La Martella” nel comune di Matera, destinato ad accogliere una parte degli abitanti dei Sassi. L’inaugurazione ha avuto luogo il giorno 17 alla presenza del Presidente del Consiglio On/le De Gasperi. Con un grande comizio cui hanno partecipato circa 30 mila persone il succitato partito ha dato prova di aver raggiunta una solida organizzazione capillare e di essersi creato un notevole seguito in seno alla classe contadina. L’inaugurazione del nuovo borgo “La Martella”, nonché l’assicurazione che con la costituzione di altri villaggi rurali troveranno comoda e dignitosa abitazione gran parte delle famiglie che in atto alloggiano nelle “grotte” di Matera, famiglie che oltre la casa avranno anche terra ed assistenza, hanno segnato un punto non indifferente, ai fini elettorali, a favore della democrazia cristiana, in seno alla classe interessata.’ ASM, Prefettura, Atti Amministrativi di Gabinetto (Ricovero 1990), busta 82, fascicolo 669, sottofascicolo M, Risanamento dei Sassi. Legge 17 maggio 1952, n. 619: Varie.

\textsuperscript{47} Giorgio Amendola, ‘Un inutile viaggio elettorale’, \textit{L’Unità}, 22 May 1953, p. 1
Mezzogiorno, under orders from their superiors, were ferried to Matera in trucks. Moreover, it alleged that the local prefect, police chief and state functionaries had been mobilised to organise the Christian Democrats’ day of pre-electoral propaganda.\footnote{Ibid., p. 1}

However, according to Amendola, these efforts had been rendered ineffective by the village’s incomplete state. In contrast to official sources, \textit{L’Unità} presented a negative image of La Martella. Rather than a model for southern development, it was argued, the village illustrated the failure of the government’s reform programme. The PCI organ reported that De Gasperi was meant to inaugurate ‘la più grande opera del regime del Mezzogiorno, l’unica portata a termine in cinque anni.’\footnote{Ibid., p. 1 (italics appear in original text)} La Martella was billed in official sources as the first step in tackling the national shame embodied by the Sassi and by implication the southern question. Instead, Amendola stated, the Italian Prime Minister had handed over the keys to ‘22 casette di tufo mal costruite’ while 3,000 families remained living in Matera’s cave dwellings.\footnote{Ibid., p. 1} The article argued that the government could not even take credit for these hastily constructed buildings as they had been paid for by UNRRA-CASAS and not the 5 billion lire allocated under the special law for the Sassi. The implication was that rather than being a project to celebrate, La Martella embodied the government’s failure to tackle a national shame.\footnote{‘A Matera, dove più severo si leva dal Sasso l’atto di accusa del popolo meridionale contro i governi e le vecchie classi dirigenti, responsabili di quella e di altre vergogne, a Matera erano stati concentrati i massimi sforzi del governo dell’on. De Gasperi, che aveva assunto personalmente un “impegno d’onore”.’ Ibid. p. 1}

The failure to complete the La Martella project, as well as delays in
constructing the additional rural villages and residential neighbourhoods proposed under the provisions of the special law for Matera, were blamed on the government’s southern reform programme. Amendola criticised the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno for wasting money and corrupting local politics. It was, he argued, ‘un nuovo cancro della vita meridionale, centro di speculazioni e di corruzione.’\textsuperscript{52} Moreover, the agricultural reform authorities were branded ‘nuovi esosi padroni, che agiscono contro i contadini assegnatari con tutto un pesante e costoso apparato burocratico.’\textsuperscript{53} The unfinished village of La Martella, according to Amendola, exemplified the failings of these two reform bodies.\textsuperscript{54} Thus, L’Unità’s 500,000 readers were presented with a negative image of La Martella in the run up to the general election on 7 June 1953. In contrast to the official image of the purpose-built rural village as the future of Mezzogiorno, the PCI daily depicted a project which embodied the government’s failure to resolve the problem of the Sassi and by implication the southern question.\textsuperscript{55}

Communist Party complaints about the failure to complete La Martella in time for its ceremonial opening were fully justified. As noted above just forty-nine of the projected two-hundred houses were completed in time for De Gasperi’s visit and a number of public buildings had yet to be started. The PCI’s interest in La Martella, however, needs to be seen in the context of the upcoming general election and its accompanying propaganda campaign. Arguably the project was at too early a stage to be condemned to failure. The Communist

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., p. 1
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., p. 1
\textsuperscript{54} ‘I risultati di questi metodi si sono potuti ammirare a Matera. Su questi metodi, sul modo come viene speso dalla Cassa e dagli Enti il pubblico denaro, dovrà essere fatta luce al più presto, per indicare e colpire i responsabili.’ Ibid., p. 1
Party’s relative silence on subsequent difficulties that the new-born community faced (which are examined in detail below) suggests that Amendola’s criticism of La Martella reflected a predictable attempt to win votes in the forthcoming election rather than a deep concern for the welfare and long-term development of a project for which his party had ultimately, albeit reluctantly, voted in favour. Thus Matera and La Martella became sites of political contest between the DC and PCI in the lead-up to the general election of 1953. Both parties used Matera as a symbol of the southern question in their pre-electoral propaganda. The Christian Democrats presented La Martella as the first step in resolving southern Italy’s economic and social problems. Conversely, for the Communist party the purpose-built village embodied the shortcomings of the government’s southern reform programme. It was DC rhetoric, unsurprisingly, which dominated representations of La Martella in government commissioned documentaries in the 1950s. The Sassi were presented as a symbol of the southern question and a national shame while La Martella, in contrast, embodied the impact that the government’s reform programme had made in southern Italy. Furthermore, as one of the first new villages to be completed in the context of land reform, documentary footage depicting La Martella provided an opportunity to present the social values that the Christian Democrats looked to promote in the mid-1950s, in particular the sanctity of the home and the Christian family. The next section will examine this official documentary footage in detail.

4.3 Matera and La Martella in Centro Documentazione films
Alcide De Gasperi established the Centro di documentazione della Presidenza del consiglio dei ministri della Repubblica italiana in 1951. It was headed by Gastone Silvano Spinetti who had worked in the Fascist government press office before moving on to the Ministero della Cultura Popolare. The primary role of the Centro Documentazione according to Spinetti was ‘to document and disseminate, both at home and abroad, information on activities of the public administration, with a special focus on reconstruction.’ Visual media was the Centro Documentazione’s preferred method for achieving these aims. It produced an illustrated magazine entitled Documenti di vita italiana while the photographic and film department produced posters, photos as well as newsreels and documentaries. The Centro Documentazione commissioned approximately 200 short films and documentaries during its nine-year lifespan from private production companies including Documento Film, Astra, Orizzonte Cinematografico, Atlante, Gamma, the reconstituted Istituto Luce and La Settimana INCOM. In order to ensure the dissemination of government documentaries throughout the peninsula, the Centro Documentazione issued a number of directives: official documentaries and newsreels had to be shown during the interval at feature films; production companies had to inform

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56 Quoted in Maria Adelaide Frabotta, ‘Government Propaganda: Official Newsreels and Documentaries in the 1950s’, in Luciano Cheles and Lucio Sponza (eds.), The Art of Persuasion. Political Communication in Italy from 1945 to the 1990s, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2001, p. 51. Unfortunately a large number of the files covering the activities of the Centro Documentazione listed in the inventory of the Archivio Centrale dello Stato in Rome have been misplaced. However, an English-language magazine from May 1951 entitled Italian Affairs and an Italian-language magazine entitled L’Italia del popolo were located. Both magazines looked to publicize the Italian government’s post-war reconstruction efforts. See ACS, MI, Gabinetto, fasc. permanenti, Atti, Enti e Associazioni, busta 29 - 1, fasc. 879 E/1.

regional press offices of when and where newsreels were projected on a weekly basis; and official films were to be shown for a period of at least four days. With the number of cinemas in Italy rising from 14,676 in October 1952 to 15,500 in September 1953 cinematic images were more widely disseminated in Italy in the 1950s than ever before. Moreover, Centro Documentazione films were shown throughout the peninsula and islands via mobile cinema trucks. A 1956 communiqué from the Ministry of the Interior to various prefects noted that the aim of the *cinemobili* was to ‘proiettare ogni sera gratuitamente documentari di attualità sull’opera di ricostruzione realizzata dal Governo nel dopoguerra e cortometraggi di varietà nelle varie località d’Italia.’ The importance of film as a medium of communication in a country with an illiteracy rate of 12.9 per cent in 1951 is summed up by Domenico Paolella, editor in chief and director of La Settimana INCOM: ‘In those days [the immediate post-war period] our newsreels represented the only audiovisual medium that showed Italians what was going on, given that television only started in 1954.’ Therefore official newsreels and documentaries received wide circulation at a popular level during the scope of this study.

Centro Documentazione films and newsreels focused on Italy’s post-war reconstruction and emphasized the role that government reform and foreign aid played in this process. Although they were produced in the same historical

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58 Frabotta, ‘Government Propaganda’, p. 52
59 For details of the activities of Centro Documentazione mobile cinemas in 1956 see ACS, MI, Gabinetto, fasc. permanenti, Atti, Enti e Associazioni, busta 289, fascicolo 879/E. Moreover, documents found in the Archivio Sturzo in Rome reveal that in 1953 the DC’s propaganda office came to an agreement with Universal Films and Metro Goldwyn Mayer which allowed American feature films to be shown in local party headquarters and via its mobile cinema units in an attempt to attract more people to see DC propaganda films. See Archivio Storico dell’Istituto Luigi Sturzo (ASILS), Fondo Democrazia Cristiana (FDC), Segreteria politica, Atti dei segretari, 5, Guido Gonella, Uffici centrali, Circolari, scatola 11, fascicolo 13, Spes (1953).
60 Frabotta, ‘Government Propaganda’, p. 5. For Italian literacy rates in the 1950s see Ginsborg, p. 440.
context as so-called Italian Neorealist cinema, the government sponsored films were diametrically opposed in style, tone and narrative structure to the works of, for example, De Sica, De Santis and Germi.\(^6^1\) While Neorealism focused on the uncertainties, difficulties and frustrations of a country in the aftermath of the Second World War and over twenty years of Fascist rule, the Centro Documentazione, in contrast, focused on reconstruction, economic growth and productivity. Consequently, the Centro Documentazione reduced the complexities of post-war Italy to images which eschewed the perceived verisimilitude of Neorealism, instead offering a more positive view of the present and an optimistic vision of the country’s future.\(^6^2\)

The British documentary tradition had a notable impact on the style, tone and narrative structure of Italian post-war reconstruction documentaries.\(^6^3\) The state- and commercially-sponsored British documentary movement roughly spanned the period 1929-1952 and produced over one thousand films. It was pioneered and heavily influenced by the Scottish filmmaker John Grierson. Grierson, who produced films for the Empire Marketing Board, the General Post Office, and later the British Ministry of Information during the Second World War, famously declared that: ‘I look on

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\(^{61}\) Pierre Sorlin, “‘La Settimana INCOM’ messaggera del futuro: verso la società dei consumi”, in Augusto Sainati (ed.), *La Settimana INCOM. Cinegiornali e informazione negli anni ‘50*, Edizioni Lindau, Turin, 2002, p. 76. Notably Paola Bonifazio has identified the similarity of social situations and characters in a number of prominent neorealist films and government documentaries. She convincingly argues that the Centro Documentazione appears to have reacted to social issues addressed in Italian post-war cinema. However, in contrast to the bleak tone and lack of narrative resolution in many so-called neorealist films, the official documentaries have happy endings and reflect the values of reconstruction: hope for the future and employment. Italy’s social and economic problems are resolved thanks to government intervention and foreign financial aid. See Bonifazio, ‘Work, Welfare, Bio-Politics’, pp. 155-180.


cinema as a pulpit and use it as a propagandist.'\textsuperscript{64} He believed that propaganda films were an essential tool for engaging and educating the wider public in a functioning mass democracy, and his theories on the role that government-sponsored documentary films could play in instructing and informing democratic citizens were translated into Italian in the early post-war period.\textsuperscript{65}

Furthermore, the narrative structure of Griersonian documentaries appears to have influenced Centro Documentazione productions. The Griersonian documentary featured what Brian Winston has dubbed a 'problem moment' at the heart of its narrative; the social problem highlighted could be resolved if 'society is given over to the enlightened managers of industry and the experts in government.'\textsuperscript{66} As a result, Griersonian documentaries replaced in-depth analysis of social problems with a deus-ex-machina resolution to the problems highlighted. Moreover, they communicated the message that no action was needed from the viewer apart from placing their trust in official experts and bureaucrats.\textsuperscript{67} This narrative structure was adopted in Centro Documentazione films. The social and economic problems they highlighted in post-war Italy were later resolved through a combination of state intervention and foreign aid.\textsuperscript{68}

The work of American documentary film-maker Pare Lorentz was

\textsuperscript{64} Quoted in Jack C. Ellis and Betsy A. McLane, A New History of Documentary Film, Continuum, London, 2005, p. 71.
\textsuperscript{65} See Bonifazio, 'Work, Welfare, Bio-Politics', p. 158. Writing in 1942 about the need for propaganda in democratic societies Grierson claimed that 'it is your democrat who most needs and demands guidance from his leaders. It is the democratic leader who most must give it. If only for the sake of quick decision and common action, it is democracy for which propaganda is the more urgent necessity.' Quoted in John Grierson, The Nature of Propaganda, in Forsyth Hardy (ed.), Grierson on Documentary, Faber and Faber, London, 1979, p. 109.
\textsuperscript{66} Brian Winston, Claiming the Real. The Documentary Film Revisited, British Film Institute, London, 1999, p. 45
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., p. 47
\textsuperscript{68} Bonifazio, 'Work, Welfare, Bio-Politics', pp. 157-158
another notable influence on Centro Documentazione productions.69 He produced films for the Resettlement Administration, a US federal agency established in the mid-1930s to relocate urban and rural workers displaced by the Dust Bowl to new state planned communities, and then in 1938 helped to create the United States Film Service. His two most important films in terms of their influence on Italian documentary makers were *The Plow that Broke the Plains* (1936) and *The River* (1937). The former examined the origins of the dust storms which afflicted the American Great Plains in the 1930s, while the latter film showcased the work that the Tennessee Valley Authority had carried out in the Mississippi Valley during the 1930s in an attempt to gain popular support for further state investment in the area. Lorentz’s films aimed to justify the need for expensive and at times unpopular official reform programmes.70 Similar to the Griersonian School of documentaries, ‘social problems were presented as passing phenomena, actively being corrected by the officials paying for the film.’71 Centro Documentazione films aimed to fulfil a similar function in the context of post-war Italy and appear to have taken their cue from Lorentz’s most famous works. A supplemental element of Lorentz’s film-making that seems to have influenced Centro Documentazione productions is his use of score which integrated contemporary elements from folk and popular music. Virgil Thomson’s original scores for *The Plow that Broke the Plains* and *The River*, for example, incorporated elements from indigenous traditional music that reflect each film’s historical context and geographical setting. Meticulous attention was paid to writing and editing scores, ensuring that they dove-tailed smoothly with

69 For a detailed yet succinct outline of Lorentz’s career see Ellis and McLane, p. 81-91.
71 Winston, p. 73
the film's visuals.\textsuperscript{72} Both of these elements can be found in a number of official
Italian post-war documentaries. Echoes of folk music can be heard in the
musical accompaniment to Centro Documentazione films depending on the
regional setting and it is clear that individual scores were composed specifically
to balance the accompanying narrative and images.

Italian reform documentaries used a past-to-present narrative structure
to promote the image of a country that was evolving rapidly. Writing about the
output of La Settimana INCOM, but applicable to Centro Documentazione films
in general, Pierre Sorlin notes that: ‘beginning with a quick glimpse of the past,
they stressed the improvements introduced by modern techniques and
contrasted old ploughs with tractors or derelict farmhouses with hygienic
modern cowsheds.’\textsuperscript{73} The past-to-present narrative structure gave the viewer
the sense that not only was she or he witnessing Italy’s post-war
transformation, but that they were actively taking part in it themselves.\textsuperscript{74}
Moreover, the narrative structure employed in Centro Documentazione films
meant that Italy’s post-war social and economic problems could be presented as
the legacy of Fascist rule against which the government reconstruction and
reform efforts could be directly contrasted.\textsuperscript{75}

Following the implementation of land reform and the Cassa per il
Mezzogiorno in 1950, southern Italy and the Islands featured heavily in Centro
Documentazione films as the Italian government looked to promote its twin

\textsuperscript{72} See Ellis and McLane, p. 82-84.
\textsuperscript{73} Sorlin, \textit{Italian National Cinema}, p. 86
\textsuperscript{74} Paola Bonifazio, ‘Italian Documentary Filmmakers and the Christian Democratic Road to
Hegemony’, in Eugenio Bolongaro, Mark Epstein and Rita Gagliano (eds.), \textit{Creative
Interventions: The Role of Intellectuals in Contemporary Italy}, Cambridge Scholars Publishing,
Newcastle, 2009, p. 60
\textsuperscript{75} David Forgacs and Steven Gundle, \textit{Mass Culture and Society from Fascism to the Cold War},
Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2007, p. 218
reform programme. The primary intention of official films and newsreels depicting southern Italy was to promote the process of modernization, the development of southern agriculture and the effects of the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno. The protagonist of this transformation was the Italian state.\textsuperscript{76} Paola Bonifazio has argued that Centro Documentazione films challenged the existence of divisive cultural differences between northern and southern Italy. Rather they focused on the perceived economic disparity between North and South. Southern economic backwardness was presented as a by-product of previous governments’ mismanagement combined with natural factors such as malaria, landslides, and the shortage of water. These problems would be overcome, it was claimed, thanks to the Italian government’s investment in infrastructure and new technology. Instead of cultural differences between North and South, Bonifazio contends, official reconstruction documentaries presented a discourse of modernization in which the dichotomy was 'between those who work and those who are idle, between those who have a family and those who do not have one.'\textsuperscript{77} These points are reflected in the documentaries depicting Matera and La Martella examined below. Emphasis is placed on the need to provide new homes, improved employment conditions, and cement existing family bonds. The government-sponsored films underline the importance of patriarchal family values and the potential of southern Italy’s natural resources and workforce. Predictably non-domestic work depicted in Centro Documentazione films is male dominated. Women, in contrast, are mainly presented as mothers and housewives with a few notable exceptions.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{76} Frabotta, ‘Government Propaganda’, p. 55
\textsuperscript{77} Bonifazio, ‘Italian Documentary Filmmakers’, p. 59
Writing about the geography of film Jeff Hopkins contends that ‘the cinematic landscape is not ... a neutral place of entertainment or an objective documentation or mirror of the “real”, but an ideologically charged cultural creation whereby meanings of place and society are made, legitimized, contested, and obscured.’

79 The depiction of Matera and La Martella in government-sponsored documentaries exemplifies this point. The choice of camera angles, shots, soundtrack, voice-over, and editing made in the production of these films shaped how the three-dimensional profilmic space situated in front of the camera was presented as a two-dimensional film image.80 This process was politically charged. The illusionary cinematic landscape that these documentaries created aimed to promote government intervention in southern Italy and at the same time convey the societal values that the Christian Democrats looked to foster in post-war Italy. This cinematic space drew on and at the same time reinforced the concept that the Sassi were emblematic of the southern question. It created stereotypical images of the Mezzogiorno which were viewed by thousands of Italians. The chronological analysis of official documentaries depicting Matera and La Martella will provide an insight into how these ideas changed and developed during the 1950s.

**Accade in Lucania**

La Martella is featured in the documentary film *Accade in Lucania* (1953) which

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showcases the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno’s public works programme in Basilicata. The documentary presents the region as one of Italy’s most underdeveloped territories which is undergoing a dramatic transformation thanks to government investment. The ten-minute film focuses on four distinct topics: irrigation, the region’s road network, its inadequate housing situation, and finally education. La Martella is used to highlight the impact that government intervention has had on Basilicata’s housing problems and to communicate the message that the move to modern housing strengthens rather than weakens traditional family bonds. The narrator informs the viewer that ‘tra le zone depresse d’Italia la Lucania godeva di un triste primato. Non si trattava di migliorare una situazione economica precaria, ma di creare tutto dal nulla o quasi.’

The sequence begins with an extreme long shot of a hill-top town situated high above deserted country plains. It then cuts to an extreme long shot of the gravina, or valley which acts as the natural border to Matera’s Sassi, before cutting to a long shot of an abandoned farm house, a truck crossing a river at a ford, and shepherds tending to their flock on abandoned flatland. The discordant orchestral score used in the film’s opening sequence adds to the sense of desolation that the voice-over and visual images convey. La Martella is central to the sequence which focuses on housing. A shot of a hill-top town is juxtaposed with a montage of new farmhouses that the land reform board has built. The accompanying voice-over presents a stereotypical image of the prevailing urban makeup of southern Italy: ‘nel Meridione, la casa colonica era pressoché sconosciuta. La popolazione rurale si era concentrata in grossi

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81 Francesco De Feo, *Accade in Lucania* (Italy, 1953)
The film claims, however, that thanks to the work of the land reform board, Basilicata is being rapidly transformed. La Martella is presented as the prime example of this modernization process. The establishing shot of the village pans right to left, from the parish church to a group of finished houses, giving the viewer a sense of La Martella’s scale. The narrator conveys the village’s importance as one of the first land reform villages to be completed: ‘Oggi nelle zone di riforma le nuove case rurali sorgono con ritmo accelerato. Qua e là villaggi destinati a diventare le future cittadine di questa nuova Lucania come il borgo La Martella nei pressi di Matera.’ The accompanying mid-shot of Quaroni’s church reminds the viewer that La Martella is a community founded upon Catholic values.

Furthermore, a short sequence featuring an agricultural family having lunch in one the village’s pristine new homes subtly conveys the social values that the DC looked to foster through its southern development programme. The implication of the scene is that modern housing protects the sanctity of the family. The sequence features a number of mid-shots of a patriarchal family sitting down to lunch. The father figure who sits at the head of the table cuts bread for his family, another middle-aged man pours wine for himself and the head of the household, while a traditionally dressed woman stands serving minestra to three young children. The domestic scene and the voice-over imply that the move from the Sassi to La Martella has fostered new social values amongst the former cave dwellers: ‘Una nuova casa, una nuova dignità umana. Oggi già in molte zone il contadino lucano si raccoglie in ambienti luminosi e

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82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
This concept of a new sense of dignity directly linked to improved housing echoes attitudes in Victorian Britain. Overcrowded and inadequate housing conditions were believed to foster immorality, laziness and bad manners as much as disease. Slum clearances, it was argued, not only improved health conditions, but could shape morality and protect the sanctity of the family. This sequence also needs to be understood in the context of the perceived links between housing and morality prevalent in official sources in the post-war period as examined in the second chapter of this thesis. The domestic scene depicted in Accade in Lucania appears to communicate a similar message. The move from troglodyte dwellings to La Martella’s modern houses, it is implied, has fostered a newfound self-respect amongst the village’s residents. The new home has strengthened rather than eroded traditional family values. Accade in Lucania, therefore, celebrates the arrival of modernization in Basilicata in the guise of government reforms following centuries of neglect. The La Martella sequence shows viewers that the DC’s post-war reform programme strengthens traditional family values and underscores the Catholic Church’s central role in Italian society. The risanamento programme has delivered Matera’s cave dwellers from inadequate living conditions which fostered moral degeneracy. Writing about the Christian Democrats’ post-war electoral success, Rosario Forlenza has noted that they ‘answered a need for stability, security and reconciliation in a society emerging from years of warfare, and accordingly it

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84 Ibid.
stressed the importance of family and of women.\textsuperscript{86} This rhetorical message is clearly reflected in \textit{Accade in Lucania}'s depiction of family life at La Martella.

\textbf{\textit{Paesi Nuovi} and \textit{Cronache del Mezzogiorno}}

The concept of La Martella as a symbol of southern Italy's rapid transformation thanks to government reform is also conveyed in the documentaries \textit{Paesi Nuovi} (1954) and \textit{Cronache del Mezzogiorno} (1955).\textsuperscript{87} In these two films La Martella is presented as a fully functioning town with a vibrant community. This message is communicated in \textit{Paesi Nuovi} through the juxtaposition of La Martella with a number of land reform villages either recently inaugurated or still under construction. In contrast to the half-finished villages profiled at the start of the film, La Martella is presented as a model town with a fully-formed and functioning community where there is work for all. This point is made explicitly in the voice-over which accompanies a wide shot of the village's pristine houses:

‘In uno dei più grossi borghi, borgo La Martella presso Matera, ormai la vita è nel suo pieno ritmo, la borgata si è sviluppata, la gente attende al proprio lavoro, e ha preso abitudine alla nuova dimora, come se qui avesse abitato da sempre, mentre le case sanno ancora di calce.’\textsuperscript{88} This sense of La Martella's rapid transformation into a prototypical village is further emphasized by the film's narrative structure which describes Sundays in the new community. The market scene underlines the gender roles assigned in the new village. A group of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{87} \textit{Paesi Nuovi} (Italy, 1954) was made for the Centro Documentazione by the recently re-launched Istituto Luce and was shown together with Robert G. Springsteen's film \textit{Detective G. Sezione Criminale}. See Frabotta, \textit{Il governo fila l'Italia}, p. 114. For a brief summary of the rebirth of the Istituto Luce see Frabotta, ‘Government Propaganda’, pp. 60-61.
\item \textsuperscript{88} Giovanni Passante, \textit{Paesi Nuovi} (Italy, 1954)
\end{itemize}
women wearing contemporary clothing are depicted buying material for clothes while the town’s men purchase farming equipment. Apart from a shot of a woman feeding some chickens, women’s role in agricultural work, especially physical labour, is not acknowledged in the film. The implication is that female manual labour does not fit the official vision for the new community. The market sequence culminates with a shot of La Martella’s residents entering the village’s church. The voice-over underlines that Catholicism is at the heart of community life: ‘la casa di Dio nata con le loro case, il lavoro per tutti una benedizione del cielo.’

Paesi Nuovi, therefore, presents La Martella as a model town which embodies the societal values that the Christian Democrats looked to promote in post-war Italy: the traditional family, improved housing, employment, and the centrality of the Catholic Church.

Cronache del Mezzogiorno promotes the impact that land reform and the Cassa del Mezzogiorno had in Calabria, Puglia, Sardinia, Sicily, and Basilicata in the early 1950s. It features a short sequence showcasing La Martella. Again the village’s apparent strong sense of community is underlined. This message is created through shots of the town’s residents congregating in the main square, children attending primary school and the local carabiniere officer with his children. The accompanying voice-over uses the past-to-present narrative trope to underline southern Italy’s rapid development. The new village is described as a place where ‘una gallina da cuocere e un uovo da bere non manca più a nessuno.’

A number of panoramic and mid-shots depicting the new village are juxtaposed with dialogue describing the residents’ improved living conditions:

89 Ibid.
90 Elio Tarquini, Cronache del Mezzogiorno (Italy, 1955)
‘è la gente che viveva nei Sassi di Matera, la civiltà ha cancellato ogni cupezza.’

The sequence features no images of the Sassi and the voice-over provides no further description of Matera's troglodyte homes. The implication, however, is that the Sassi need no introduction to the viewer and that the city’s name alone is enough to evoke an image of southern backwardness. Furthermore, the voice-over suggests that La Martella’s living conditions have had a transformative effect on the villagers’ existential and moral wellbeing: they once lived like savages, but have now been civilized thanks to improved housing. Although the La Martella sequence is fleeting in the film’s overall context, its rhetorical message is clear. The construction of La Martella is the first step in resolving Matera’s widely publicized housing problems which had been dubbed a national shame. The village is a fully-functioning community which has removed the uncertainty of life in the Sassi through education, housing, and employment. The depiction of family life in Cronache del Mezzogiorno and Paesi Nuovi echoes the message in a letter from Mariano Rumor (the then head of the DC’s Ufficio studi propaganda e stampa) dated 16 June 1954 to the Christian Democrats’ weekly and periodic publications. The text was addressed directly to Italy’s rural workers. It looked to communicate four main points: the important role that rural culture could play in Italy’s post-war development, the sanctity of the traditional family, the right to education, the central role of Catholicism, and how these values had been protected and improved thanks to government reforms in southern Italy.

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91 Passante
92 Rumor wrote that: ‘La Democrazia Cristiana, nel difendere la libertà attraverso la sua azione politica, di tutti questi anni, ha voluto difendere ciò che per voi è più sacro: la santità e la pace delle famiglie, la libera educazione dei figli, il rispetto della religione, le sane ed antiche tradizioni contadine, che, ereditate dai vostri padri, sono ancor oggi alla base della vostra
Borgate della riforma

The use of Matera and La Martella to promote government reform reached its apex in the 1955 documentary Borgate della riforma. The film showcases a number of new villages in southern Italy that the land reform board had constructed including Borgo della Libertà, S. Rita and Gaudiano in Puglia; Rovalle in Calabria; and Scanzano, Policoro, and La Martella in Basilicata. The bulk of the film is shot from the perspective of an airplane passing overhead. This device is used to convey the vast scale of work carried out by the land reform board in the three regions. A select number of villages are profiled further at ground level. The film’s central sequence contrasts Matera’s Sassi and La Martella. Over half of the short documentary’s seven minutes and twenty-three seconds focus on the Sassi and the purpose-built village. Borgate della riforma was produced in 1955 illustrating that Matera and La Martella continued to be important images in promoting state intervention in southern Italy at that point in time. The fact that the village was one of the first reform projects to be inaugurated would appear to explain its enduring importance. La vita comune. Non sempre la società italiana aveva compreso e valorizzato la civiltà contadina [which the communiqué implies is southern rural culture], che pure rappresenta tanta parte della vita italiana, né aveva saputo aiutare il vostro progresso, l’elevazione delle vostre condizioni di vita, il miglioramento della vostra cultura. Con una coraggiosa politica di rinnovamento – pur tra mille difficoltà – mediante la Riforma Agraria, la Cassa del Mezzogiorno, le opere di bonifica nelle aree depresse, la legge per la montagna, il piano dodecennale per l’agricoltura, l’impulso alla meccanizzazione, la creazione e la difesa della piccola proprietà contadina, la Democrazia Cristiana ha voluto invece porre all’ordine del giorno di tutta la Nazione il problema dello sviluppo del mondo contadino e quello della liberazione ed elevazione umana di quei contadini che erano in condizioni di maggiore abbandono e di più umiliante soggezione. Oggi tutta la Nazione è consapevole che il futuro della intera democracia italiana passa anche attraverso il miglioramento delle condizioni sociali, economiche, spirituali ed umane del mondo contadino.’ ASILS, FDC, Segreteria politica, Atti dei segretari 6, Alcide De Gasperi, Uffici centrali, Circolari emesse dagli uffici, 1953, Sc. 18, fasc. 11, Spes.

93 Borgate della riforma was produced by Documento Film in 1955 and directed by Luigi Scattini. The film was shown together with Alfred Hitchcock’s Rear Window. For film’s full production credits see Frabotta, Il governo filma l’Italia, p. 115.
Martella could be juxtaposed with work in progress to underline that
government intervention in southern Italy had already delivered concrete
results.

The Matera-La Martella sequence in *Borgate della riforma* echoes a
number of British documentaries that focused on urban planning and promoted
New Towns in the post-war period, e.g. *The City* (1939), *When We Build Again*
(1943), *Proud City* (1945), *New Town* (1948), *Planned Town* (1948), and *Home of
Your Own* (1951). These films shared a basic narrative structure: ‘The first
[shot] was the image of the crowded and decrepit inner-city slum. The
dilapidated state of the urban fabric symbolized the historic legacy of
unplanned development, with the obligatory shots of children playing in the
gutter emphasizing the waste of human potential.’94 Echoing the rhetorical
strategies that Carlo Levi employed in his description of Matera, these
sequences provided the moral imperative for government intervention and
highlighted the need for urban planning to resolve social and housing problems.
The latter half of the documentary focused on housing but underlined that
building alone was not enough. Rather, ‘what was needed … were
comprehensive approaches that saw rehousing the population as involving
other key functions of the city – including transport, workplace and
employment patterns, recreation, neighbourhood planning and post-war
reconstruction.’95 A similar narrative structure is adopted in the Matera-La
Martella sequence featured in *Borgate della riforma*. The Sassi are used to
present the city’s inadequate housing conditions. La Martella, in contrast, is

94 John R. Gold and Stephen V. Ward, ‘We’re Going to Do It Right This Time: Cinematic
Representations of Urban Planning and the British New Towns, 1939 to 1951’, in Aitken and
Zonn, p. 235
95 Ibid., p. 235
presented as a model for resolving this problem. However, the village is not merely an answer to Matera’s housing problems according to the film. It has also been designed to provide employment, leisure activities and to foster a new rural community. Predictably this community reflects the societal values that the DC looked to promote in post-war Italy.

The Matera sequence begins with an establishing shot of the Sassi and Matera’s distinctive gorge from the air. The musical accompaniment shifts from a playful aria to a discordant tone when the Sassi first appear on screen. Moreover, the voice-over hints at recurring themes in official documentaries that depict Basilicata: the region’s position outside of modernity, the struggle against untamed natural elements, and its previous neglect by the Italian state: ‘Sono in volo sulla Lucania. La terra che sembrava dimenticata da Dio e dagli uomini. In questa zona depressa le città sorgevano sugli strapiombi quasi a distintiva difesa contro le forze della natura.’

The juxtaposition of the narrator’s words with an aerial shot of Matera implies that the town is emblematic of southern Italy’s natural and economic problems. The sequence continues with a number of panoramic views of Sasso Caveoso interspersed with long shots of cave homes taken from the airplane above. This cuts to a mid-shot of two children filmed at street level in the Sassi. High-angle framing is used to illustrate the Sassi’s distinctive urban layout: the descending pathway on which the children play doubles up as the rooftops of the houses below. The accompanying voice-over implies that the poverty of those living amongst the Sassi is moral as well as material: ‘Matera è una vecchia città nata sulla roccia, ancora tristamente famosa per i Sassi, luogo di estrema miseria in cui vivevano

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96 Luigi Scattini, *Borgate della riforma* (Italy, 1955)
nel più grande squallore centinaia e centinaia di famiglie.\textsuperscript{97} The narrator, however, makes it clear that hundreds of families used to live in extreme poverty. The implication is that the town’s age-old housing problems are finally being resolved thanks to government intervention.

The next sequence focuses on Matera’s housing situation. It starts with a pan from left to right across the roofs of a number of homes before a crane shot downwards from the street level above reveals a vicinato below. The camera work looks to convey the density of homes amongst the Sassi. However, voice-over rather than an internal shot is employed to describe the city’s distinctive housing situation: ‘le case sono scavate nella roccia e la vita si svolge sotto terra dove entra solamente un pallido raggio di sole.’\textsuperscript{98} Echoing Levi’s description of the Sassi, light and dark are repeatedly used as a metaphor for backwardness and modernity in the Matera-La Martella sequence. The film’s imagery implies that public works have delivered the Sassi’s inhabitants from darkness into the light, i.e. from their troglodyte homes to modern housing.

A transitional sequence between the Matera and La Martella sections is used to convey the passage from the town’s past, embodied by the Sassi, to its future, symbolized by La Martella. A panning shot from Matera’s Cathedral moves to the right before the camera tilts upwards into the sky above the city. The soundtrack becomes more upbeat in conjunction with the tone of the voice-over: ‘Non basta a scaldare il corpo e il cuore di chi soffre. Le porte di questi buchi stanno man mano chiudendosi e una nuova possibilità di vita si offre a coloro che forse non credevano più alla vita.’\textsuperscript{99} The salvation offered to Matera’s

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid.
poor comes in the shape of alternative housing. The transitional sequence is shot from the perspective of the low-flying airplane. The on-board camera moves rapidly across the quickly changing terrain suggesting the fast pace of Matera's transformation. The airplane passes above a new housing estate on the city's outskirts before continuing its journey through the countryside near Matera showcasing additional new apartment blocks under construction. The voice-over makes it clear that the city's housing problems are finally being resolved thanks to state intervention: 'E accanto alla vecchia città ne è sorta una nuova ... anche Matera ora può guardare all'avvenire con rinnovata fiducia.' The future being referred to is embodied by the already 'completed' village of La Martella which is the focus of the film's next section.

*Borgate della riforma*'s La Martella sequence is the most detailed cinematic document of the village in the years following its inauguration. This section of the film implies that housing conditions are not only linked to physical health and fears about hygiene, but also to the existential wellbeing of Sassi residents. It opens with a panoramic-establishing shot of the village from the air before cutting to a long shot of La Martella from above. Notably the soundtrack changes along with the visual transition from Matera's hinterland to La Martella: the discordant elements are replaced with a melodic orchestral refrain with hints of regional-folk music. The first scene in this sequence conveys the improved health conditions that La Martella offers its new residents in comparison to the Sassi. It opens with a long-shot of the village taken from the air before cutting to a mid-shot of young children playing in the garden of a pristine new house while a group of women sit sewing in the garden. The

100 Ibid.
children at La Martella are noticeably better dressed than those depicted in the earlier Matera sequence. The voice-over underlines the improved sanitary conditions of La Martella’s new residents. ‘Non più case scavate nella roccia, ma abitazioni con giardini dove le donne e i bambini possono finalmente godersi il sole.’ Again light is used to symbolize health conditions. The implication is that La Martella’s residents have been delivered from the dark and unsanitary conditions of the Sassi to their new pristine homes. Moreover, similar to the other Centro Documentazione films depicting La Martella, women in the new village are assigned the role of domestic workers, wives and mothers.

The next scene showcases La Martella’s housing. A mid-shot of an assignee working in the allotment at the back of his house is used to depict the hardworking nature of the village’s new inhabitants. It again underlines the gender roles assigned to residents: women are domestic workers while men work in agriculture. The sequence continues depicting two horse-drawn carriages passing each other on the village’s main road. The shot is framed to show the abundant space and resulting accessibility that La Martella offers to its residents in contrast to the narrow terraced streets of the Sassi. The voice-over reinforces this point: ‘Lo stile architettonico è in armonia con le caratteristiche strade transitabili in tutti sensi. Che confronto con i sentieri inaccessibili dei Sassi.’ Finally, La Martella is presented as a fully functioning and autonomous community. This is achieved by showcasing the village’s public buildings from the public meeting house, the Church, the cinema – still under construction – and the Post Office with a man shown posting a letter. The voice-over notes that:

\[101\] Ibid.
\[102\] Ibid.
‘la vita della borgata è autonoma. I principali servizi sono assicurati: la casa di ritrovo, la chiesa di ardita architettura, il cinema ancora in costruzione e la posta. C’è tutto no?’ La Martella, therefore, is depicted as a model village which provides housing, work as well as spiritual and material sustenance to its residents. The film presents the village as a pioneering project which could be replicated throughout southern Italy. This point is implied in the documentary’s latter half which focuses on new towns under construction and destined to house new rural communities. Despite the reassuring tone of the narrator, however, the La Martella project encountered numerous problems in its early life which are examined in detail below. These problems had come to a head in 1955 when Borgate della riforma was shot, illustrating the gap between life at La Martella and the village’s role in the promotion of official reform in southern Italy.

Writing in the context of the intervento straordinario, Maria Adelaide Frabotta argues that: ‘as in any large-scale reconstruction it was necessary to create myths and offer projects which promised a better future.’ The depiction of La Martella in Centro Documentazione commissioned films exemplifies this point. The village was portrayed as a fully-functioning community built from scratch which represented the first step in resolving the problem of the Sassi thanks to the combined resources of the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno, agrarian reform and the ERP. In contrast, the Sassi provided a ready-made symbol of the southern question. They embodied southern Italy’s difficult past which, according to government rhetoric, had been finally left

103 Ibid.
104 Frabotta, ‘Government Propaganda’, p. 51
behind. In the context of Italy’s post-war housing crisis, the depiction of La Martella in Centro Documentazione films provides an insight into the values that the Christian Democrats looked to communicate to viewers. The sanctity of the nuclear family, central to the DC’s rhetoric, was linked to the sanctity of the home. The concept that housing could shape morality is one of the undertones of Centro Documentazione films depicting Matera and La Martella. The organization of Matera’s former cave dwellers into normative family units and the resulting improvement in their moral wellbeing is one of the supplemental themes implied in the depiction of La Martella in official propaganda films.

Cinema continued to be Italy’s preferred commercial mass entertainment in the mid-1950s. As a result the images of Matera and La Martella in Centro Documentazione productions examined above were shown widely. While the majority of cinemas and thus audience members were concentrated in provincial capitals and large towns, the fact that, as outlined above, it was compulsory to show Centro Documentazione newsreels and documentaries means that regular cinema-goers would have been exposed to images of Matera and La Martella as symbols of the southern question and a model for southern development respectively. \(^{105}\) It is difficult to gauge the impact that these films had at a popular level. However, as this chapter has attempted to show, Italian cinema audiences in the immediate post-war period were presented with images of the South, the nuclear family and normative gender roles directly filtered through the DC’s political lens as Italy’s ruling party looked to promote its twin reform programme, social values, and version of Italian national

\(^{105}\) For information on cinema going in Italy from the mid-1930s to the mid-1950s see Forgacs and Gundle, pp. 42-53.
identity. Images of Matera and La Martella played an important role in this process during the 1950s.

4.4 Limitations of the La Martella project

La Martella fell short of the original vision for an autonomous rural community set out by its planners and many of its buildings were lying in a state of disrepair by the late 1960s.\footnote{La Martella’s trajectory from model of southern development to a symbol of the \textit{intervento straordinario}’s limitations is encapsulated by the historian Muriel Grindrod’s account of the village. Writing in 1955 about the effects of ERP funding and official reform in southern Italy, Grindrod noted: ‘Perhaps the most outstanding example is the village of La Martella, in Lucania, built with funds from the UNRRA-CASAS and the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno. Inaugurated in May 1953, La Martella is to provide accommodation for families from the ‘Sassi’, the cave-dwellings of Matera, whose plight is described in Carlo Levi’s \textit{Christ Stopped at Eboli}.’ See Muriel Grindrod, \textit{The Rebuilding of Italy: Politics and Economics 1945-1955}, The Broadwater Press, Hertfordshire, 1955, p. 212. However, writing on the same subject just over a decade later Grindrod outlined the project’s apparent failure: ‘The classic example of this reluctance to leave the known for the unknown was La Martella, the village established early in the 1950s seven kilometres outside the Lucanian town of Matera to house the inhabitants of the Sassi, the cave-dwellings made famous by Carlo Levi’s description of them, which were to be closed. Twelve years later nearly half the caves were still inhabited, while La Martella was half empty; the peasants used the houses there to keep tools, journeying there each day to work on their plots.’ See Muriel Grindrod, \textit{Italy}, Ernest Benn Limited, London, 1968, p. 211.} Despite being hailed as a model for the future of southern development due to its combination of cutting-edge town planning theories, Neorealist architecture as well as funding from the ERP and the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno, the reality of the project was in stark contrast to the utopian image portrayed in the official sources examined above as well as contemporary architectural and urban planning periodicals and documentaries.\footnote{See for example Giancarlo De Carlo, ‘A proposito di La Martella, \textit{Casabella continuità}, (1954), no. 200, pp. v-viii; Ludovico Quaroni, ‘La chiesa del villaggio “La Martella“’, \textit{Casabella continuità}, (1955), no. 208, pp. 30-34; Ludovico Quaroni, ‘La chiesa: lo spazio interno’, \textit{Casabella continuità}, (1955), no. 208, pp. 34-42; Paolo Portoghesi, ‘L’esperimento la Martella’, \textit{Civilità delle macchine}, (1955), no. 6, pp. 16-20; Michele Prisco, ‘La Martella è un simbolo del Mezzogiorno in cammino’, \textit{Prospettive meridionali}, (1955), no.6, pp. 13-15. Furthermore, Matera and La Martella were the primary focus of Nicolò Ferrari’s documentary \textit{Cronache dell’Urbanistica italiana}, (Italy, 1954) which uses the Sassi to exemplify Italy’s post-war housing crisis and La Martella as a model for town planning.} A number of factors hampered the project from the outset and contributed to its slow decline. First, there was a lack of coordination between the different
organizations involved in completing the village’s construction, i.e. UNRRA-CASAS and the land reform board. In a letter to Emilio Colombo dated 27 August 1953, Giuseppe Lamacchia, the mayor of Matera, noted that ‘il mancato coordinamento delle attività esplicate dagli enti in parola e la mancata collaborazione nel quadro della visione unitaria della vita del borgo hanno prodotto vaste e profonde fratture che incidono sensibilmente sullo sviluppo del borgo.’\textsuperscript{108} This lack of coordination continued during La Martella’s early life and delayed the provision of a number of the village’s public buildings and essential services. By February 1955, 90 of the projected 200 projected houses at La Martella had been occupied by families from the Sassi. The village had a population of approximately 1,000 residents. The new town, however, was still without a post office, a suitable school building, a public telephone, a working doctor’s surgery, a resident doctor and midwife as well as adequate public transport facilities.\textsuperscript{109} Furthermore, there were structural problems with the village’s newly built homes. The leakage of rainwater in 1954 had rendered a number of houses uninhabitable forcing residents to leave their homes temporarily.\textsuperscript{110} Moreover, the communal ovens, designed to recreate the social

\textsuperscript{108} The letter continues by cataloguing the specific failures of the official bodies responsible for La Martella’s completion. See ASM, Prefettura, Atti Amministrativi di Gabinetto (Ricovero 1990), busta 82, fascicolo 662, sottofascicolo B, Risanamento dei rioni dei “Sassi” di Matera. Legge 17 maggio 1952: Programma delle opere e degli interventi.


\textsuperscript{110} A letter from Romano Pasquinageli, head of the local carabinieri, to the town’s Prefect, dated 18 November 1954, noted that three families were forced to abandon their homes at La Martella ‘per forte infiltrazione acqua e difetto costruzione’. See ASM, Prefettura, Atti
ties of the Sassi, were not completed in time for the village’s opening in 1953 following a dispute between the two companies responsible for their construction.\textsuperscript{111} Instead the women of La Martella were ferried to and from Matera once a week to use the Sassi’s public ovens. The failure of the village’s only shop, managed by the land reform board, to provide adequate supplies of essential foodstuffs and cooking supplies (including bread, oil, salt, wine and salt) further exacerbated the situation. As a result La Martella was still completely dependent on the provincial capital and its residents were forced to make regular bus trips to Matera at a cost of 100 lire each way.\textsuperscript{112}

Furthermore, the process of allocating land and housing to La Martella’s residents created social disharmony within the new community. In order to ensure that the village would be self-sufficient the \textit{Commissione Speciale dei Sassi}, following advice from UNRRA-CASAS, had decided to allocate houses to families who owned or rented at least three hectares of land in the vicinity of La Martella. The existing plot of land would then be augmented by an allocation from the land reform board (this type of farm was known as a \textit{quota} while small...
farms allocated to landless peasants were called *poderi*). There were a total of 90 new homes available in the first batch of houses built. As noted above, forty-nine land reform assignees and their families had been transferred to La Martella on 17 May 1953. Another eight assignees and their families moved to the village in November of the same year. Fifty-eight families renting land near La Martella were earmarked as potential assignees for the remaining 33 houses. However, only 13 were interested in moving to the new village. The remaining families deemed the three hectares of additional land that the reform board had offered as too small to meet their farming needs. This refusal was telling of popular attitudes towards La Martella, as the land offered would have transformed these agricultural workers from short-term tenant farmers into small landowners.114

In January 1954 only 10 of the 58 families that the land reform board had originally shortlisted for rehousing were transferred to La Martella. The remaining 23 houses were assigned in February 1954 to families chosen by UNRRA-CASAS and the local town council. However, these families were not eligible for land from the reform board; rather they were granted housing under the provisions of the special law for the Sassi. The 23 newly-transferred families, predominately landless and some from homes that had been defined as suitable for renovation, called on the reform board to provide them with land and work. Writing in 1955 about the lessons that needed to be learned from La Martella, Fedele Aiello argued that placing families assigned land and housing by the agricultural reform board in the same village as those evacuated from the

113 Foot, *Modern Italy*, pp. 115-116
114 Aiello, pp. 63-64
Sassi under the terms of the Special Law had created a dangerous division in La Martella's fledgling community.\(^{115}\) This division was illustrated in a letter of protest from landless residents to the local prefect, bishop and land reform office dated 13 October 1955. The failure to provide land meant that the nine signatories and their families had effectively been without work and income since moving to the village in February 1954.

\[\text{Di fronte a questa situazione abbastanza precaria fanno appello alle autorità intestate affinché prendano in seria considerazione la questione in oggetto, vogliono richiamare l’Ente di Riforma e farla subito all’assegnazione, altrimenti questi lavoratori della terra che sono stati spostati, chi per le case malsane e chi per le famiglie numerose non possono restare inermi, senza terra e senza lavoro, peggiorando giorno per giorno le loro condizioni di vita. Fanno voti affinché vengano adottati tutti i provvedimenti onde evitare le continue agitazioni e i continui disagi che l’incombe giorno per giorno. Attuare quella che é la vera giustizia e serietà nell’assegnazione delle terre ed evitare dissidi fra i lavoratori stessi.}\(^{116}\)

When UNRRA-CASAS proposed creating an agricultural cooperative for the 23 landless families in spring 1954, the Ente di riforma decided to include the new residents amongst its assignees. As a result the land reform board became La Martella’s most influential public body.\(^{117}\)

Land allocation, however, did not fully resolve La Martella's social or labour problems. Some of the plots assigned to residents were situated as far from La Martella as they were from Matera thus nullifying one of the project’s main aims, i.e. to move small landowners closer to their workplace and increase

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\(^{115}\) For a detailed account of housing allocation at La Martella see Aiello, p. 63-64.

\(^{116}\) See ASM, Prefettura, Atti Amministrativi di Gabinetto (Ricovero 1990), busta 161, fascicolo 1370. Moreover, an article in the regional newspaper Basilicata in October 1955 reported that eleven families transferred to La Martella were still waiting to receive agricultural land from the reform board and as a result were living in dire poverty. Despite numerous efforts to obtain the land promised to them, including letters to local and national politicians as well as the reform board, no indication had been given about when the situation would be finally resolved. ’Nuovamente alla ribalta il villaggio ”La Martella”. Undici famiglie sono ancora senza terra’, Basilicata, 23 October 1955, p. 1.

\(^{117}\) Aiello, pp. 64-65
agricultural productivity. Speaking about the land allocated to his family after their transfer to La Martella, Angelo Raffaele Belfiore noted that ‘dall’allogio che ci avevano dato, per raggiungere la campagna, vicino Santa Maria d’Irsi, ci volevano quasi 5 ore. Troppo lontano. La promessa di assegnarci la terra sotto casa non fu mantenuta.’ Furthermore, there were problems with the quality of land that the reform board had distributed. A letter of complaint signed by ten assignees at La Martella to the local prefect and mayor, dated 19 November 1953, claims that much of the land distributed was rocky, infertile and wholly unsuitable for agriculture. The letter alludes to the social divisions that land allocation had created amongst the village’s assignees. There were, in addition, problems in expropriating the required amount of land needed for La Martella’s new residents. A letter from the Prefect of Matera, dated 7 June 1955, to the president of the Consorzio del Medio Bradano notes that the agricultural reform board was struggling to find the required 260 hectares of land needed for the 68 families scheduled to move to La Martella.

The various teething problems during La Martella’s early life caused widespread discontent amongst the village’s residents. This manifested itself in popular protest which culminated in the so-called marcia su Matera on 3 February 1955. Following a public meeting the night before, between 50 and 80 residents from the village travelled to the provincial capital by bus to protest.

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118 See Doria, p. 75.
120 ASM, Prefettura, Atti Amministrativi di Gabinetto (ricovero 1990), busta 82, fascicolo 669, sottofascicolo 2
against infrastructural problems with housing; the lack of postal and telephonic services; the failure to supply a blacksmith, a barber, and a local land reform office; and the degradation of the village’s internal road network. Together with the local priest and a number of social workers that UNRRA-CASAS had provided the village, the protesters delivered a petition to the relief agency’s local offices and the Prefect of Matera. The ‘march on Matera’ provoked debate about La Martella’s social conditions in the local press. Criticism of the village’s troubled development was led by the Matera-based weekly Basilicata, which was closely linked to Adriano Olivetti’s Comunità movement and the erstwhile Action Party. According to an article published on 13 February 1955, the protest earlier that month had removed ‘il velo alla patina edulcorata ed ufficiale che avvolge quello che – comunque – è da giudicare come il primo serio tentativo di adeguare la riforma agraria e l’edilizia rurale alla realtà della vita contadina’. Moreover, Basilicata claimed that rivalry between the land reform board and UNRRA-CASAS had resulted in the former deliberately obstructing the village’s completion. In contrast, the local ecclesiastical

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121 Restucci and Tafuri, p. 49
122 This narrative of events was reported in an article by Leonardo Sacco which appeared in Il Mondo on 15 September 1955 and later reproduced in his book Matera contemporanea. Cultura e società, Basilicata editrice, Matera, 1982, pp. 50-55. However, the police report of the incident makes no mention of the involvement of either the priest or social workers. See the letter from captain of the local carabinieri, Michele Frangipane, dated 3 February 1955, to the both the Prefect and police headquarters at Matera. Archivio di Stato di Matera, Prefettura, Atti Amministrativi di Gabinetto (Ricovero 1990), busta 83, fascicolo 675, sottofascicolo 1. “Matera –Risanamento Sassi – L. 17-5-1952, no. 619, Borgo rurale La Martella, Famiglie assegnatarie delle case e delle terre”.
123 For a history of the Basilicata newspaper, which ran from 1954 to 1962, see Baglieri, Fabbri and Sacco, pp. ix-xxvii.
124 ‘La Martella vuol vivere’, Basilicata, 13 February, 1955, p. 1
125 L’Ente di Riforma non ha mai visto favorevolmente il nuovo villaggio, per diverse ragioni: perché il proprietario delle case è un altro ente, l’UNRRA-CASAS, che vi svolge una diretta opera di assistenza sociale; e tutta l’iniziativa, dalla concezione urbanistica al tipo di ambiente sociale che ne deriva, e più ancora ne può derivare; non è in linea con l’idea dell’Ente di Riforma stesso. Perciò l’atteggiamento adottato verso questa vera e propria
newspaper, L’Eco di Matera blamed La Martella’s problems on the social, political and religious backwardness of the village’s new inhabitants. An article in its July 1955 edition claimed that La Martella’s social and political development was being impeded by an egoism which pervaded the village’s daily life. Furthermore, the new community was spiritually deficient: turnout at Catholic mass was reported to be poor and a number of residents were, instead, reported to be attending an Evangelical service in return for material reward.126 The new community’s social and spiritual poverty, according to the article, was nothing more than could be expected from former inhabitants of the Sassi.127

The protest on 3 February 1955 was the catalyst behind a public debate about La Martella’s various problems. Two public meetings entitled Presente e avvenire della Martella were held on 17 February and 17 March 1955 to discuss the village’s on-going difficulties. The meetings were attended by approximately 30 to 40 people including provincial representatives of the main political parties, local journalists and a number of the village’s residents.128 During the first meeting an unnamed La Martella resident gave a speech that catalogued the practical difficulties the villagers had experienced since moving to the

126 ‘Ci chiediamo se la popolazione evacuata aveva quella ricchezza spirituale (non solo religioso, ma anche più strettamente umana, cioè sociale e politica) tanta necessaria anche in un risanamento economico. Dopo aver esaminato quei tre elementi – sociale, politico e religioso – che dovrebbero essere il tessuto connettivo, le premesse fondamentali della creazione di una comunità moderna e democratica, ci siamo accorti che qualsiasi anelito sociale, o coscienza politica, o spirito religioso, è in deficienza.’ See Sacco, Matera contemporanea, p. 53.

127 ‘È impossibile che tutto questo modo di vivere sia sorto come per incanto: ha indubbiamente le sue radici profonde nella tradizione e nelle abitudini che la gente ha portato al borgo dal suo luogo d’origine, cioè dal sassu.’ Excerpts from the Eco di Matera article are reproduced in Sacco, Matera contemporanea, p. 53.

128 Details of the two meetings are outlined in reports from the local police commissioner to the Prefect of Matera dated 21 February and 18 March respectively. See ASM, Prefettura, Atti Amministrativi di Gabinetto (Ricovero 1990), busta 70, fascicolo 652: Matera situazione locale – ordine pubblico (1952-1956).
widely-publicized project. The speaker underlined that tensions between UNRRA-CASAS and the land reform board had had a negative impact on the lives of La Martella's residents: ‘siete impegnati in lotte fra di voi e volete riversarne su di noi le conseguenze; è tempo che vi mettiate d'accordo e ci lasciate in pace.’ 129 However, notably no officials from the land reform board or UNRRA-CASAS attended either meeting.

Although La Martella's post office was finally opened on 1 April 1955 problems with the primary school building and the village's medical service persisted. 130 The team of UNRRA-CASAS social workers that provided adult education courses and social assistance in the village ceased working at La Martella in June 1955. Their removal from the town appears to have been directly linked to their involvement in the popular protest on 3 February of the same year as well as accusations that they were in fact communists. 131 The UNRRA-CASAS social workers employed at La Martella, however, denied accusations of political bias. Moreover, they warned that their removal from the village would increase the gap between the state and the new community and

129 Giovanni Dello Jacovo, 'Il villaggio La Martella, due anni dopo', Cronache meridionali, (1955), no. 7-8, pp. 497-501
131 A report dated 8 December 1954 written by Aaron Schreiman, an industrial engineer from New Jersey, following a visit to La Martella earlier the same year was critical of the amount of influence, in his opinion, that UNRRA-CASAS social workers had over the life of the village: 'The government workers at La Martella (these social workers are also government employees) are a group whose experience in solving problems is limited by their working through governmental agencies. They have had little or no experience with other methods of solving problems. Hence their approach is very apt to be, "The government should do the job." Such thinking in 1918 by the Russian planners led to the Communist State where the government knows what is best for everyone. Similar thinking will, in its mildest form, lead in Italy to the Socialist State.' See NARA, UC-17 - La Martella; ARC Identifier 4319707 / MLR Number UD 1262; File Unit from Record Group 469: Records of U.S. Foreign Assistance Agencies, 1942-1963; Department of State. International Cooperation Administration. Mission to Italy. Production and Technical Assistance Division.
allow the PCI to fill the void. Writing about the incident in 1960 the local journalist and historian Leonardo Sacco claimed that the UNRRA-CASAS social workers, one of whom was his brother, were removed from La Martella because:

‘agli occhi di alcuni ambienti governativi l’assistenza sociale dello UNRRA aveva il grave difetto di non essere “politizzata”, e di favorire anzi l’autonoma organizzazione degli assegnatari, evitando la solita strada del paternalismo.’

The request for UNRRA-CASAS to discontinue its provision of social services in the village was, according to Sacco, personally delivered by Emilio Colombo, the then undersecretary for agriculture, to the head of UNRRA-CASAS. Sacco traces the slow demise of the original vision for La Martella to the removal of UNRRA-CASAS’s social workers from the village. Instead the land reform board assumed responsibility for social care at La Martella with UNRRA-CASAS increasingly marginalized from the project’s development. This culminated in February 1960 when the land reform board bought the 167 houses and public buildings that UNRRA-CASAS had financed and built at La Martella. This brought UNRRA-CASAS’s direct involvement in a project that it had pioneered to an end. The additional 62 houses scheduled for completion in 1956 were never constructed.

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132 Laura Sasso Calogero, ‘La lezione di La Martella’, *Nord e Sud*, (1955), no. 12, pp. 50-54.
133 Sacco, ‘La Martella nel ‘60’, in Baglieri, Fabri and Sacco, pp. 403-406.
134 Sacco, *Matera contemporanea*, pp. 46-48
135 A report dated 13 May 1955 entitled ‘Appunto per L’On. Colombo sulla situazione de “La Martella”’ which outlined UNRRA-CASAS’s work in the village claimed that ‘se ragioni d’ordine dovessero richiedere che, per uniformità d’indirizzo nella risoluzione dei problemi di riforma e trasformazione fosse opportuno che il settore dell’assistenza sociale e famigliare venga svolto esclusivamente dall’Ente di Riforma in quanto gli assegnatari del borgo sia direttamente che indirettamente sono interessati all’opera di tale Ente, la Prima Giunta può far cessare tale sua attività nel borgo.’ See ACS, Ministero dell’Interno, Direzione generale servizi civili, Attività assistenziali italiane e internazionali, busta 93, documentazione generale.
136 For details on the negotiations between UNRRA-CASAS and the land reform board see ACS, MI, Direzione generale servizi civili, Attività assistenziali italiane e internazionali, busta 93, documentazione generale.
Sassi in the Italian Senate on 26 February 1958, Emilio Colombo referenced La Martella’s early problems but claimed that: ‘ora [1958] la borgata funziona.’\textsuperscript{137} The problems with La Martella’s public services and infrastructure, however, were still present in the 1970s and 1980s. The village’s roads and footpaths were not maintained and had fallen into a state of disrepair; there were problems with the postal service and refuse collection; the local doctor’s surgery had been closed and subsequently illegally occupied; the public transport links to Matera were expensive and unreliable; and the local police station had been shut down.\textsuperscript{138}

La Martella’s slow demise prompts the question why a project hailed as a model for southern development was seemingly allowed to fall into disrepair? As outlined above the rivalry between UNRRA-CASAS and the land reform board appears to have been the primary reason for the catalogue of errors that characterized the village’s early development. However, La Martella’s problems persisted even after UNRRA-CASAS was no longer involved in the project. A number of contemporary sources blamed the village’s decline on the land reform board which, it was argued, was under the DC’s direct control. The Ente di riforma’s actions at La Martella, it was claimed, reflected a wider Christian Democrat policy of using land reform as a means to politically control southern


\textsuperscript{138} See the various documents in ASM, Prefettura (Ricovero 90), busta 84, fascicolo 680, Matera - Situazione sociale del Borgo La Martella, and in particular the letter of complaint from the local section of Comunità Braccianti to the Prefect of Matera dated 20 April 1970. Speaking in 1993 about La Martella, former ECA official Vincent Barnett claimed that: ‘within a year or two, the people were going back to their caves [laughs] because they liked the community life of the caves better than they liked the artificially-structured things that happen when some planners build you a city as the way you ought to live, instead of the way you like to live.’ Interview by Eric Christenson and Linda Christenson with Dr. Vincent Barnett (European Cooperation Administration Program Chief Italy), August 19 1993.
landless workers rather than an attempt to improve social and economic conditions. This conclusion dominates the existing literature on La Martella. Writing in 1955 for the Communist periodical *Cronache del Mezzogiorno*, Giovanni Dello Jacovo claimed that the agricultural reform board was the agent of a government which had used land allocation as a means of social control. La Martella was a prime example of this strategy. The village was a ‘monumento eretto ai perfidi sistemi di un regime che proclama gli assegnatari piccolo proprietari e li vuole invece servi della gleba, chiusi nei campi di concentramento dei comprensori di riforma.’\(^{139}\) Leonardo Sacco came to a similar conclusion in an article originally published in *Il Mondo* in 1955. He claimed that the land reform board had come under increasing pressure to adhere to the DC’s demands at Matera. La Martella’s failings were the result of a ‘composito programma che da vari ambienti e centrali preferiva la trasformazione degli abitanti dei Sassi in sottoproletariato o piccolissima borghesia – per assicurarsene il controllo politico.’\(^{140}\) It is clear that agrarian reform, together with the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno, was crucial in the DC’s construction of political consensus in post-war southern Italy. However, as Paul Ginsborg has noted ‘this strategy was not planned and executed according to some preconceived blueprint, but was rather a series of contingent responses which none the less reveal an underlying unity of intent.’\(^{141}\) Land reform was a reaction to peasant land occupations in Calabria, Basilicata and Puglia in the late 1940s and an attempt to halt communist gains in southern Italy. It was hoped that the transformation of landless agricultural workers into small landowners

\(^{139}\) Dello Jacovo, p. 501
\(^{140}\) Sacco, *Matera contemporanea*, pp. 52-55
\(^{141}\) Ginsborg, p. 139
would diffuse social unrest and foster political consensus amongst assignees.\textsuperscript{142} However, in the context of La Martella the opposite seems to have happened. Social unrest and tensions were caused by the village’s lack of amenities and the failure to provide adequate farm land to new residents. Thus the question remains: if the DC directly controlled the land reform board why did it apparently allow such a high-profile project to fail?

One potential explanation is the relationship between the DC and the land reform board. The argument that the \textit{Ente di riforma} was under the DC’s direct influence appears to neglect the government party’s factious nature and its inability to maintain control over the numerous post-war public bodies and collateral organizations it had established. While the image of an all-seeing and all-controlling Christian Democratic Party that pursued a programmatic strategy of social control in southern Italy has proved to be seductive for historians of post-war Matera, it is a viewpoint which overlooks the complex matrix of political rivalries and infighting that defined the DC at national and local levels in the 1950s. As Rosario Forlenza has argued, the DC was a ‘dynamic and complex phenomenon, conditioned by circumstances and contingencies rather than by programmatic or ideological assumptions.’\textsuperscript{143} The development programme at Matera, similar to the \textit{intervento straordinario}, appears to have been undertaken for short-term political gains rather than as part of a systematic government strategy ‘to dictate politically sanctioned lifestyles and to transform Materans’ beliefs and allegiances, their values and ideology’ as has

\textsuperscript{142} The limited scope of land reform and the marginalization of the southern landowning classes meant that direct political gains at a national level were ultimately negligible. Land reform affected only 3 per cent of the Italian peninsula and 1 per cent of the Republic’s agricultural workers; just 15 per cent of \textit{braccianti} were allocated expropriated land. See King, \textit{Land Reform}, pp. 210-225.

\textsuperscript{143} Forlenza, pp. 331-349
been recently claimed.\textsuperscript{144} It seems more fruitful, therefore, for historians to approach government intervention at Matera as having been reactive, malleable, and conditioned by contemporary political exigencies rather than part of a long-term and coherent political strategy.

Archival documents from the Archivio Sturzo in Rome suggest that the relationship between the DC and the land reform board at Matera was not as straightforward as presented in the contemporary critiques cited above. Rather it mirrored the internal rivalries of the governing party and the tension between national and local party branches. The complex relations between local and national DC politicians and the land reform board could offer a supplemental explanation for La Martella’s continued problems after UNRRA-CASAS had ceased to be involved in the project. A report written in 1955 by Michele Tantolo, DC Provincial Secretary for Matera, implies that there were tensions between the DC’s local branch at Matera and the land reform board. It suggests that there was a gap between the governing party’s local and national representatives. Tantolo delivered a damning assessment of the land reform board in his report. He claimed that ‘troppi dirigenti, a parte la loro impreparazione strettamente e squisitamente sociale, non solo non sono democratici cristiani, quand'anche sono feroci avversari del nostro Partito e dei suoi rappresentanti periferici.’\textsuperscript{145} Moreover, he claimed that it was ‘pressoché impossibile scalzarli, perché, nella maggior parte dei casi, sono emanazioni di

\textsuperscript{144} Toxey, \textit{Materan Contradictions}, p. 55. Toxey describes the Sassi’s post-war evacuation as an ‘act of violence’ in which ‘the government of Rome essentially colonized Matera. Its paternalistic purpose ... was to transform the orientalized peasants who lived a communally sufficient lifestyle (by necessity) into Italian citizens and consumers dependent on the state political and economic systems.’ Ibid., pp. 55-56.

\textsuperscript{145} ASILS, FDC, Segretaria politica, Atti dei segretari 7, Amintore Fanfani, Uffici centrali, Corrispondenza con gli organi periferici, scatola 69, fascicolo 5, Convegno dei segretari provinciali e regionali del Mezzogiorno, Castelgandolfo 6-8 gennaio 1955 (testa di relazione riguardante la provincia di Matera).
gruppi clientelistici strettamente legati a questo o a quel papavero, ovvero, a questo onorevole o a quell’altro, s’intende, democratici cristiani.’

While it is difficult to corroborate Tantolo’s implication that senior DC politicians had provided non-party members jobs with the land reform board, nonetheless the report suggests that there were internal rivalries and power struggles within the governing party. A memorandum dated 4 April 1955 claims that the Ente di riforma had fired the head of the DC’s local section at Pisticci for political activism amongst assignees. This activity had been viewed unfavourably by his supervisors who are described in the report as ‘probabilmente mangiapreti.’

The implication, similar to Tantolo’s report above, is that the reform board was staffed by people openly hostile to the DC. Rather than an organization under the direct control of the Christian Democrats then, the archival sources cited above suggest that the land reform board was not a public body which simply adhered to the ruling party’s political requests on a local level. Thus, the relationship between the DC and the Ente di riforma appears to have been more complex and nuanced than previously thought. The land reform board could have been an example of what Paul Ginsborg dubbed the DC’s ‘uncontrollable monsters’, i.e. public bodies and collateral organizations that the governing party at times struggled to influence and control.

The complex relationship between the land reform board and the Christian Democrats outlined above, coupled with the internal divisions within the ruling party itself, could offer a supplemental reason why La Martella struggled to live up to the image of a

146 Ibid.
147 See ASILS, FDC, Segretaria politica, Atti dei segretari 7, Amintore Fanfani, Uffici centrali, Corrispondenza con gli organi periferici, scatola 64, sottofascicolo 6, Corrispondenza con Matera.
148 Ginsborg, p. 157
model for southern development as depicted in official sources even after UNRRA-CASAS was no longer involved in the project.

The archival sources consulted for this study show that Emilio Colombo, Basilicata's most important post-war politician, was kept constantly informed of La Martella's various problems as well as complaints about the village from residents and visitors.\(^{149}\) If Colombo was one of the *papaveri* referred to in Tantolo's report, that suggests he held influence over various employees of the land reform board. Therefore, the question remains why, if Colombo wielded such influence, would he have allowed an important project in terms of government propaganda to fall into anonymity and disrepair. It seems, above all, that La Martella's slow decline over a twenty-year period reflected dwindling political interest in the project at a national level, and in the wider *risanamento* effort at Matera in general, from the late 1950s onwards. Its symbolic capital had dwindled to zero. The project had been important primarily in terms of political propaganda. The village's development, moreover, needs to be viewed in the context of wider social and economic upheavals in post-war Italy. The economic boom of 1958-1963 saw Italy become a predominately industrial nation. This period was also marked by migration, both internal and external which included a rural exodus as millions of Italians swapped the countryside.

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\(^{149}\) See for example a report on La Martella by the Cassa per Mezzogiorno dated 21 May 1955 in ACS, Ministero dell'Interno, Direzione generale servizi civili, Attività assistenziali italiane e internazionali, busta 93, documentazione generale; and a letter dated 5 March 1955 from a priest who had been so disappointed following his visit to La Martella that he wrote a letter of complaint to Amintore Fanfani who later forwarded it to Colombo. The priest wrote that: 'sono rimasto alquanto deluso nell'osservare e sentire. Parlai con una persona qualificata del Villaggio, degna di fiducia (non potei accostare altre persone perché avevo poco tempo disponibile a anche perché credetti sufficiente la testimonianza sua) "Molto fumo (l'arrosto c'è ma non nella qualità che si desidererebbe o che si aspetrebbe [sic]) molti mangiano attorno a un così delizioso piatto, molto scivio di denaro, molti capi e sottocapi, ingegneri e sottoingegneri, molti guadagni illeciti ecc". ASILS, FDC, Segretaria politica, Atti dei segretari 7, Amintore Fanfani, Uffici centrali, Corrispondenza con gli organi periferici, scatola 64, sottofascicolo 6, Corrispondenza con Matera.
for Italy’s rapidly growing provincial capitals and the many centres of industrial and economic growth.\textsuperscript{150} As a result land reform was relegated in terms of political importance as the aspirations of many Italians turned away from agriculture. In the context of La Martella this is reflected in the fact that the village no longer featured in official propaganda in the late 1950s. The project seems to have had a finite value in the context of promoting the government’s southern development programme, in particular land reform, and was no longer of political relevance at the end of the 1950s following the onset of the economic miracle. The political disinterest in La Martella appears to have been apparent at a local and regional level. During a talk given in the village’s Communist section on 9 May 1980, Giambattista Barberino, the PCI’s regional counsellor for Basilicata, denounced ‘lo stato di abbandono in cui resta detta Borgata e la mancata esecuzione di opera per l’irrigazione delle campagne circostante.’\textsuperscript{151} The village’s political abandonment was blamed on the disinterest of local politicians, in particular the DC, and the land reform board. While Barberino’s words need to be viewed in the context political canvassing, contemporary press accounts of La Martella present a similar description of a village that was no longer of political interest and had thus been left to slowly deteriorate.\textsuperscript{152}

The sense of frustration that La Martella’s residents felt at their apparent


\textsuperscript{151} ASM, Prefettura (RICOVERO 90), busta 84, fascicolo 680, Matera - Situazione sociale del Borgo La Martella

\textsuperscript{152} See the press clippings from the 1970s and 1980s in ASM, Prefettura (RICOVERO 90), busta 84, fascicolo 680, Matera - Situazione sociale del Borgo La Martella
abandonment can be gauged in a letter of protest dated 8 April 1972, signed by 80 assignees and sent to the Italian Prime Minister; the local prefect and mayor; Emilio Colombo; the regional president; the DC regional secretary and the land reform board. The letter was written in the wake of eviction orders served to a number of residents who had refused to accept the terms of a new housing agreement proposed by the land reform board. The village’s inhabitants had originally been promised the possibility of redeeming their mortgages according to the original value that UNRRA-CASAS had stipulated in the 1950s. However, the land reform board wanted to remove this guarantee from the new housing contract. The petition expressed the frustrations that a community, hailed as a model for southern development in the mid-1950s, had accumulated over the intervening twenty-year period:

I cittadini di La Martella sono stati i pionieri dell’esperimento di riforma agraria e di sfollamento dei Sassi mediante la costituzione di un borgo rurale con rappresentanze di altre categorie sociali (artigiani, commercianti, ecc.) e hanno per ciò affrontato e subito straordinari sacrifici personali e familiari di natura spirituale e morale ed anche economica essendo rimasti isolati dalla città privi dei conforti e dei servizi di cui normalmente godono altri cittadini, con conseguenti maggiori spese, pur rimanendo nella più assoluta povertà.\textsuperscript{153}

**Conclusion**

Notwithstanding the problems with the La Martella project, the village became one of the key images utilized by the DC in the early 1950s to promote its reform programme for southern Italy. La Martella was one of the first joint Cassa per il Mezzogiorno and land-reform projects to be inaugurated and thus had a unique political and historical significance in the context of publicizing the *intervento straordinario*. As outlined above, Matera and La Martella were

\textsuperscript{153} ASM, Prefettura (Ricovero 90), busta 84, fascicolo 692, La Martella Ente di Riforma
juxtaposed in official sources to promote southern Italy’s rapid transition from ‘backwardness’ to ‘modernity’. The village was used to espouse the message that improvements to housing and infrastructure would strengthen rather than erode traditional family and community bonds. However, the project had initially been the brainchild of UNRRA-CASAS. It was co-opted into the wider reform programme undertaken at Matera following De Gasperi’s first visit to the town in 1950 and the mounting political and media focus on a city that had been dubbed a national shame. La Martella’s failure to live up to its billing as a model for southern development revealed the coordination problems and internal rivalries between the official bodies involved in the project’s construction and management. The village’s continued uneven development suggests that the relationship between the land reform board and the Christian Democrats may have been more complex than the image previously presented in the existing literature. Above all, however, it seems that the political interest in the village’s maintenance ran parallel to its role in promoting the DC’s southern reform programme. This suggests that La Martella was ultimately, as Marcello Fabbri has suggested, ‘come opera da regime da mostrare e fotografare.’

Once land reform had declined in political importance in the late 1950s with the onset of the economic miracle, Matera, the so-called capital of southern Italy’s civiltà contadina, and La Martella, land reform’s model village, all but disappeared from official sources and the village slowly fell into a state of neglect. Behind the veneer offered by the numerous official images of La Martella, therefore, was the reality of a project that had failed to deliver on the promises of De Gasperi and his party. As a result, the village which was hailed as a model for southern

154 Quoted in Francione, p. 113
development in fact became a monument to the *intervento straordinario*'s many limitations.\textsuperscript{155}

\textsuperscript{155} Research visits to La Martella in 2010 and 2011 revealed that the village has been reinvented as an industrial zone and hamlet of Matera with thirty-two houses recently built in a new residential area called Ecopolis in 2009. Notably on 25 May 2012 La Martella’s first ever library was opened. The local historian and journalist Leonardo Sacco donated his personal archive to the village under the proviso that the public library would be dedicated to the memory of Adriano Olivetti. For further information on La Martella today see Vito Orlando and Mariana Pacucci, *La Martella 50 anni dopo: situazione attuale e prospettive di rinascita del borgo. Risultati dell’indagine socio-religiosa*, Matera, 2004; and Francione, pp. 119-129.
Conclusions

Oggi su Matera è calato il silenzio: solo dei gruppi di tecnici stranieri o alcuni studenti delle Facoltà di Architettura continuano a interessarsi all’esperimento effettuato e alle conseguenze che ne sono derivate ... La “storia” di Matera è nata con i primi interventi della Riforma agraria, e dalle prospettive di mutamento del latifondo ha preso slancio e vita; tutti i programmi hanno avuto come bara la soluzione del problema contadino. Oggi che l’indirizzo politico è mutato, che della Riforma si tende a parlare solo come un capitolo chiuso, anche la “storia” di Matera rientra in questo libro di cui si vuol scrivere l’indice.¹

The above quote comes from an article that the architect and urban planner Carlo Aymonino wrote in 1959 about the risanamento programme for the Sassi. It reflects the fact that by the time the second special law for Matera was passed on 21 March 1958 the Sassi were no longer considered a pressing political concern. Following the implementation of the first special law for Matera and the resulting risanamento programme, the Christian Democrats claimed to have resolved a national shame and taken the first step in tackling the southern question. Instead the city became a laboratory for urban planners and architects and an important source for government propaganda promoting the intervento straordinario. Official patriotic narratives produced in the context of Matera switched from shame to pride. However, Matera’s time in the political and media spotlight was limited. The years of Italy’s post-war economic miracle were marked by rural exodus as millions of Italians swapped the countryside for the country’s rapidly growing provincial capitals and centres of industrial and economic growth.² The issue of land ownership, which had inspired thousands of braccianti to occupy the great estates in the immediate post-war years, ceased to have the same political currency at a national level. Instead from the

¹ Carlo Aymonino, ‘Matera: mito e realtà’, Casabella continua, (1959), no. 231, pp. 11-12
² See Foot, Modern Italy, p. 138 and Ginsborg, p. 219.
late 1950s the Christian Democrat government turned its attention to a programme of industrial development for southern Italy. In this broader historical context, Matera’s symbolic role as the capital of southern rural culture and emblem of the southern question diminished in political importance. The fact that no government ministers attended Spine Bianche’s inauguration in 1959, and that there was no national press coverage of this event, suggest that by that point in time the Sassi had lost their political value in official propaganda. In the 1960s Matera and the Sassi had all but disappeared from political debate, official sources and the national press. As a result the city faded back into provincial obscurity.

The Italian state spent over 35 billion lire on rehousing Sassi residents from 1952 onwards. Despite this investment a number of cave homes continued to be occupied into the 1970s: over 2,395 dwellings were still in use in 1958 and approximately 420, albeit illegally, as late as 1971. Two further special laws for the Sassi were passed in 1967 and 1971 and a national competition on how to preserve the then largely uninhabited 29-hectare site was held in 1974. From an urban centre that had housed an estimated 15,000 people in the 1950s, the Sassi had become a ghost city that was used as an illegal rubbish dump and associated with petty crime. A preservation order was passed in 1986, however, and the Sassi’s elevation to a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1993 saw Matera’s former slums rebranded as a cultural treasure that needed to be preserved. A

4 Pontrandolfi, p. 154
5 Ibid., p. 186
6 For an overview of debates in the 1960s about what to do with the Sassi see Restucci and Tafuri, pp. 70-83; for a summary of the public competition for preserving the Sassi see the articles in Basilicata, no. 1-3, 1977, pp. 23-31.
process of repopulation and urban regeneration began in the 1990s and today the site is a popular tourist destination.\(^7\)

This research project has examined how and why Matera came to be seen as a national shame and a symbol of the southern question post-1945. It has shown the impact that these concepts had on the city’s post-war history. It contends that notions of national shame and the southern question are conditioned by the historical contexts in which they are produced and are not fixed or universal givens. They change across time and space. Studies of nationalism and the southern question, therefore, need to be carried out on a micro-level to avoid broad generalizations. The case-study of Matera has shown that notions of the city as a symbol of the southern question originated in Carlo Levi’s description of Matera in *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* and gained cultural currency at political and intellectual levels due to the book’s commercial and critical success in the immediate post-war period. The notion of Matera as Other to ideas of modernity was appropriated in the context of discourses of national shame as post-war Italy’s two main parties, the Christian Democrats and the Italian Communist Party, looked to forge political identities and build electoral consensus. Moreover, the image of Matera as a symbol of the southern question was a key image in promoting the DC government’s twin reform programme for southern Italy. The Sassi were used to represent southern Italian poverty in contrast to the images of modernization produced to publicize the work of the land reform board and the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno. Furthermore, this thesis has traced the impact that notions of Matera as a national shame and symbol of

\[^{7}\text{ For a discussion of the preservation efforts undertaken at Matera since 1986 and the urban, economic and social changes that they have engendered see Toxey, *Materan Contradictions*, pp. 235-300.}\]
the southern question had on the city's social and urban fabric in the 1950s. Despite the fact that living standards at Matera were comparable with many other parts of Italy in the immediate post-war period, political and media pressure resulted in the enactment of special legislation for Matera's cave homes on 17 May 1952. The Sassi were slowly emptied in the following decades and new rural and urban housing projects built to accommodate their 15,000 residents. Matera’s social and urban topography was transformed irrevocably. This thesis has shown that narratives of national shame and the southern question were central to this process.

On a micro-level this thesis has made an original contribution to the large body of work on post-war Matera. It has drawn on previously unused primary sources and employed original methods for examining the city's post-war history. In particular the concepts of national shame and the southern question had been largely overlooked or under theorised in the existing literature. The current research project has aimed to fill that gap. This research project has situated Matera's post-war history in the broader context of historical processes at a national and international level. The *risanamento* programme needs to be examined in the context of Cold War politics, land reform, Italy’s post-war economic boom, and the rural exodus of the 1950s. This thesis has challenged the prevalent argument in the existing literature that the special's laws limitations reflected a deliberate Christian Democrat strategy to push landless workers out of agriculture and into industry. Rather the primary sources consulted for this study suggest that the *risanamento* programme’s problems were the result of a lack of institutional coordination, political infighting, the failure to consult the local population, and fading political interest
in a project whose propaganda value diminished in importance in the late 1950s.

Furthermore, this thesis has contributed to the existing body of knowledge on the history of the southern question. The majority of work carried out on this topic has focused on the Liberal period. In contrast, this research project has examined narratives of the southern question generated in the context of post-war Matera. The notion that Matera was a symbol of the southern question saw the city become a testing ground for how to resolve the Mezzogiorno’s perceived social and economic problems. Generic models were applied to a specific local case with limited results. This project has shown that competing and contrasting ideas of the Mezzogiorno were created and used to promote modernization programmes for southern Italy post-1945. These narratives were shaped by the historical context in which they were created: the push for land reform, Cold War politics, and the *intervento straordinario*. These concepts, moreover, had a concrete impact on government policy and southern Italy’s social and urban development. The current research project has endeavoured to make a modest contribution to the existing body of research on the southern question. However, more work on images of the Mezzogiorno in the post-war period is needed. Archival research for this thesis revealed that a large body of official newsreel and print material was produced in the 1950s to promote land reform and Cassa per il Mezzogiorno. Hitherto this material has

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8 For example, during the research phase of this project numerous copies of the monthly magazine *Vita Contadina* that the agricultural reform board produced in the 1950s for the families that had been assigned land and housing were consulted. In addition, the Istituto Luce’s online archive provides access to the large number of newsreels and documentaries produced to publicise government initiatives in southern Italy in the post-war period. See [http://www.archivioluce.com/archivio/](http://www.archivioluce.com/archivio/) (accessed 26/07/2013).
been largely ignored.\textsuperscript{9} A comprehensive study of these sources would provide a
greater understanding of post-war notions of the South and shed light on the
complex interplay between discourse, politics and official policy during a period
of great social, cultural, and urban change.

In addition, the current research project has looked to make an original
contribution to the study of Italian national identity and the history of emotions.
Studies of Italian nationalism have tended to focus on the Liberal period. The
current research project, in contrast, has examined notions of Italian
nationalism in a post-war context. The patriotic narratives that Matera
generated during the scope of this study reveal that there were competing
notions of Italian national identity. These concepts were one of the ways in
which political identities were forged in a Cold War context. The DC and the PCI
looked to define the national ‘we’ and concurrently accuse their political
opponents of being ‘bad’ patriots. This thesis has shown that broad
generalizations about the feelings of Italians, or in fact any group of people, need
to be avoided. Rather historians need to focus their attention on the emotional
scenarios that were created and the specific emotional communities which
shaped these narratives at a micro-level. The theoretical framework used to
examine national shame in the context of post-war Matera could potentially be
used to study patriotic narratives in different cultural, temporal and
geographical contexts.

Through the use of hitherto neglected archival sources this research
project has looked to register the absent voices of the 15,000 people that the

\textsuperscript{9} Paola Bonifazio has recently examined notions of the South in a number of official
documentaries, but arguably a lot more work remains to be done on this topic. See the third
chapter in Bonifazio, \textit{Narrating Modernization}.\hfill 267
risanamento programme directly affected. These sources, however, are fragmentary in nature and the history of post-war Matera from below remains to be written. Although a number of recent studies have incorporated an oral history component, this is an area of study that could be developed further in future research. A community-based project in which local residents interview older relatives that were moved from the Sassi to new housing could be a successful avenue for large-scale data collection in this regard. Vernacular photography is another primary source that could be used to examine the experiences and perspectives of former Sassi dwellers post-1945. The Museo virtuale della memoria collettiva di Matera has collected a large body of photos depicting various aspects of life in post-war Matera.¹⁰ These images are available via their website, but hitherto no comprehensive study of these important sources appears to have been undertaken. They provide a potential window into the lives of the people that notions of Matera as a national shame and symbol of the southern question most directly affected.

This thesis is a history of how and why the city of Matera came to be seen as a national shame and a symbol of the southern question in the post-war period. The discursive construction of these ideas was a politically charged process. These narratives were produced in the context of emerging Cold War rivalries and the battle for electoral consensus in a country that was rebuilding itself in material, social, cultural and political terms following twenty years of Fascist rule and the destruction of the Second World War. The imaginings of the nation and of the South generated in the context of post-war Matera were created through words and images, but they had concrete effects. They

mobilized political opinion, influenced government policy, shaped Matera's urban landscape, and transformed the lives of 15,000 people permanently.
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