

Between Roots and Horizons

*Memory, Song, and Cultural Life in an Arbëresh
Community*

By

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Arbëresh Community

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Table of Contents

Foreword	xi
Introduction	xiv
Methodology	xvii
The Arbëresh: A Living Diaspora in Southern Italy, with a Focus on Portocannone.....	1
The Meaning of the Journey	4
Echoes in the Cradle	8
Where Memory Takes Roots.....	18
Where a Village Returns from Silence	22
The Village That Knew Before the Child Arrived	26
From Womb to World: A Psychoanalytic Reading of Village Life	29
Rituals of Union	38
Intimate Song Traditions: Lullabies, Courtship, and Lament	59
Folktales.....	174
Rooted Memory: A Plant Perspective on Arbëresh Songs, Rituals, and Identity	209
Arbëresh and Albanian Songs in the Repertoire of Silvana Licursi	265
Mother Tongues, Daughters, and Loss: Female Transmission of Arbëresh in Portocannone	313
What the Roots Teach: An Arbëresh Pedagogy of Personal Growth.....	343

Conclusion: The Voice That Remains	367
Glossary	373
References and Other Sources.....	380

Foreword

Between Roots and Horizons is a work of memory, recovery, and cultural listening. It invites the reader into the Arbëresh world of Portocannone not as a distant object of study, but as a living cultural and emotional landscape, shaped by language, song, ritual, family memory, and the delicate persistence of inherited forms of belonging.

What makes this book particularly meaningful is its double movement. On the one hand, it gathers and preserves a fragile heritage: lullabies, courtship songs, children's games, ritual practices, oral memories, and everyday gestures that might otherwise disappear with the passing of generations. On the other hand, it interprets these materials through a reflective and interdisciplinary lens, bringing together anthropology, psychoanalysis, cultural memory, and what may be called a poetics of rootedness.

The Arbëresh culture explored in these pages is not presented as a static remnant of the past. It appears instead as a living and complex form of identity, marked by migration, adaptation, continuity, and loss. Portocannone becomes more than a village. It becomes a symbolic space in which history is sedimented in voices, names, songs, rituals, and family narratives. The book shows how a community remembers itself not only through official history, but through domestic spaces, women's voices, children's play, mourning practices, courtship rituals, and the language of everyday life.

One of the most moving aspects of this work is the attention given to transmission. The songs and memories collected here are not simply cultural documents. They are acts of passage. They move from one generation to another, often through intimate and embodied forms: a mother's voice, a lullaby sung at the cradle, a story told in the family,

a ritual repeated without needing to be fully explained. In this sense, the book reminds us that culture does not survive only in archives or institutions. It survives in gestures, in rhythms, in words remembered imperfectly but lovingly, in the emotional structures that bind individuals to a shared past.

The psychoanalytic dimension of the book is especially important. It allows the reader to understand cultural memory not only as historical recollection, but as a psychic inheritance. The Arbëresh language, songs, and rituals carry desires, fears, ideals, wounds, and forms of belonging that exceed the individual. They reveal the existence of a collective inner world, shaped by displacement and by the long effort to preserve identity in a new land. Through this perspective, the book shows that the loss of a language or a ritual is never only a cultural loss. It is also the weakening of a symbolic universe, of a way of feeling, imagining, and being in the world.

At the same time, *Between Roots and Horizons* is deeply attentive to the natural world. Its reflections on roots, plants, land, birds, and seasonal cycles open the Arbëresh experience to a broader ecological and symbolic imagination. The vegetal metaphors that appear throughout the text are not decorative. They help us understand how identity takes root, how memory grows, how culture reproduces itself, and how fragile traditions can nevertheless resist disappearance. The image of roots is therefore not a nostalgic return to a closed origin, but a way of thinking about continuity, nourishment, and transformation.

The title itself, *Between Roots and Horizons*, expresses the central tension of the book. Roots evoke origin, memory, land, family, and belonging. Horizons suggest movement, migration, longing, openness, and the future. The Arbëresh experience lives between these two poles. It is rooted, but not immobile. It remembers, but it also transforms. It carries the past, but it does not simply repeat it. This tension gives the book its emotional depth and its contemporary relevance.

In a time when minority languages and local cultures are increasingly threatened by homogenization, migration, and global forms of forgetting, this work performs an important act of preservation. Yet it does more than preserve. It asks what these traditions can still teach us. It asks how memory can become a resource for the present, how fragile cultural forms can resist disappearance, and how personal inheritance can become a form of knowledge.

This is also a book about love: love for a mother, for a language, for a village, for a world that is disappearing but not yet lost. Its scholarly value lies precisely in this combination of intimacy and interpretation. The personal dimension does not weaken the research; rather, it gives it depth, urgency, and ethical force. Barbara writes from within an inheritance, but also with the distance necessary to analyse it. This gives the text a rare quality: it is both testimony and reflection, both archive and meditation.

Between Roots and Horizons reminds us that cultures live when they are spoken, sung, remembered, and reinterpreted. It shows that even the smallest forms of oral tradition can contain an entire world. To read this book is to enter that world with care, and to recognize that what is fragile may also be profoundly resilient.

Mara Borelli

Introduction

This is a journey into the Arbëresh culture of Portocannone, a small Albanian-speaking community in Italy, historically surrounded by Latin-speaking villages. It is not simply an encounter with a language, but with the cultural world that this language preserves and transmits, and with the deeper psychic structures of a community shaped across generations. To write and research this work has meant engaging with a collective past that is not entirely gone, but continues to live in memories, practices, and shared forms of expression, even as it becomes increasingly fragile.

If you choose to follow this journey, what is offered is not only a set of linguistic or anthropological tools, but an invitation to enter a different way of experiencing the world. Language here is not treated as a neutral system of communication, nor as a purely technical object of study. It is understood as a living repository of culture: it shapes thought, organizes perception, and gives form to action. Through language, a community preserves its ways of interpreting reality, relating to others, and imagining the future.

For this reason, the weakening or disappearance of a language cannot be seen as a purely linguistic loss. What is at stake is an entire cultural and psychological universe. When a language fades, we do not lose only words, but ways of thinking, feeling, and being. Conversely, to rediscover a language rooted in a living tradition is to rediscover a culture and the inner structures that sustain it. It allows a reconnection with inherited meanings, while opening new possibilities for reinterpreting them in the present.

This book also proposes to be read through a psychoanalytic perspective. From this point of view, language can be understood as a space in

which collective experiences are sedimented, where memories, traumas, and desires are transmitted across generations. The Arbëresh culture of Portocannone, preserved through its language, can thus be approached as the expression of a shared psyche. Its gradual erosion may be interpreted as a form of cultural repression, while its recovery resembles a process of bringing back into consciousness what has been silenced or forgotten.

At the same time, this work offers an anthropological glimpse into Portocannone in the 1920s, a period in which everyday life was deeply structured by rituals, beliefs, and communal practices. Through the memories and testimonies of Maria Elsa Musacchio (my mother), Assunto Nicola Musacchio (her father), and Costantina Musacchio (her mother), a vivid portrait emerges of a community in which customs gave meaning to the most significant moments of life. These voices do not merely recount personal experiences; they reveal a collective way of living, feeling, and understanding the world.

What takes shape in these pages is therefore not simply a record of the past, but a form of cultural memory. The descriptions of marriage rites, mourning practices, religious festivals, and everyday gestures reveal a dense symbolic universe, in which each action carried social and emotional significance. This makes the book not only a historical testimony, but also an anthropological document, showing how identity is constructed through ritual, kinship, faith, and oral tradition.

This is particularly important in the case of Portocannone, whose Arbëresh heritage has allowed it to preserve, across centuries, a distinct cultural identity. To tell these stories means safeguarding an intangible heritage made up of words, gestures, beliefs, and practices that might otherwise disappear. It means recognizing that history is not only found in official narratives, but also in domestic spaces, communal ceremonies, and spoken memory.

For this reason, this book calls to be told and retold. It preserves voices that would otherwise risk being lost, and allows future generations to encounter a past that is not distant or abstract, but lived and embodied. In a time in which local cultures are increasingly threatened by processes of homogenization and forgetting, documenting and interpreting these memories becomes an act of responsibility. To narrate them is not only to honour those who came before, but also to offer a deeper understanding of roots, identity, and the historical experience that continues to shape the community today.

Methodology

This book adopts an interdisciplinary, interpretive, and autoethnographic methodology to examine the Arbëresh culture of Portocannone through language, oral tradition, family memory, ritual practice, song, and narrative. Its purpose is not to offer a detached or exhaustive ethnographic account of the community, nor to establish a definitive linguistic edition of its oral texts. Rather, it seeks to explore how cultural identity is remembered, embodied, transmitted, and transformed across generations.

The study is grounded in an ethnographic corpus developed by me and Maria Elsa Musacchio. This corpus includes lullabies, courtship songs, children's rhymes, ritual songs, narratives, folktales, descriptions of village customs, family memories, linguistic expressions, and testimonies relating to everyday life in Portocannone. A substantial part of this material was first documented and published in *The Space of Memory: Language and Culture of Portocannone, a Small Albanian Village in Italy: Gjaku Jonë i Shëprishur* (The Albanian Diaspora) (Musacchio & Renzi, 2012). The present volume returns to that earlier corpus, expands it through additional testimony and materials, and offers new psychoanalytic, pedagogical, ecological, and cultural-memory interpretations.

The texts reproduced in this volume should therefore not be understood as provisional reconstructions or as materials gathered from secondary anthologies. They derive from direct ethnographic work and from forms of transmission rooted in family and community memory. Their value lies not only in the verbal content of the songs and narratives, but also in the contexts in which they were remembered, repeated, explained, and preserved.

The study pays particular attention to the testimony and research of my mother, whose documentation of songs, local expressions, ritual practices, and memories of village life provides a fundamental basis for the volume. Her work is not treated merely as a collection of factual information. It constitutes an archive of lived cultural knowledge, shaped by participation, memory, kinship, and long familiarity with the symbolic world of Portocannone.

Further testimony derives from the recollections of Assunto Nicola Musacchio, Costantina Musacchio, and other members of the family and community whose memories illuminate the social and emotional structures of village life. These testimonies reveal not only what occurred, but how events were understood and remembered. They make visible a world in which birth, marriage, mourning, religion, work, gender relations, kinship, and communal belonging were organized through shared rituals and forms of speech.

Positionality and Autoethnography

The research is also explicitly autoethnographic. As the daughter of an Arbëresh woman from Portocannone, I do not approach this material as a neutral observer standing outside the culture under examination. I write from a position of inherited proximity, partial distance, and return.

This position is central to the book. My relationship with the material is familial, emotional, linguistic, and intellectual. Many of the songs and memories entered my life through Maria Elsa Musacchio, yet the cultural world from which they emerged was not fully available to me from the beginning. The research therefore developed through a process of return: listening again, asking questions, reconstructing contexts, and recognising forms of inheritance that had previously remained only partially conscious.

Autoethnography makes it possible to treat this personal involvement not as a methodological weakness, but as a source of situated knowledge. It allows the individual experience of return, loss, and rediscovery to become a point of entry into wider questions concerning diaspora, minority language transmission, cultural memory, maternal inheritance, and belonging.

At the same time, the book does not assume that personal memory is transparent or complete. The researcher's position is acknowledged as partial. Proximity creates access, but it also requires reflexivity. For this reason, the volume distinguishes between remembered experience, ethnographic testimony, historical reconstruction, and interpretive analysis. It does not claim to speak for all Arbëresh communities, nor does it present the experience of one family or one village as universally representative.

Portocannone is approached as a specific cultural location, shaped by its own history, dialectal forms, rituals, memories, and relations with neighbouring communities. The interpretations proposed here arise from that situated context.

Oral Tradition as Cultural Knowledge

The oral texts included in this volume are treated as forms of cultural knowledge. Songs, lullabies, rhymes, ritual expressions, and folktales are not approached as marginal or decorative survivals. They are understood as active vehicles of memory and transmission.

Oral traditions preserve ways of perceiving the world that may not appear in official historical records. They contain assumptions about gender, childhood, work, kinship, courtship, death, religion, the body, the land, and the relationship between insiders and outsiders. Their

importance lies not only in what they say explicitly, but also in the emotions, values, and structures of belonging that they transmit.

A lullaby, for example, may function simultaneously as an act of care, a form of linguistic transmission, an early experience of rhythm and attachment, and a repository of collective imagery. A courtship song may express desire while also revealing communal expectations concerning marriage, reputation, gender, and family. A mourning ritual may structure private grief while transforming it into a shared and culturally intelligible experience.

The method of this book therefore reads oral texts on several levels. Attention is given to verbal meaning, imagery, repetition, tone, social context, symbolic structure, and the conditions of performance. The aim is not to reduce each song or narrative to a single explanation, but to show how oral forms can contain multiple layers of cultural significance.

Linguistic Form, Transcription, and Translation

The Arbëresh texts presented in this volume derive from the ethnographic work of Maria Elsa Musacchio and me, and reflect the linguistic forms preserved in the oral culture of Portocannone. Dialectal features, local vocabulary, and oral variations have been retained where they are significant to the identity and transmission of the texts.

Because oral traditions do not always circulate in one fixed form, variation is treated as an inherent feature of the material rather than as evidence of corruption. Songs and rhymes may change slightly across speakers, families, performances, and generations. Such variation reveals the living nature of oral culture.

The volume does not seek to impose an artificial uniformity where the ethnographic materials preserve local or performative differences. At

the same time, consistency is maintained in the presentation of titles, translations, explanatory glosses, and recurring terms.

Translation is treated as an interpretive and ethical act. The English translations aim to make the materials accessible while preserving, as far as possible, their emotional force, imagery, rhythm, and cultural meaning. Literal translation alone is not always sufficient, especially where expressions depend on dialect, kinship structures, ritual usage, humour, insult, plant imagery, or local social knowledge.

Where no direct equivalent exists, the translation is accompanied by contextual explanation. The aim is not to domesticate the texts completely for an English-speaking readership, but to allow the reader to encounter their specificity. Some linguistic and cultural meanings necessarily remain resistant to full translation, and this resistance is acknowledged rather than concealed.

Public-Domain and Traditional Materials

The songs, rhymes, lullabies, and oral narratives reproduced in this volume belong to the traditional cultural heritage of the Arbëresh community and are in the public domain. They are not reproduced from copyrighted literary or musical editions.

Where the book discusses a particular singer or performance, the object of analysis is the interpretation of traditional material rather than ownership of the underlying song. The traditional status of the corpus is distinguished from any separate rights that may attach to a particular commercial recording. The volume does not reproduce protected sound recordings, musical arrangements, or modern copyrighted adaptations without appropriate attribution.

The purpose of including these materials is scholarly, documentary, interpretive, and preservative. Their presentation acknowledges the

community from which they emerged and the individuals through whom they were transmitted.

Memory as Source and Object of Study

Memory occupies a double position in this book. It is both a source of information and an object of analysis.

Oral recollection is not treated as a neutral recording of the past. Memory is selective, affective, relational, and sometimes contradictory. It may preserve some elements vividly while silencing or transforming others. Rather than disqualifying oral memory as unreliable, the book considers its selectivity to be culturally meaningful.

What individuals and communities remember, repeat, idealise, fear, or omit can reveal how the past continues to function in the present. Memory shows not only what happened, but what has remained emotionally and symbolically important.

For this reason, the study does not attempt to eliminate every ambiguity or variation in testimony. Instead, it reads remembered experience in relation to historical context, family transmission, ritual practice, and cultural change. Where historical claims can be independently documented, they should be supported by appropriate archival or scholarly sources. Where the material derives from oral testimony, this provenance is made clear.

The book therefore distinguishes between historical documentation and remembered cultural experience while recognising the value of both.

Interdisciplinary Interpretation

The interpretive framework brings together anthropology, psychoanalysis, cultural memory studies, diaspora studies, feminist approaches to transmission, pedagogy, and plant humanities.

Anthropology provides tools for examining rituals, kinship, social organisation, religious practice, courtship, mourning, birth, work, and communal belonging. It allows everyday actions to be understood not as isolated customs, but as practices embedded in a wider symbolic order.

Cultural memory studies illuminate the ways in which communities transmit the past through song, gesture, repetition, narrative, place, and family practice. This approach is especially relevant in contexts where official archives preserve only a limited account of minority experience.

Diaspora studies help articulate the tensions between origin and settlement, continuity and adaptation, roots and movement. They make it possible to understand Arbëresh identity as neither static nor purely nostalgic, but as a form of belonging repeatedly negotiated across time and place.

Psychoanalytic concepts are used as interpretive tools rather than as diagnostic claims about a people. References to attachment, repression, projection, desire, loss, mourning, inheritance, and symbolic formation are employed to explore how historical and cultural experiences may be lived emotionally and transmitted across generations.

Accordingly, the expression “collective psyche” is used in this book as a heuristic concept. It refers to the shared images, narratives, emotional patterns, values, fears, rituals, and symbolic structures through which

a community gives meaning to experience. It does not imply that all individuals within the community think or feel in the same way.

Feminist analysis is important because much of the cultural transmission examined here takes place through women's voices and domestic practices. Mothers, daughters, grandmothers, singers, storytellers, and mourners often preserve language and memory through acts of care that may remain absent from formal histories.

Plant humanities provides a further interpretive perspective. The recurring images of roots, seeds, soil, flowers, cultivation, growth, fragility, and seasonal renewal are examined not merely as literary ornaments, but as structures through which cultural survival and transformation are imagined. The vegetal dimension of the book allows identity to be understood as a living process: rooted yet changing, dependent yet resilient, inherited yet continually renewed.

Pedagogy and Cultural Transmission

The book also adopts a pedagogical perspective. Pedagogy here is not limited to formal schooling. It refers more broadly to the processes through which human beings learn to belong, remember, interpret, care, and transmit.

Songs, rituals, stories, bodily practices, and forms of silence all participate in education. They teach individuals how to understand relationships, vulnerability, authority, family, loss, gender, work, and the natural world. Such teaching is often implicit. It occurs through repetition, participation, observation, and emotional attachment rather than through formal explanation.

The concept of a vegetal pedagogy emerges from this framework. It describes a model of learning based on rootedness, relationality, patience, adaptation, interdependence, and growth. The aim is not to

idealise tradition, but to ask what forms of personal and collective understanding may still be drawn from cultural memory.

The pedagogical approach adopted here remains critical. Traditions can sustain belonging, but they may also transmit exclusion, gender inequality, prejudice, and restrictive expectations. Cultural continuity is therefore not understood as simple repetition. It involves interpretation, selection, transformation, and ethical responsibility.

Ethical Principles

The methodology is guided by an ethics of care, attribution, and cultural responsibility.

The individuals whose memories form part of the study are treated not simply as sources, but as participants in the transmission of cultural knowledge. Their contributions are acknowledged, and distinctions are maintained between the researcher's interpretation and the testimony from which it arises.

The book seeks to avoid presenting Arbëresh culture as exotic, homogeneous, or frozen in the past. It recognises internal variation, historical change, linguistic fragility, and the complex relationship between preservation and transformation.

Particular care is required when discussing expressions of prejudice, gender hierarchy, violence, or exclusion. Such materials are neither concealed nor presented as timeless truths. They are situated within their historical and cultural contexts and examined critically.

Preservation, in this study, does not mean romanticisation. To preserve a cultural form is also to create the conditions for questioning and reinterpretation.

Scope and Limitations

This book is a situated study of Portocannone and of the family and community materials available through the ethnographic work of Maria Elsa Musacchio and me. It does not claim to provide a comprehensive history of all Arbëresh communities or a complete linguistic survey of Arbëresh varieties.

Its conclusions arise from a particular corpus and a particular history of transmission. The interpretations offered are therefore intended as contributions to an ongoing conversation rather than as definitive statements.

The interdisciplinary nature of the work is both a strength and a limitation. Bringing together anthropology, psychoanalysis, pedagogy, cultural memory, and plant humanities makes it possible to reveal connections that a single disciplinary approach might overlook. At the same time, no one of these fields is treated exhaustively.

The purpose is not disciplinary completeness, but interpretive depth.

Methodological Aim

The central methodological aim of the book is to listen closely to the forms through which culture survives.

These forms are often small: a lullaby remembered by a mother, a phrase preserved in dialect, a ritual gesture, a children's rhyme, a story repeated within a family, a plant name, a lament, or a melody carried across generations. Yet such forms may preserve an entire structure of feeling and belonging.

By bringing these materials together, the book seeks to document an endangered cultural inheritance while also asking what this inher-

itance can mean in the present. It understands Arbëresh culture not as a relic, but as a living and changing field of memory, language, emotion, and interpretation.

The method therefore mirrors the central image of the book itself. Cultural identity exists between roots and horizons: grounded in inherited language, land, family, and memory, yet open to movement, change, critical reflection, and renewed forms of transmission.

The Arbëresh:

A Living Diaspora in Southern Italy, with a Focus on Portocannone

The Arbëresh are an ethno-linguistic minority living in Southern Italy, whose origins trace back to Albanian populations that migrated between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries in response to the Ottoman expansion in the Balkans. Forced to leave their homeland, these communities settled across regions such as Calabria, Sicily, Basilicata, Molise, and Puglia, where they established villages that, over time, became spaces of cultural preservation and transformation. Today, more than five centuries later, the Arbëresh continue to exist as a distinct cultural presence within Italy, maintaining elements of their original language, traditions, and social structures while engaging with the surrounding Italian context.

For those unfamiliar with the Arbëresh, it is important to understand that they are not simply a historical remnant, but a living community in which identity is actively produced and transmitted. Their language, Arbëresh, is a variant of Albanian rooted in the medieval Tosk dialect, enriched over centuries through contact with Italian and local dialects. It is spoken not only as a means of communication but as a symbolic marker of belonging, often used within the family and community as a way of preserving continuity with the past. Alongside language, the Arbëresh maintain a rich cultural heritage composed of oral traditions, songs, rituals, and social practices that structure everyday life.

One of the most distinctive aspects of Arbëresh identity is the preservation of the Byzantine rite within a predominantly Roman Catholic environment. Religious ceremonies, liturgical language, and ritual

practices contribute to reinforcing a sense of difference and continuity, linking present-day communities to their historical origins. At the same time, Arbëresh identity cannot be reduced to a set of fixed traditions. It is continuously negotiated through processes of adaptation, interaction, and reinterpretation, reflecting the dynamic nature of diasporic existence. The Arbëresh inhabit a space between past and present, between origin and settlement, where memory and transformation coexist.

Within this broader cultural landscape, the village of Portocannone, located in the region of Molise, offers a particularly meaningful case through which to explore Arbëresh identity in its lived form. Known in Arbëresh as Portkanuni, the village is one of the communities where the language and traditions have been preserved with notable vitality. Here, cultural identity is not confined to formal occasions but permeates everyday life, from family interactions to communal events. The use of Arbëresh language, the performance of traditional songs, and the enactment of rituals all contribute to sustaining a shared sense of belonging.

Portocannone is also characterized by its strong connection to collective memory and oral tradition. Stories, lullabies, and poetic expressions play a central role in transmitting cultural knowledge across generations, embedding identity within affective and symbolic forms. Community events, such as festivals and religious celebrations, provide moments in which this identity is publicly expressed and reaffirmed. Among these, the well-known festival of St. Leo stands out as an example of how tradition, ritual, and collective participation intersect, creating a space where past and present are brought into dialogue.

At the same time, Portocannone reflects the broader tensions experienced by many minority communities. Processes of modernization, migration, and linguistic shift pose challenges to the transmission of

cultural practices, particularly among younger generations. Yet these challenges do not simply lead to loss; they also generate new forms of engagement and reinterpretation. The Arbëresh identity in Portocannone is therefore not static, but continuously evolving, shaped by both preservation and change.

To understand the Arbëresh, and Portocannone in particular, is to recognize the complexity of cultural identity as a lived experience. It is not defined solely by origins or traditions, but by the ways in which individuals and communities relate to their past while navigating the present. In this sense, the Arbëresh offer a compelling example of how memory, language, and everyday practices can sustain a sense of belonging across time, even in the context of displacement and transformation.

The Meaning of the Journey

I am the daughter of Elsa, an Arbëresh woman, and many of the poems, lyrics, and songs gathered in these pages were passed on to me in written form. For a long time, however, the world from which they came remained at a distance. It was only in the final years of my mother's life that I began to move closer to that cultural horizon which had, until then, felt partly foreign to me. What began as an intimate gesture, listening more carefully, asking questions, paying attention, gradually became a deeper need to understand. I found myself drawn toward this inheritance not only emotionally, but also intellectually, seeking to approach it through both an anthropological and a psychoanalytic perspective.

This book is the result of that movement. It is a journey into the Arbëresh culture of Portocannone, traced through my attempt to rediscover my mother's roots and, in doing so, to confront my own. It is not simply an effort to reconstruct memories, nor merely a description of a place. Rather, it is an immersion into a living cultural world, one that continues to exist not only in space, but in the inner life of those who belong to it.

Through my mother's experiences, I began to perceive something that exceeded the limits of individual biography. What emerged was the presence of a shared psychic dimension, a collective inner world shaped over time and transmitted across generations. I came to understand that what I was encountering was not just my mother's story, but the expression of a deeper continuity, the psychic life of a community.

At the centre of my reflection lies the idea that every culture carries within it a collective psyche. I do not mean this as a metaphor, but as a

way of describing how a community organizes its experience, how it thinks, feels, remembers, and gives meaning to existence. This collective psyche is composed of recurring images, shared fears, inherited beliefs, narrative forms, and emotional patterns that persist through time. It manifests not only in what is explicitly told, but also in what is repeated without question, in what is silently assumed, in what feels natural and self-evident to those who inhabit that world.

In Portocannone, I found that this shared psychic life is preserved and transmitted through everyday practices. It lives in lullabies whispered across generations, in folktales and myths of origin, in family stories and in the continuous act of storytelling. These are not simply cultural artifacts. They are formative structures. They shape the way individuals come to interpret reality, relate to others, and position themselves within the world. They offer a framework through which life and death, belonging and difference, are understood. They provide coherence, orientation, and a sense of place within a broader symbolic order.

My journey into my mother's roots thus became, gradually, an entry into this shared psychic space. The memories she carried, of childhood games, of evenings spent listening to stories, of her father's voice transmitting narratives treated as unquestionable truths, revealed themselves to me not as isolated recollections, but as expressions of a deeper network of meaning. Each story, each image, each gesture was part of a web that connected the individual to a collective past and situated her within a shared identity.

I became increasingly aware of how central the notions of origin and lineage were within this world. Surnames, genealogies, family histories were not merely markers of social organization, but fundamental elements in the construction of the self. To know where one comes from was not a matter of simple curiosity. It was a way of grounding one's existence. Identity was formed through these narratives, through the comparison between families, and through the recogni-

tion of belonging to a lineage. In this sense, the individual was never fully separate, but always embedded within a wider symbolic and emotional structure.

Language, too, revealed itself to me as a crucial element in this process. It is not only a means of communication, but the very form through which thought takes shape. The Arbëresh language of Portocannone carries within it traces of an ancient past, preserving sounds, meanings, and structures that influence how reality is perceived and expressed. Through language, I could see how the collective psyche maintains its continuity, how it survives, adapts, and is transmitted even as the external world changes.

At the same time, my mother's experience of leaving Portocannone made visible the fragility of this equilibrium. Displacement brought with it not only a change of environment, but also a profound sense of disorientation. Entering a different linguistic and cultural context meant confronting unfamiliar values, expectations, and ways of relating. The difficulty was not limited to communication. It extended to the very structure of experience. The feeling of being other revealed the distance between different collective psyches, each internally coherent yet not immediately translatable into the other.

And yet, what struck me with equal force was the persistence of the original cultural imprint. Even after long periods of absence, the return to the village was experienced by my mother, and in turn by me, as a return to something deeply rooted within the self. Memory did not appear as a distant recollection, but as something alive, capable of re-emerging through gestures, emotions, and words. I came to recognize how certain elements, such as a lullaby resurfacing unexpectedly, could reactivate an entire world of meaning. In such moments, it became clear that the collective psyche continues to operate beyond conscious awareness, linking past and present in an ongoing chain of transmission.

What began for me as a personal exploration gradually took on a broader significance. This work became an attempt to make visible that underlying continuity, to recognize and articulate the structures that sustain the inner life of a community. The Arbëresh culture of Portocannone emerged, in my understanding, as a space in which memory, language, and identity are inseparable, and where the psyche of a people is continuously formed and reformed through shared narratives and practices.

In writing these pages, I have come to see that this journey is not only about my mother, nor only about a specific cultural context. It is also about the ways in which human beings are shaped by what precedes them, by what is transmitted often without being named, by what lives within them as both inheritance and possibility. Through this process, I have not only sought to understand my mother's world, but also to locate myself within it, and to reflect on what it means to belong, to remember, and to carry forward a living cultural and psychic legacy.

Echoes in the Cradle

Lullabies are often regarded as simple songs meant to soothe a child to sleep, yet their cultural significance reaches far beyond this immediate function. They belong to the earliest layer of human experience, a space where language, emotion, and relationship are first intertwined. In the quiet intimacy of the cradle, the voice of the mother or caregiver becomes the child's first encounter with rhythm, meaning, and belonging. For this reason, lullabies can be understood as one of the most subtle and powerful vehicles through which a culture is transmitted.

To listen carefully to lullabies is to enter a culture at its most intimate level. Unlike formal narratives or public rituals, lullabies are not performed for an audience but for a single listener, often at the threshold between wakefulness and sleep. In this liminal space, words, sounds, and gestures acquire a particular density. They do not merely communicate information; they shape the emotional and symbolic environment in which the child begins to exist. Through repetition, melody, and tone, lullabies introduce patterns of feeling, expectations of care, and implicit understandings of the world.

In this sense, lullabies can be seen as early structures of psychic formation. They carry images, fears, hopes, and cultural values in a form that is not yet fully conscious, but deeply internalized. The child does not "learn" them in a rational sense, yet absorbs them as part of the earliest experience of being held, comforted, and addressed. What is transmitted is not only language, but a way of inhabiting language, a particular relationship to sound, rhythm, and meaning.

Within the Arbëresh context, lullabies take on an even more significant role. As a minority culture shaped by historical displacement and

long processes of preservation, the Arbëresh world relies on forms of transmission that are often informal, embodied, and continuous. Lullabies, in this framework, are not marginal expressions, but central practices through which cultural memory is sustained. They preserve linguistic elements that may no longer be present in everyday speech, retaining archaic forms, sounds, and structures that connect the present to a distant past.

At the same time, Arbëresh lullabies often contain fragments of collective history and shared imagination. References to migration, to loss, to protection, and to belonging appear not as explicit narratives, but as underlying tonalities, recurring motifs, or symbolic images. Even when the words are simple, their resonance is complex. They carry the weight of a community's experience, condensed into forms that can be transmitted across generations without the need for formal explanation.

The act of singing a lullaby thus becomes more than a gesture of care. It is a moment in which the individual voice connects to a broader cultural continuity. The mother does not sing only as herself, but as part of a lineage of voices that have repeated similar words, similar melodies, across time. In this repetition, the past is not merely remembered, but reactivated. The child, in turn, is introduced into this continuity before being able to recognize it consciously.

For this reason, lullabies offer a privileged point of access for understanding a culture. They reveal how a community relates to infancy, to vulnerability, to protection, and to the passage from one generation to the next. They show how language is lived rather than simply spoken, how memory is carried not only in stories but in tones, rhythms, and gestures. In the Arbëresh case, they also testify to the resilience of a cultural identity that persists through intimate, everyday acts rather than through institutional forms alone.