

The Indigenous Healing Tradition in Calabria, Italy¹

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In 2003, the four of us spent several weeks in Calabria, Italy. We interviewed local people about folk healing remedies, attended a Feast Day honoring St. Cosma and St. Damian, and paid two visits to the Shrine of Madonna dello Scoglio, where we interviewed its founder, Fratel Cosimo. In this essay, we have provided our impressions of Calabria and the ways in which its native people have developed indigenous practices and beliefs around medicine and healing. Although it is one of the poorest areas in Italy, Calabria is one of the richest in its folk traditions and alternative modes of healing. Combining personal experiences and theoretical knowledge, this paper aims at illuminating how these practices, though indigenous and primal, still continue to serve a meaningful and powerful purpose for the inhabitants of Calabria.

Keywords: *complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), ethnomedicine, traditional medicine, folk medicine, evil eye, witchcraft, magic, Calabria*

In April 1995, before it became the Center for Alternative and Complimentary Medicine, the Office of Alternative Medicine (OAM) of the United States National Institutes of Health held a conference on research methodology. The objective of the conference was to evaluate the need for research in the field of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), which they designed several working groups to address with consensus statements on a variety of essential topics. Given that most of the world's population uses and spends 60 billion dollars a year on CAM, the OAM recognized the demand for its study. Americans spend approximately 17 billion dollars per year on CAM practices, many of which can be classified as traditional medicine, or ethnomedicine (Freeman, 2004; World Health Organization, 2003).

The OAM panel on definition and description accepted a dual charge: To establish a definition of the field of complementary and alternative medicine for the purposes of identification and research, and to identify factors critical to a thorough and unbiased description of CAM systems; one that would support both quantitative and qualitative research. The panel defined CAM as follows:

Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) is a broad domain of healing resources that encompasses all health systems, modalities, and practices and their accompanying theories and beliefs, other than those intrinsic to the politically dominant health system of a particular society or culture in a given historical period. CAM includes all such practices and ideas self-defined by their users as preventing or treating illness or promoting health and well being. Boundaries within CAM and between the CAM domain and the domain of the dominant system are not always sharp or fixed. (O'Connor et al., 1997)

The panel's second goal was to establish a list of parameters for obtaining thorough descriptions of CAM systems. The list consisted of 13 categories first conceptualized by Hufford (1995):

1. Lexicon: What are the specialized terms in the system?
2. Taxonomy: What classes of health and sickness does the system recognize and address?
3. Epistemology: How was the body of knowledge derived?

4. Theories: What are the key mechanisms understood to be?
5. Goals for Interventions: What are the primary goals of the system?
6. Outcome Measures: What constitutes a successful intervention?
7. Social Organization: Who uses and who practices the system?
8. Specific Activities: What do the practitioners do? What do they use?
9. Responsibilities: What are the responsibilities of the practitioners, patients, families, and community members?
10. Scope: How extensive are the system's applications?
11. Analysis of Benefits and Barriers: What are the risks and costs of the system?
12. Views of Suffering and Death: How does the system view suffering and death?
13. Comparison and Interaction with Dominant System: What does this system provide that the dominant system does not? How does this system interact with the dominant system?

A 14th category was provided for researchers, listing critical procedures for formal investigations of CAM systems. As this article is a descriptive account of Calabrian healers and healing practices, and not a formal assessment of their efficacy, we omit consideration of this final guideline.

A Brief History of Calabria

Calabria is renowned for its Mediterranean climate and history of conquest and settlement, reaching back to antiquity. This narrow strip of land in Southern Italy is located between the Tyrrhenian and Ionian Seas, or the "toe" of Italy's "boot." Human presence in the area dates back to the Paleolithic Age (as determined by the graffito in Cosenza), and artifacts of *Homo erectus* from about 700,000 years BCE. have been recovered in coastal areas. Researchers have discovered remnants of the Copper Age and Bronze Age, often in caves, as well as from the Iron Age (e.g., tombs in Cassano Ionio). When the Neolithic replaced the Paleolithic age, hunters converted to farming and founded the first villages roughly 3500 BCE (Douglas, 1915/2001).

Calabria prehistory ended with colonization about 2000 BCE. The term "Italy" was derived from King Italo of the Enotrians or Arcadians, the first colonizers, and the name eventually spread to the entire peninsula.

Beginning about 720 BCE, various city-states from Greece established rich and colorful colonies meriting the name *Magna Graecia* (i.e., "Greater Greece," a name that conveyed the comparatively small size of the mother country). *Magna Graecia* was well reputed for the health of its people, which was the result of proper territorial management and ecological balance. In those days, Calabria was known for its fertile farmlands, as well as its precious minerals and silks. Bronze tablets, unearthed in 1732, described how the Greek colonists were obliged to replace wind-swept or dead trees, and initiate land reclamation works.

Roman occupation brought with it a disregard for traditional ways of life, tilled fields instead pastures, and a diminishing population. Malaria casualties took farmers away from their plots, and the uncultivated land produced marshes that compounded the spread of malaria (Danubio, Piro, & Tagarelli, 1999). In time, Italy became the center of the Roman Empire, which began its conquest of Calabria in about 275 BCE, defeating most of the Calabrian tribes within a few years. Many of these tribes supported Hannibal during the Second Punic War, but when Hannibal withdrew from Italy, he murdered his Calabrian allies to protect himself against facing them in battle should they defect to Rome. When the threat of Hannibal and Carthage ended, the Roman conquest of Calabria was completed in 211 BCE. The mass deforestation initiated by the Romans marked the first serious environmental challenge to the area. Such deforestation practices expanded marshy areas ideal for mosquitoes, and consequently malaria.

Goths and Visigoths invaded the area, sacked towns, and destroyed much of Calabria's Greek and Roman legacy. After the fall of Rome in the 4th century CE, Byzantines dominated the area and named it "Calabria" in the 7th century CE. Eastern Orthodox monks came with the Byzantine rulers, establishing monasteries and building shrines in the secluded mountains. Their rule lasted until the 11th century CE and was followed by the Normans, who arrived about 1050 CE, creating the Kingdom of the South. The Swabians conquered the Normans in 1194 and cultivated one of the most civilized nations in that part of the world, the so-called "Kingdom of the Sun," in which people of different religious persuasions (e.g., Islamic, Greek Orthodox) lived as peaceful neighbors. This kingdom was followed by others, specifically Anjou in 1266 and Aragon in 1435, whose rulers created a

system of feudalism in Spain, which conquered the area in 1503. Austrian domination began in 1707, followed by Bourbon rule in 1734. Under the title, "The Kingdom of the Two Sicilies," the Bourbons exploited local natural resources, especially what was left of the forests.

Even though they had lived in Italy for 12 centuries, probably longer than in any other place in Europe, Jews suffered persecution at the hands of the Catholic Church. The move dated back to 1290 when a Dominican friar accused the Jews of Apulia of putting a Christian child to death in mockery of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Calabrian Jews put up strong resistance to maltreatment, but organized Jewry virtually disappeared from southern Italy for several centuries after being expelled from Calabria in 1541. Frederick II and his immediate line protected the Jews of Sicily from the Crusaders and fanatical church authorities. However, Spain controlled Sicily during the years when Ferdinand and Isabella began the expulsion movement. Half of the Jewish population converted to Catholicism to prevent the loss of their property. Jewish communities slowly regained equality and emancipation only to be persecuted again during the Fascist era in the 20th century.

Another instance of gross intolerance occurred under Spanish rule in 1571, whereby the Waldenses were massacred for their allegiance to the Protestant movement in Europe. During the era of Islamic expansion, there were periodic forays by Muslims. Bourbon rule was interrupted by French domination from 1805 to 1816, and then resumed until Garibaldi unified Italy in the middle of the 19th century.

In the meantime, disastrous agricultural practices had transformed the pristine coastlands into marshy and malarial swamps. Much of the population withdrew inland to avoid both malaria and pirate raids, primarily by the Saracens and the Turks from 1100 to 1800. Chapels and churches constructed by Roman Catholic monks helped preserve Calabria's culture. However, a major earthquake in 1783 destroyed many of those buildings and cultural artifacts.

In the early 19th century secret societies abounded, working to help Garibaldi unify what is now Italy. The efforts of Garibaldi and supporting subversive groups were confirmed by a plebiscite on October 21, 1860 (Crawford, 1901).

The term "traditional southern Italy" refers to the provinces of Calabria, Abruzzi, Basilicata, Campagna, Molise, Puglia, and Sicily before World War II. After

the war, and the downfall of Fascism, Italy underwent a dramatic transformation that erased many folk traditions or modified them beyond recognition. This process was not as noticeable in Calabria as it was elsewhere due to both internal and external isolation (Orlando, 1998). This is one reason why folk healing traditions have survived over the millennia.

Calabria represents what Keates (1915/2001) has called a "savage Europe" that existed alongside its more "civilized" equivalent, a place where the Renaissance and the Enlightenment were unknown. It has always been among the regions of Europe most resistant to the Europeanizing process (p. 7) and, later, to industrialization. Without the production base that accompanies industrialization, many of the local agrarian based customs remained, including folk health practices.

Keates (1915/2001) continued, "Lonely, intractable, often impenetrably strange, sheltering the oddest of paradoxes, the weirdest of survivals and the darkest of secrets, Calabria endures, sullenly defiant of our modern manias of system, connection, and universal openness" (p. 8). However, it was not so much that Calabria waged an open or even covert revolution against Rome and its more contemporary rulers; its remoteness was responsible for neglect by the forces of modernization.

We encountered a somewhat different Calabria, as we stayed in the populated areas of the Locride (the topographical area that is claimed to have been influenced by the Greek city of Locroi Epizhyroi). Young adults and families with children are leaving their ancestral mountain villages for the coastal towns and cities to seek job opportunities and a modern lifestyle. The Calabria that was once resistant to change now ensures that all of its children learn foreign languages in school, and many of the children we met spoke or understood at least basic English. Computers are part of many households, and thus the world beyond the historical isolation is at their fingertips. Indeed, we suspect that the "savage culture" described by Keates (1915/2001) is misleading, perhaps held over from colonialist attitudes.

Calabrian institutions and culture have been deeply influenced by Roman Catholic traditions. For example, the 12th century Calabrian abbot Joachim of Fiore first introduced the distinction between the Holy Spirit and Divine entity into Catholic theology (McGinn, 1985) and several folk healers in the area continue to evoke the Holy Spirit. The alleged conversation between St. Peter and Jesus Christ in the olive grove is salient

evidence for the commingling influences of native belief and Catholicism, in which Christian figures are substituted for folk characters.

St. Peter: It takes too much time to collect all these small olives. Let's make them the size of melons.

Jesus Christ: Very well. But something awkward is bound to happen when you suggest improvements.

After the olives were enlarged one of them fell on top of St. Peter's head, ruining his new hat, provoking laughter on the part of Jesus Christ.

This story is typical of "folk Catholicism," practiced in mountainous and rural areas; a syncretic mixture of some pre-Christian elements with a dose of Roman Catholicism, still relatively resistant to much of the official church doctrine. The church traditionally allied with the elite political and economic classes, causing it to be viewed as a conspirator in the cultural and economic oppression of Calabrian peasants. Italy has been rife with anti-clericalism, in part because priests disapprove of such folk activities as non-religious festivals, birth control, and premarital sex. Nevertheless, Calabrian folk healing has a Roman Catholic veneer (Ramage & Clay, 1987).

Folk Healing Practices in Calabria

In 1898, A. D. White wrote that medical science has frequently been blocked by belief in "supernatural agencies," but that folk traditions have gradually given way to Western biomedical science. However, there are exceptions in remote locations such as the mountains of Calabria. One can find, in this area and even in some nearby urban settings, a mosaic of rituals and remedies that fall into the category of Calabrian "popular medicine" (or "folk medicine"). It survived, at least in part, because biomedical practitioners were rare and costly. However, in 1866 the government began to fund physicians, sending one to every small town in the newly unified nation. As a result, many popular medical practices have disappeared; those that have survived can be described using the OAM framework (O'Connor et al., 1997). We have used the "ethnographic present" in these descriptions; some of them do not reflect contemporary beliefs and practices while others survive, primarily in isolated areas. Knowledge about folk medicine circulated without written texts, and therefore contains regional variations. Nevertheless, this account reflects Calabria as a whole, with a particular emphasis on the areas we visited.

Indigenous Healing Tradition in Calabria, Italy

The OAM Framework

1. *Lexicon: What are the specialized terms in the system?*

The key term in Calabrian popular medicine is *malocchio*, the "evil eye," an illness brought about either unintentionally or by malice (Simorto, 1990). In the former instance, it can result from simple envy or jealousy. In the latter instance, it can be evoked by *attaccatura* (attachment), *fascino* or *legatura* (binding), or *fattura* (fixing). The perpetrator of *malocchio* dominates the victim's body by one of these three mechanisms, producing such maladies as "dryness," which might take the form of barrenness, the inability to have or bear children. Especially vulnerable to *malocchio* are "wet youth" (because "wetness" represents fertility, and therefore opposes "dryness"), new brides, pregnant women, and even livestock, if they are the objects of envy for someone who knows how to cast the "evil eye."

It is believed that hunchbacks know how to cast *malocchio*. Priests also possess this ability and may practice it upon losing their moral bearings. One practitioner of *malocchio* confessed, "Every good thing I ever had was gained at the expense of a neighbor."

Another term dates back to ancient times. Pliny the Elder wrote about women who could transform themselves into birds of prey, flying by night, looking for babies to slaughter. The Inquisitors, who prosecuted women suspected of practicing witchcraft, promulgated belief in this folkloric witch, and these women still appear in local folktales, referred to as *streghe*. These women have the power to give people *malocchio*, and are in turn highly feared. There are a few male *streghe*, though either gender can transform themselves into animals rather than birds.

There are a number of traditional folk terms for special conditions. *Il mal caduco*, or the "falling sickness," is dreaded but can be prevented by charms. *Il male di San Donato* or epilepsy is felt to be due to supernatural causes, and can be controlled if the afflicted person carries iron nails or keys, or pictures of lunar crescents and frogs—practices that date back to pagan times.

2. *Taxonomy: What classes of health and sickness does the system recognize and address?*

In Calabrian popular medicine, folk healing, sorcery, witchcraft, magical spells, and religious causation overlap. Not only did we derive this information from our review of the literature, but from conversations with local inhabitants, and personal observation. Indeed these were the three sources from which all of our data was obtained.

3. Epistemology: How was the body of knowledge derived?

Popular medicine in Calabria can be miraculous, medical, or magical. Miraculous healing defies natural law; its effects are attributed to divine intervention, often mediated through the panoply of Roman Catholic saints who have appeared over the centuries. Knowledge of magical practices has been disseminated throughout the rural population rather than being limited to a secret group of practitioners. Our conversations with local informants suggested that self-medication is common, both for oneself and one's family.

Folk practices in Calabria, and elsewhere, are derived from local economies as well as from local modes of subsistence and production. Folk medicine relies on herbal and animal substances, some of which date back to Greek colonization. They are believed to work because of the intrinsic power of the substance; no special rituals are required to summon these qualities.

On the other hand, magical medicine is a collection of rituals, spells, elixirs, and potions that resemble cookbook recipes. Their purported effectiveness results from an established and sequential methodology that activates their latent properties. Both benevolent and malevolent practitioners employ magic, but in Calabria it is also the province of ordinary people. For the inhabitants of Calabria, until fairly recently, life was a precarious enterprise, full of dangers at every turn. Magic was one of many protective strategies people relied upon to ensure the survival of themselves and their family. Calabrian magical practices are a pastiche of Egyptian, Greek, and Roman influences, and even contain a Roman Catholic component; some of them (such as *malocchio*) survive in Calabria today.

4. Theories: What are the key mechanisms?

The Calabrian universe is an interconnected whole; tweaking one part of the fabric is likely to bring about changes in another part. For example, peasants often plant according to the phases of the moon. Calabrians believe that the world is inhabited by a variety of local spirits as well as by angels, demons, and saints. These beings can be invoked to aid survival, but may also be hazardous. Appeasing them with prayer and magic is not seen as sorcery or witchcraft, but as common sense, or protection. These practices are not limited to a small group of esoteric practitioners but are widely practiced. Recipes for protective formulae are typically passed on to younger family members on Christmas Eve or St.

John's Eve (January 23rd), after which time the previous practitioner stops using the procedure.

Before the arrival of Western biomedicine, a number of causal mechanisms were advanced for common ailments. For example, malaria was attributed to sorcery, the evil eye, evil spirits, eating putrefied vegetables, consuming too many blackberries, or drinking stagnant water (Danubio, Piro, & Tagarelli, 1999).

The use of wire netting, beginning in 1899, was thought to be an effective mode for preventing malaria. Calabrians, even physicians, initially suspected that quinine was addictive (Douglas, 1915/2001). Such practices are no longer used, and we found no evidence for their presence in contemporary Calabria.

Although some illnesses, such as *malocchio*, are still treated by magical procedures, Calabrians now rely on the modern medical model to explain the success of most herbal and animal substances. However, God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, Mary, and the saints are given credit for ostensibly miraculous recoveries. Intercessory prayer by the afflicted person, a friend, or family member initiates these healings.

Undergirding all of these conditions and practices is the notion of a "vital force," resident to all Calabrian and southern Italian belief systems. They claim that this force can be strengthened or restored in miraculous healings. It resides in medicinal plants and foods, and is available through magical rituals. It can also occur naturally, for example they believe that the vital force is transferred from a mother to her child during nursing (Binde, 1999).

5. Goals for Interventions: What are the primary goals of the system?

The goal of interventions, whether by prayer or the administration of herbal remedies, is to restore the vital force of the person who has fallen ill.

6. Outcome Measures: What constitutes a successful intervention?

An intervention is considered successful if the vital force has been restored completely or partially. Restoration of this force allows someone to return to work, participate in family life, or rejoin community activities.

7. Social Organization: Who uses and who practices the system?

Calabrian popular medicine is not a unified set of beliefs and practices. It has deep roots in the past, but is not a systematized extension of an ancient religion. Rather, it is an integral part of a rural peasant economic and social way of life, highly syncretized with folk Catholicism.

In addition, there are some practitioners of popular medicine, usually female, who have extensive knowledge of herbs and are able to treat minor illnesses (with the exceptions of tuberculosis and malaria). Their knowledge is frequently combined with popular magic and Roman Catholicism. These female folk healers are referred to as *maghe* while male practitioners are called *maghi*. The “fixers,” or practitioners of magic, are referred to as *fattuchiere*. Many of these practitioners are felt to have inherited their gifts from their ancestors. Genetics aside, it is a common practice for mothers to pass on herbal recipes and other folkloric knowledge to their daughters.

Some of the *maghe*, *maghi*, and *fattuchiere* work in altered states of consciousness. This may involve “merging” with their patient’s condition. Practitioners may involve spirits, especially if they dabble in sorcery. While in an altered state, a folk healer may be asked to find lost objects, stolen livestock, or determine if a client has been “bewitched.” However, there is a considerable overlap of folk healing, sorcery, witchcraft, and religious ritual.

8. Specific Activities: What do the practitioners do? What do they use?

Popular medicine is extremely dependent on herbal preparations. Its advocates hold that “only death can not be cured by plants.” Especially popular are plants with an “anti-thermic” or diuretic effect, such as “embittering plants” (e.g., bitter pomegranate roots, male fern, wild olive, oak and willow bark, lupine seeds, sea onions, ergot of rye, sabina, mustard, and Cajenna (Cayenne) pepper; De Giacomo, 1899). Popular medicine also utilizes animal parts; they believe that “nearly every animal has been discovered to possess some medicinal property” (Douglas, 1915/2001, p. 71).

The most popular herbal and animal medicinal substances include chamomile tea (prescribed for cases of anxiety), swallows’ hearts, tortoise blood (believed to strengthen people’s spines) puppy dogs’ hearts (thought to be especially effective for scrofula), undigested fish taken from the stomachs of larger fish (used for “sea fever,” sicknesses felt to be due to exposure to the sea), chamois blood (given to shepherds’ children to enable them to function at high altitudes), and snake blood (thought to enhance glandular functioning; Douglas, 1915/2001, pp. 70-71).

Over the years, the treatment of malaria by popular medicine has included a variety of practices. They

ranged from applying witchcraft to overturn a sorcerer’s spell to such practices as drinking wine infused with the embers dug out of a fire on St. Lorenzo’s night, using herbal preparations (e.g., juice from bergamot oranges), eating a preparation of viper’s head and wormwood, and tying a variety of supposed curative agents (e.g., toads, lizards, nuts) to the area around a patients’ spleen. Historically, there were regional differences in popular practices; in the city of Reggio Calabria, it was common to have sick people swallow three living bedbugs wrapped in tissue paper. In Cassano allo Ionio and Bisignano, folk practitioners had their patients eat cobwebs, drink their own urine, swallow pulverized insects, or ingest a preparation made from wine and baked rabbit’s blood. People living in other areas took great stock in drinking their own saliva or masticating chunks of tobacco. Prayers were also used to counter malaria. In Consenza, for example, Madonna della Febbre (i.e., “Mary of the Fever”) was frequently petitioned (Genovese, 1924).

Treatment of *malocchio* runs a wide gamut. People who accidentally feel resentment or jealousy can prevent the other person from succumbing to *malocchio* by immediately blessing him or her. Another remedy is to apply a mixture of water, salt, oil, wheat seeds, and molten lead to a victim. Vulnerable people can take preventative measures by wearing amulets, such as horns made of red coral, phallic symbols (e.g., keys, roosters, snakes, daggers, fish), a *mano fica* (a fist), or a *mano cornuta* (a horned hand). Some of the amulets thought to be most effective, are made from silver or tin, and contain cimarruta, the top of the rye plant. Some large amulets are shaped as trees with various other symbols (e.g., horns, suns, moons, fish, keys, Sacred Hearts) at the tips of each branch.

The use of amulets can be attributed to Roman times, in which women often wore *bullae* (small bags filled with phallic-shaped objects) around their necks. These evolved into *brevi*, small bags filled with rue and lavender, semi-precious stones, ashes taken from sacred fires, flowers grown near churches, or images of saints. Especially valuable components of *brevi* are stones filled with iron-rich clay that rattle when shaken. Special *brevi* are filled with *pietre della gravidanza* (pregnancy stones), *pietre del sangue* (red-spotted jasper that will stop a wound from bleeding), and, for protection against sorcery and witchcraft, *brevi* filled with *pietre stellar* (star stones—polyporic pebbles dotted with tiny star-like spots that are sometimes carved into crosses and carried with the

image of a saint) or *legno stregonia* (holly twigs carved into crosses).

Rue is a popular medicinal herb, especially for the treatment of colic, digestive problems, skin eruptions, and even sorcery or witchcraft.

9. Responsibilities: What are the responsibilities of the practitioners, patients, families, and community members?

Even though a sizable proportion of the community may practice popular medicine, there is a responsibility to perform it in a skilled manner. Family and community solidarity is an important value, and this balance must not be put at risk by an intervention.

10. Scope: How extensive are the system's applications?

Calabrian popular medicine is still practiced by people living in rural areas, in the mountains, and by gypsies. However, it generally focuses on health problems that are transitory. During our stay in the small town of Roccella Ionica, we conducted interviews with several of its inhabitants, inquiring about the "home remedies" they employ. The resulting list provided us with contemporary examples of popular Calabrian medicine.

- a. If someone is the victim of *malocchio*, friends and family members can address the condition with prayer. Specialists are needed for more specific treatment. Not much can be done to prevent *malocchio*, but its diagnosis can be made with a special preparation: Start with a cup of water. Add five pinches of salt, and five grains of incense. Add pieces of five palm leaves that have been blessed by a priest, five leaves from an olive tree, and a few embers obtained by burning twigs from an ash tree. Drop five pinches of salt into this concoction; if the salt turns black, the person in question is the victim of the "evil eye." An alternative is to let three drops of olive oil fall into a cup of water; if the drops separate, the person in question has *malocchio*. In both cases, the liquid solution must be thrown away at a crossroads.
- b. To treat small cuts in the skin, boil water, add salt, wait until the water is tepid, and then apply it to the skin. If possible, soak the afflicted body part in the salty water for half an hour. Another treatment is to substitute the section dividers from the reed plant for the salt. If the cut occurred far from one's home while working or playing, urine can be applied immediately.
- c. To treat a recurring cough, put sugar into a foot-warmer or a similar receptacle. Ask the person with

cough to breathe the fumes, and place a blanket over his or her head so that the fumes do not escape. Another remedy is to drink *vino cotto* (wine that has not yet fermented). *Vino cotto* is commonly used in cooking.

- d. For stomach aches, dry the stems of several cherries, boil them in water, and drink the brew once it cools down.
- e. For the treatment of bronchitis, saturate waxed paper with olive oil, warm it by placing it near a fire, then apply the paper to one's chest. Another treatment is to boil linen seeds and place them on one's chest.
- f. For second-degree burns, mix olive oil and plaster; apply it to the burned area of the skin. Later, once the burned area scabs, substitute strono leaves for the olive oil and apply.
- g. For treating high blood pressure, olive leaves can be crushed and mixed with water, then imbibed.
- h. In the case of a headache, sliced potatoes can be applied to one's head and held in place by a headband. If the headband is soaked in vinegar beforehand, the treatment is thought to be even more effective. Linen seeds can be substituted for potatoes.
- i. Chamomile tea is frequently used to calm someone having an anxiety attack.
- j. If a baby is constipated, the tip of an oregano stick coated with human hair or parsley can be carefully inserted into his or her anus.
- k. In the case of recurring dandruff, use soap made from pig fat, soda, olive oil, and lemon skin.
- l. If a mother cannot nurse a baby, and if a substitute is not available, almond milk is better than cow's milk for the baby's milk bottle. If the baby develops an intestinal disorder, a solution of water and leaves from a ruta plant is an effective remedy.
- m. When washing clothes, add embers from an ash tree to the water, even if the clothes are washed in the river. This serves as a disinfectant.

We were told that these remedies are passed down from person to person, usually from mother to daughter, as most home practitioners are women. One informant remarked, "Everybody knows about these treatments."

11. Analysis of Benefits and Barriers: What are the risks and costs of the system?

Prior to Italy's introduction of free public medicine in the 1970s, folk medicine was the treatment of choice for

those who could not afford Western biomedicine, or who lived in areas where physicians were rarely seen. Since that time Western biomedicine has become the keystone of healthcare, though Calabrese maintain their cultural affinity for folk medicine, prayer, and the enactment of religious rituals for health and betterment. Older adults still possess knowledge of folk remedies, and seem to be willing to use both traditional and Western modalities.

Of course, with respect to *malocchio* and witchcraft, there are social risks and costs. As with many societies, people are often reluctant to address such issues in the open, even though they may be commonly and deeply believed. Suspicion of witchcraft or giving evil eye can carry the price of social stigmatization or even ostracism. Given increasingly modern and “rational” attitudes toward these matters, dabbling in these arts may subject one to epithets like crazy, superstitious, or backward. Nevertheless, belief in *malocchio* and witchcraft are still a powerful undercurrent, even in the cities. Some will turn to the latter to solve various social and health related problems, but most tend to keep a respectful distance.

12. Views of Suffering and Death: How does the system view suffering and death?

An omnipresent “vital force” is felt to be a substance that can be lost or gained. Losses lead to illness, weakness, or death. Gains can be evoked from external sources that reinvigorate the body. When death occurs, there is a “transcendence” in which a new body is created, manifesting itself in a different type of “vital force.”

From the perspective of folk magic, suffering often results from sorcery or witchcraft. From the Roman Catholic perspective, suffering is part of the human condition, often representing God’s “test” of one’s faith.

13. Comparison and Interaction with Dominant System: What does this system provide that the dominant system does not provide? How does this system interact with the dominant system?

There are several “dominant systems” in Calabria. There is Western biomedicine, the Roman Catholic Church, and such familial organizations as Mafia and Camorra (known in Calabria as ‘ndrangheta). The latter organizations originated to protect households against greedy landlords.

The Feast Day of Saints Cosma and Damian

We visited the town of Riace on September 25 to participate in a three-day feast honoring the Saints Cosma and Damian (*Cosimo* and *Damiano* in

Italian). It was also our intention to document gatherings of Rom (also Roma or Romani) who participate in the festivities. The two holy physicians lived in the region of Cilicia, Turkey in the 4th century CE, and some of their followers, most of them Byzantine monks, arrived in Calabria around 1000 CE. According to legend, however, Cosma and Damian themselves once sailed to an area near present-day Riace, coming ashore and instructing a local shepherd to build a church. Another tells of how the physicians converted to Christianity, much to the consternation of the Romans who depended upon their healing ministrations. The physicians were urged to drop a few seeds before the statues of the Roman deities, promising them that this would save them from the wrath of temple authorities. Cosma and Damian refused and, as a result, were secretly beheaded in a distant field. According to the legend, their faith was so strong that they picked up their heads with their hands, and walked several meters singing Christian hymns before they expired. Thanks to stories of this nature, and subsequent claims of miraculous healings, they were canonized by the Vatican.

The central ritual of the feast is the journey of the statues of the physician saints, along with a procession of devotees, from Riace’s Church of San Nicola di Bari to a smaller church (the Sanctuary of Cosma and Damian approximately a quarter of a mile away). The Church of San Nicola di Bari, where the statues of the doctor saints Cosma and Damian are housed, is ornately festooned with vibrantly colored paper called *paratu*, on the church’s walls, arches, and ceiling. Parishioners and devotees enter the church and approach the statues for blessings. Some brought their children whom they lifted to touch the base adjoining the effigies. Others came with *ex votos*, special devotional replicas of body parts, made from wax or bread. These devotions represent the parts of the body either healed by the saints, or about which those believers had prayed to them.

A vendor told us that people requesting a healing often purchased a replica of the ailing body part. The wax effigy would be placed at the feet of the statue as an offering. When we asked if there were any wax *ex votos* of phalluses, the salesman explained that they were only made for witchcraft, primarily in coastal cities in the Locride, and that he did not have any. He did not remember seeing them, though in his youth, he knew of witchcraft practices. The lack of contact with witchcraft or magical practices was typical in the area, although

a member of our group's family also recalled hearing about this practice. Someone in our group commented that perhaps there were no phalluses, because curing sexual dysfunctions is beyond the purview of the saints. In any event, the man selling *ex votos* lamented that too few people were buying them and that it would likely be his last year selling them at this feast.

The statues remain in the Church of San Nicola di Bari all year, except when they are transported to the Sanctuary of Saints Cosma and Damian for the duration of the feast. The Church of San Nicola di Bari is also known as Riace's Matrix church or the Mother church. The route between the church and the sanctuary was lined with booths selling *ex votos* and other religious items.

During the closing ceremony they are returned to San Nicola di Bari. While attending a service at the church, several people placed *ex voto* offerings at the base of the statues, and children were positioned at their feet, or touched them, presumably for blessings or good luck.

A hand carried caravan later took the statues through the town to their ordained sanctuary, a smaller church built and named in honor of the saints. The procession of the statues through Riace involved dynamic participation by several thousand parishioners, devotees of the cult of the saints from other towns, and Rom who played a visibly distinct and traditionally separate role in the feast. Parish priests, followed by church members and volunteers, carried the caravan and led the procession, which was accompanied by a choir, brass band, and police. People attending the feast, but not formal participants in the ceremony,

Rom primarily convened near the sanctuary of the saints. Since most of the Rom were already assembled closer to the destination point, they preceded the assembled procession. One of our photographs clearly shows a group of Rom at the very head of the procession, followed by a line of police that separated them from the other members of the procession (priests, a choral group, non-Romani community members, and visitors joining the procession).

Scattered throughout the procession were men with large wooden staffs, or *paranze* (singular is *paranza*). The *paranza* was used in a popular martial art of southern Italy, especially in Sicily and Calabria, first seen in the Middle Ages. The ancient name for the stick is *paranza*, but has evolved to become a sign of command, called *capo bastone*, which can be roughly translated as "chief cane" or "chief stick." This name was transmitted to the

'Ndrangheta, or Calabrese mafia, in which the holder of the stick is the *capo*, or mafia boss (English, 1993). In the setting of this feast, however, each man holding a *paranza* was simply the head of his Rom clan.

One of the Rom explained that his clan was from Gioia Tauro, a city on the western coast of Calabria. He mentioned that there would normally be many more participants from his group, but that many of his compatriots stayed behind to mourn the death of a clan elder. Those that did come to Riace were festively engaged in the feast. Some were dressed in colorful costumes, and many danced tarantellas and played tarantella music on traditional instruments.

Three instruments that we identified were the *tamburrello* (a type of tambourine), the *organetto* (a traditional accordion), and the *zampogna* (an instrument very much like a bagpipe, with five pipes of uneven length and a double reed).

The tarantella has Greek origins, apparently being related to the orgiastic rituals of Dionysus, the god of wine. Tarantella was also a type of trance performance used by women as an idiom of psychosocial distress. A common folk belief about the tarantella is that it was induced by the bite of the spider *Lycosa tarantula*. More recently, it has evolved into a folkloric dance. The musicians are known to adapt to the dancers, adjusting the tempo as it seemed appropriate. Most of the performers are women, who dance ecstatically until, exhausted, they collapse (supposedly cured). This behavior could be interpreted as a socially approved outlet for women whose self-expression and emotional expression is often muted by local customs. The dance is also popular among Rom, whether or not it is attributed to a spider bite (English, 2000). Customs related to this dance must have changed throughout the course of history, as we saw as many men dancing as women.

One of the authors (RG) returned to the Riace feast the following year to further document the role and customs of Rom at the Riace feast. He interviewed church and community leaders as well as Roma participants and filmed the feast procession. Special attention was paid to the Rom and Sinti (two divisions of the Romani) dancing the tarantella.

Don Pino Strangio, a priest and church leader in the province stated, "The spirituality of the Rom and the Sinti is simple, immediate as well as very intense. It is intense in the expression of the various languages and it is particularly expressed in some moments, among which

dance is one of the most important. Through dance they express the desire to unite with the divinity with their own body, with their own feelings, with their own being. Here in Riace the Rom and the Sinti dance in front of the statues of Cosimo and Damiano to symbolize their union with the divinity.

In Galante's short film, *A Devotion with a Dance Step / Una devozione a passo di danza* (Galante, 2007) he summarized, "the remnants of two ancient cultures, one farming and one gypsy, once again meet in the sacred space of devotion. The spirituality of the Roma people is simple, immediate and very intense in the expression of the various languages among which dance and music are the most important. Through dance they express the desire to unite with the divinity, with their own bodies, their feelings, their own beings... Dance in front of Saints Cosimo and Damiano is to symbolize their union with the divinity. Their language is symbolic, made up of gestures where the body language prevails over the verbalism of the prayers."

Don Pino described some features of Rom and Sinti devotion including the offering of their children to Cosimo and Damiano by raising them as an offering to the statues of the saints. The children are dressed with the colors used to represent the Saints; blue is the color representing devotion to Saint Damiano, who was a chemist, and green is the devotional color for Saint Cosimo, who was a doctor. Those who get dressed in the Saints' colors want either to release themselves from a vow or to ask Cosimo and Damiano for a blessing (Galante, 2007).

Another feature of the Rom spirituality is expressed through the offering of locks of hair, especially for grace and the blessing for marriage or engagement (Galante, 2007). One Romani's (Rom's) invocation revealed the emotional tensions and hope for her home's safety that she brought to her prayer during the feast, "Oh St. Cosimo that I be able to pay you a visit every year... first of all let my daughter walk...secondly, I ask that you grant me a great favour, you who have already granted me a great one... Oh St. Cosimo, it is a year that I do not place a pan on the burner (a custom of the Rom when there is a death in the family)...To whomever is responsible for the misfortune of my son, that within the year they may pay the same price...Remember what they did to my house...that they never enjoy grandchildren, that they never enjoy children, that they never enjoy any of their family" (Galante, 2007).

Indigenous Healing Tradition in Calabria, Italy

Jacopo Arrigotti, an Italian musicologist, described Riace's feast of Saints Cosimo and Damiano as a rite divided into three phases: 1) waiting for the procession, 2) outgoing procession, and 3) returning procession. Three main social groups take part at the rite: 1) the local community, under the guide of the Church; 2) pilgrims coming from the mountains of the hinterland; and 3) Roma communities, coming from all Calabrian provinces. The unique symbol of the saints is then the pivot for at least three main ritual structures, which are expressed in a variety of performative activities. Singing is a priority in pilgrims' ritual. The pilgrimage ends in the main church, in front of the statues. Music-based performances are the very final act of the pilgrimage.

The Roma community is characterized by *tarantella* dancing. Secular dancing is viewed as a vehicle for social meanings, but also as sacred dance in front of the saints, which involves altered states of consciousness (Arrigotti, 2003).

As well, members of the local community of ethnic Italian Calabrese take on an ancient tradition using altered states of consciousness. Members of this group use prayer and dream incubation (in Italian, *l'incubazio*) to commune and communicate with the saints for healing in the Matrix church the night before their statues are removed for the procession to the chapel where they will stay for three days. This follows a tradition "in ancient Rome, at the temple dedicated to Castor and Pollux, the spot where physicians swore their ethical oath to Aesculapius, the sick often slept on the floor of the sanctuary. The divinity would appear to them in a dream, either granting them a cure or indicating a healing path. With the affirmation of Christianity, in place of the pagan temple, a basilica was erected, dedicated to the thaumaturgic Saints Cosma and Damiano; in turn, the ancient cult and its rites became somehow Christianized" (informant, Galante, 2007).

The doctor saints Cosma and Damian are considered to be protectors of the Rom community. Hence, Romani maintain profound reverence for them, and passionately participate in the feast. On a wall of the sanctuary is a beautiful fresco of Zefferino, beatified by the Roman Catholic Church to someday be the only canonized and sainted Rom. This permanent image of a holy Romani added fervor to their activities in the celebration.

On the day of the procession to the sanctuary, two members of our group had video cameras. We

separated several times, but always found each other. Going off the main road we went up the side of a hill where several Rom were waiting. We followed an elderly woman who spoke of a “short cut” to a local cemetery. One member of our group spoke in Italian to this Roma woman, noting that she “crossed” herself whenever our colleague mentioned the saints. Despite the merchant’s earlier lamentation about poor sales that year, we observed numerous *ex votos* being placed at the feet of the statues of the saints both while in the church and during the procession. The *ex votos* were removed after just minutes to accommodate more *ex votos*.

As the statues in the procession approached their destination, rambling past the multitude of *ex voto* booths on their way to the Sanctuary of Cosma and Damian, the crowd appeared to be in a frenzy of excitement. Many Rom played and danced tarantella in the piazza in front of the sanctuary. We worked our way into the crowded church while the statues were still in front of the piazza.

At last the statues entered the sanctuary backwards, allowing Cosma and Damian to face the processional crowd that accompanied them to it. The crowd pulsed with elation in a courtship of the sacred and the profane, whereby tarantella music and dance welcomed the statues of the saints to the church. *Ex votos* continued to be placed on the statues and were taken off just as quickly. People continued to lift children up to the statues while several priests received confessions in as much “privacy” as a filled sanctuary can offer.

While this is an ancient rite of a Calabrese village, there was certainly an international flavor to the day. We met several African priests who were part of the Church of Nicola di Bari, and who took part in the procession. There were also a number of African vendors selling wares along the procession route, as well as many Afghans, some of whom we met, living in the town sanctuary.

In his book, *Old Calabria*, generally regarded as one of the finest travel books in the English language, Norman Douglas (1915/2001) commented that “A foreigner is at an unfortunate disadvantage; if he asks questions, he will only get answers dictated by suspicion or a deliberate desire to mislead” (p. 72). At the same time, Douglas felt that Calabrians were the “ideal prey for the quack physician; they will believe anything so long as it is strange and complicated” (p. 73). Insofar as the clergy are concerned, Douglas added, “they can keep people at a consistently low level of intelligence” (p.

73), and “the intense realism of their religion is what still keeps it alive for the poor in spirit” (p. 74). Nevertheless, Douglas felt that the land itself had healing properties. He wrote, “A landscape so luminous, so resolutely scornful of accessories hints at brave and simple forms of expression; it brings us to the ground where we belong; it medicines to the disease of introspection” (p. 333).

Our experiences in Calabria, these many decades since Douglas’ writing, indicate that the same quaint picture of the land and its people cannot be painted. We found that Calabrians embraced ancient rites and traditions but also were adaptive to embrace the influx of modernization and social change. Locals we met were extremely hospitable and keen to inform us about the more obscured aspects of their surviving traditions, and as well, many were informed about issues of their country and world.

The Shrine of Madonna dello Scoglio

During our 2003 sojourn through southern Italy, we paid two visits to the Madonna dello Scoglio shrine at Santa Domenica di Placanica in the hilly coastal region of Eastern Calabria. We had heard of Fratel Cosimo, who leads a grass-roots spiritual community in the area, and who has gained an international reputation as a devout visionary. During our visits, we attended two evening worship sessions and were able to meet Cosimo and interview several members of his volunteer staff and congregation.

Cosimo Fragomeni was born in 1950. From an early age, he was a dedicated Roman Catholic. As a boy, he was frail and suffered frequent bouts of illness. Nevertheless, his faith endured as he continued a pious life, punctuated with hermitic periods in the nearby hills. At the age of 18, Cosimo reported four visions in which the Virgin Mary, standing on a rock or *scoglio*, appeared to him. During the first of these visions, in 1968, the Madonna instructed him to build a shrine at its current location “to bring people closer to God.”

Fratel Cosimo is thought by local informants to be spiritual heir of San (Saint) Pio as Fratel Cosimo’s Marian visions started in 1968, only months before Padre Pio died. Saint Pio, was a priest popularly known as Padre Pio from Campagna, another region of southern Italy who was acclaimed for his spiritual gifts that included stigmata, healings, prophecy, and bilocation. He died in 1968 and was canonized in 2002 by the Vatican.

Several informants showed their affinity with Saint Pio to members of our group when we were

invited into their homes. One elderly woman wore a gold pendant of Saint Pio; another elderly woman had a needlework portrait (approximately 4' by 4') of Saint Pio which she proudly hung over her bed. A woman in her 30's had an altar in her house devoted to Saint Pio. Shortly thereafter, Cosimo began building this shrine, which he named Madonna dello Scoglio (Madonna of the Rock), using funds from local donations. Cosimo also began to lead prayer and devotional sessions for pilgrims who placed their faith in his visionary experiences and messages. Cosimo had little formal education and no seminary training or even Bible study; however, he was admitted to the lay order of the Franciscan brothers and was given the title of "Fratel."

In the following years, the shrine grounds and facilities have been expanded to accommodate increasing numbers of pilgrims. A foundation has been established to channel donations into projects to expand the shrine. Most saliently we noticed the simplicity of the shrine's angular construction (made from concrete and sheet metal), and the spartan nature of the pews, which were plastic chairs arranged into linear rows, with gravel aisles. The focal point of the shrine is the Madonna dello Scoglio itself: a life-sized white marble statue of Mary set within a rock that is roughly 12 feet (about 3.6 meters) high. Here, supplicants come to pray and touch the sacred rock through the metal fencing in which it is immured.

A small chapel with a slender spire sits just to the side of the shrine. A highlight of this chapel is a stunning painting of the Madonna that follows Fratel Cosimo's description. Apparently, the artist had painted the body of the Madonna according to the suggestions given him by Fratel Cosimo and was about to begin with the face, but he found himself unable to paint it. He claimed that he was blocked from further work. He put the painting aside, but when he re-embarked with a new canvas he still could not depict the face. Discouraged after a third attempt, he consulted Fratel Cosimo who replied, "Don't worry, the Madonna will think of it." The following morning Cosimo came back and found the painting completed. However, the artist denied having worked on it during the previous evening, concluding that it was Heaven's work. In any event, the resulting painting is regarded as an object of special devotion.

We were told that Fratel Cosimo and a community of about 60 volunteers preside over bi-weekly devotional services that attract anywhere from several hundred to over one thousand pilgrims. Special

Masses are held from June to October, and we were informed that nearly 50,000 people attended a special Mass in May 2003. During the winter months, services at the shrine begin at 3:00pm, and during the summer at 4:30pm. The average service lasts about four hours and involves singing, praying, recitation of the rosary, and testimonies, and concludes with a sermon and prayer from Cosimo.

During the early part of the service, Cosimo holds private meetings with 100 individuals, 90 of whom have scheduled an appointment by phone, and the remaining 10 of whom are chosen by lottery at the shrine. An ecclesiastical visitor attended during one of our visits, whom we were told came for another religious ceremony in the neighborhood. By chance, we found out that the honored ecclesiastical guest was staying at our hotel, which gave us an opportunity to tell him about Fratel Cosimo. They had a personal meeting the day before the service, after which the guest expressed his conviction that Fratel Cosimo did indeed lead a mystical life, which is why he came to the following day's service. Fratel Cosimo's superiors in the Roman Catholic Church have forbidden him from conducting formal "healing" sessions, but he is allowed to pray with afflicted individuals.

Indeed, Fratel Cosimo does not claim to be a "healer," nor is healing the focus of his work. Rather, the core of his message, as relayed to us by several members of his congregation, is that one must "open one's heart to Christ," which is best done through prayer. Of central importance is the belief that spiritual growth is more important than physical healing; if physical healing follows, it is a sign of the deeper "miracle" in one's heart. Regardless, many people come to Madonna dello Scoglio to seek help for physical ailments and relief from emotional distress.

Suffering seems to be a prominent theme in Cosimo's sermons as he contends that it is an important part of spiritual growth. He points out the suffering of Jesus and the sorrow of Mary, both of which brought light to the world. He asks his followers to make changes in their hearts through the endurance of their own suffering. Often, he alludes to his own trials in God's work, such as spending time with distressed pilgrims. We noticed that Cosimo often shed tears as he led the congregation in prayer and reciting the rosary.

Another feature of this community is its undogmatic approach to belief and practice, a factor that

attracted criticism from Roman Catholic officials. Fratel Cosimo's "doctrine" does attend to the conventional roles of Mary, Jesus, God the Father, and the Holy Spirit. However, as described by a member of the community, Mary is seen as an intermediary "who takes you by the hand to God." Another depiction of Mary was as the "temple of God." Congregants pointed out that Cosimo is not dogmatic in his approach. Rather, he emphasizes prayer as the primary vehicle for opening oneself to God beyond ritual prescriptions. Although the ritual activities at Madonna dello Scoglio are in accord with Roman Catholic practice, they are much less formal.²

Some of our informants expressed their attraction to Cosimo and to his brand of simplicity. Their enthusiasm bespoke a kind of "getting down to the basics" devotion, something they found liberating. For example, we chatted with a couple from Switzerland, "Hans" and "Bertha," who frequently visited Madonna dello Scoglio. Hans expressed his enthusiasm for worshipping at the shrine because in his daily life as a corporate executive, he could not discuss his spiritual feelings and beliefs with his colleagues. For him, coming to the shrine was like "breaking out of the cage of mundane everyday life." Moreover, his wife professed that she was a "tried and true Protestant," yet, for her, Fratel Cosimo's message transcended the division between denominations despite a Catholic bias. As a result, she now prefers to simply refer to herself as "a Christian."

Following Cosimo's sermons, congregants typically lined up in procession, often with their children, to receive his blessings. At these times we noticed that many congregants, mainly women, would beckon aloud for his attention, excitedly calling his name, and sometimes waving their hands or scarves, eager to make eye contact with him or receive some gesture of acknowledgment.

Occasionally, we witnessed individuals collapse on the ground, mildly convulsing. According to René Laurentin (1988), the French theologian well known for his expertise of visionary and supernatural phenomenon, these collapses are probably a sign of the "Holy Spirit's" work in those people, some of whom attest to experiences of deep liberation. The phenomenon differs from mere hysterical collapse, which can also occur. It was apparent that the majority of congregants adored Fratel Cosimo and that many of them were deeply moved by this physical presence and proximity as well as by his public messages. Cosimo, however, eschewed any sense of

celebrity, instead projecting pronounced meekness and piety, one of sincerity of purpose in his dedication to the Divine.

This type of relationship is suggestive of Cosimo's public role as a charismatic leader. Charles Lindholm (1992) has described charisma simply as "a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he or she is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with special power or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities" (p. 289). The notion of charisma also embodies a sense of intensified emotion and excitement, the extreme case evidenced in the euphoric episodes we witnessed. Cosimo did not engage in any ecstatic or overtly manipulative behavior that we noticed; however, he was certainly viewed by congregants as a truly exemplary person, blessed with divine powers.

In this regard, Cosimo does not resemble the stereotypical charismatic leader. Rather, his charismatic properties emanate, arguably, from his embodiment of central Catholic values and imagery. His personage also encompasses the metaphorical image of Mary "the nurturing mother," with whom he has a history of visionary experiences. Some congregants told us about Cosimo's reputed ability to bi-locate. These rumors, as well as the many reported healings associated with the shrine, add to his reputation as a vessel for the Divine.

Although we found no adequate scientific or clinical data supporting the healing phenomena, these stories are prevalent in the lore surrounding Fratel Cosimo and Madonna dello Scoglio. Many people that pray and consult privately with Cosimo appear to achieve some degree of emotional comfort and alleviation of distress. Because psychological dispositions are concomitant in somatic states, the "lifting" of distress can have positive physical affects, and vice versa.

Bertha told us that she has collected several cases of healings attributed to the Madonna. Two of these involved severe medically diagnosed heart disease. One case was a boy with a deformed spinal column. Another was a woman whose mental condition had not responded to 13 years of psychotherapy. One was a woman with multiple sclerosis who is now able to walk.³ The final case was a personal friend of Bertha's, a man who had been injured in a fitness center. Allegedly, he made a complete recovery following a visit to the shrine.

During the first of our two visits to the shrine, a member of our group "won" the lottery and was able to meet privately with Fratel Cosimo. He talked with

Cosimo about his daughter who was suffering from a congenital disease, and also asked Cosimo to bless a medal of St. Christopher. Our colleague was dealing with his own health problems at the time and when he mentioned this, Cosimo gave him a personal blessing. After the meeting, our colleague was tearful but expressed a sentiment of deep relief. Six months later, his health problem had become more severe but eventually stabilized. His daughter's condition steadily improved and she became pregnant after being told by her medical specialists she would not be able to have children of her own because of ovarian failure due to chemotherapy. He also related that his niece had taken the St. Christopher's medal to her boyfriend's father who was hospitalized for a terminal disease. Apparently, he began to feel better after receiving the medal, and the nurses were surprised by his rebound. However, this improvement was only temporary.

The growing visibility and popularity of Fratel Cosimo and his work at Madonna dello Scoglio can be examined with respect to the broader issues of modernization and social change in Calabria. The region is one of the poorest in Italy, and has only recently embraced modernization. We often heard complaints from adults and elderly people in the small villages of the Calabrian interior, that young people were moving to coastal towns and cities marked by better jobs and "more action." We also learned that new immigrants were arriving illegally in Calabria from Eastern Europe, Africa, and South Asia. These changes, among others, contribute to the escalating uncertainties and anxieties about life, family, and community, and about the changing ideas and practices that new populations entail.

New religious movements often play a significant role in allowing people to find ways to cope with the changes that immigration catalyzes. The Madonna dello Scoglio is not a new religious movement, but may be best seen as a Christian renewal, deeply rooted in traditional Catholic faith. On the one hand, it offers a strong and growing spiritual following that is reinvigorating community and communal networks in the face of the fragmentation of traditional communal life. On the other hand, belief, practice, and faith alone remain familiarly and intelligibly Catholic, yet also have been disassembled and recreated into a more simplified system in a resonant and relevant form.

One possible interpretation points to the emphasis that Cosimo places on suffering, devotion,

and transformation. Cosimo and his message exemplify these pillars of the human experience: that suffering is important for spiritual growth, prayer is the vehicle for opening one's heart, and transformation and healing are the potential results of prayer. These are basic themes in the lives of people amidst change, and Cosimo embodies them, possibly in ways not articulated in mainstream venues of religious practice. The fact that Roman Catholic authorities in the Vatican do not recognize Cosimo as a visionary has not impeded the growth of the community. Rather, we got the sense that the immediacy and relevance of interacting with Fratel Cosimo was a significant attraction for the congregants at the shrine.

After both of our visits to Madonna dello Scoglio, we were fortunate to be included in a small group of people who were invited to have a private audience with Cosimo. On one occasion, he blessed a crucifix worn by a member of our group. He began to weep, saying that he was aware that the owner of the crucifix endured considerable suffering. On the other occasion, he was told that a member of our group visited and wrote about folk healers and visionaries in various parts of the world. He asked, "Did you find that these people had anything in common?" Our colleague responded, "They all spoke of the common bonds that unite humanity, despite their different worship practices." Fratel Cosimo immediately replied, "That is my belief as well."

Edward Lear, the humorist, was a notable visitor who adored Calabria. He wrote, "No sooner is the word uttered than a new world arises before the mind's eye—torrents, fastness, all the prodigality of mountain scenery—caves, brigands..., horrors and magnificence without end" (in Noland, 2001, p. 69). Our group found communion with Lear's comments, especially after interviewing townspeople who still practice folkloric healing, participating in the Feast Day of Cosimo and Damian, and spending two evenings with Fratel Cosimo. Perhaps the land itself is the origin of the healing for which the folkloric remedies and religious rituals are credited.

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Notes

1. This investigation was supported by the Chair for the Study of Consciousness, Saybrook Graduate School and Research Center, San Francisco, CA.
2. Upon our return to the United States, a member of our group found Fratel Cosimo listed on a website titled, "Dangers of False Apparitions," apparently put together by a devoted but conservative Roman Catholic "defender of the faith."
3. The woman left her wheelchair in a special room at the shrine that houses reminders of the previously disabling conditions of worshippers.