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Vincenzo Agnoni called *Scorzone*, 86 years old, a shepherd from Cori.
A "life story"

When Vincenzo told me about his "narrative project", I had no idea of what would have come out of it. He said, "come to my house in the afternoon after I come down from the mountain. Bring your recorder, we'll have a coffee and, I'll tell you everything a little bit at a time. So we can write the book--my diary." Checking my own diary, I found my answer to his request "Sure, I'll be glad to write your story. I already have the title: "Vincenzo Agnoni called Scorzone, 86 years old, a shepherd from Cori." He didn't give me the time to finish and added "…and soldier and prisoner…".


Nadia Truglia e Vincenzo Scorzone, aprile 2005

I met Vincenzo on April 23rd 2005. At that time, I was conducting research in the Leprini mountains to find deserted villages of agro-pastoral huts and I had been assigned Cori as a research field; a village in Lazio region, bordering the southern province of Rome. That day I went up the mountain with Massimo, the municipal employee who offered to come with me to meet Vincenzo *Scorzone*, the oldest shepherd in Cori. "A real character" told Massimo me, explaining me that *Scorzone* means 'earthworm' in the dialect of the area and that Vincenzo's family was called that because of their way of life, in close contact with the earth.
Later Vincenzo would also tell me about his family's nickname…"they called us Scorzoni"… but in his view, the meaning was to be found in their remarkable hardiness, in their thick hide like tree bark--*Scorzone* in their dialect.
It was about half past ten of that beautiful, sunny morning when I climbed the mountain to meet "my Ogôtemmeli (a Mali religious leader)" as I called him later – revealing the whims and the idealism of my younger anthropologist self, but also Vincenzo's extraordinary memory and reliability, his tendency not to ignore negative or "disgraceful" aspects (to use his words), his familiarity with sheep-breeding and finally, his charming expressiveness. These qualities that made me reminded me of the "social, technical, intellectual, moral and physical characteristics" recommended by Marcel Griaule for the choice of the informer.
Vincenzo knew of my arrival that day and when he saw me, he came towards me warmly taking my hand. "What now, miss?" he said and gave me his credentials.
84 years old, he had seen many things in his life but what he had witnessed as a prisoner in Germany during the Second World War could not be compared with anything else. Catching

me off guard he immediately started to tell me at length about episodes and anecdotes of that period. I tried with difficulty to bring the conversation back to my primary topic of interest: huts, villages, shepherd, and transhumance. He answered my questions with exceptional precision and a wealth of details, but then he began to speak about Germany. I listened with curiosity and a desire to know more, but then I brought him back to Cori. We were both so absorbed in our conversation that at first, I didn't even pay attention to the fact that Cori was "my" village of agro-pastoral huts to bring to the researchers' notice. The village of *Le Campore* would in fact be chosen, along with other four villages, to be the object of a more in-depth study.

I went back to Cori many times and, even if the people I met and interviewed were different, the Scorzoni brothers, Vincenzo and Tommaso stood out as key informers. The interviews with Vincenzo always followed the same pattern: I asked questions about the village and Vincenzo answered them-- but only after obliging me to listen and especially, to record the most important episodes of his four years of imprisonment.

Vincenzo Scorzone, maggio 2005

I started to collect a great deal of exceptional information for my research. In the meantime, I took note in my diary of the impressions pertaining to the relational/emotional developments of the research. In my diary, in the page of 2nd August 2005 I read:

A while ago, coming back from his journey to Germany, where he took his two nephews to see the four concentration camps (now museums) of his imprisonment, Vincenzo showed me a piece of creased paper on which someone (I think the keeper of a museum –maybe in Fullen) had written the title of a book. It was obvious that Vincenzo wanted me to help him find that "journal of imprisonment" as he called it and, with it, the piece of his life that he continuously speaks about.

That evening I ordered the book via Internet and, after a long wait, the book arrived. So yesterday evening I called Vincenzo and arranged our meeting for the next day, without telling him I had the book. I wanted to surprise him.

It's strange, somehow he knew I would bring him that book today…as soon as he saw me he hugged me and pointed to the table where he had put a heap of figs telling me that "he too had a surprise for me".

I gave him Adalberto Alpini's book and he read the title, "Il Sordomuto dell Lager" (TheDeaf-mute of the Concentration Camp). He burst into tears because the word ' deaf-mute' opened the door to some of his memories. Vincenzo was well acquainted with the protagonist of the story; they were fellow prisoners in the same sleeping quarters of the camp. Vincenzo told me many episodes of that period and, as usual, I asked him something about the huts. Before letting me go, he gave me another present: a wooden stool, "like the ones used in the backyard of the huts" he told me, adding that "when I saw it the other day I thought of you, that you could put it in that museum". Then, after a long pause, he added "I am happy to be your friend". I simply answered "me too".

I have quoted this entire page because it shows how our relationship changed in the meanwhile.

A few months passed and, even though I still concentrated on my primary research about the huts, I did not consider the hours spent listening to his stories of Germany as a necessary evil. At some point, I became interested in what Vincenzo wanted to express and I wondered why he was telling this all these things. What he was really trying to communicate to the world?
As a certain consequence of reading Alpini's book, (a laborious read, he later confessed) he started to ask me, at first shyly and almost as a joke, but then with increasing seriousness and frequency, to write the story of his own imprisonment.


Vincenzo durante le riprese al Museo delle scritture, aprile 2006

I understood that I couldn't refuse, nor wanted to, even if I had no specific skills for collecting life stories. The feeling of responsibility alternated with moments of excitement when I remembered that being an anthropologist means, as I have read and heard so many times, to "give a voice". I just needed to find the right way for both of us. In the meantime I started to record "some important facts", as Vincenzo asked me to do.
On December 10th 2005, in the afternoon, after he came back from the mountain, we started our work. We had agreed on a sort of 'plan' to follow a chronological order: his childhood, schooling and so on, but emphasizing his military service and imprisonment. I felt confident of the outcome of this plan, given the success of my interviews up to that moment. Vincenzo is a superb narrator; you open a circle by asking him about something and he speaks at length, digressing often, but in the end, he always closes the circle.
During that first longed-for session, Vincenzo should have told me about his childhood and his parents. When I came back home in the evening I felt bewildered and confused: he had kept me for three hours, recounting his youthful love stories, especially his relationships with two German girls after the liberation.
He stayed in Germany for six months after the liberation because of an impassable bridge, but he was no longer a prisoner. He worked, he met new people and he went out with girls more "open" and "uninhibited" than the ones he had met at home. Several interviews later, I realized with surprise that his stories went back to that period in Germany following his imprisonment. At the beginning, I thought he wanted to verbalize the details of the violence he had seen and experienced. I had even seen him crying while he told me about the risk of contracting TB, which he had barely escaped, about his loss of 45 kilos, about the summary executions… Instead Vincenzo was telling me romantic and passionate love stories. So I played for time. Where was he going? What did he want to tell me?
"Vincenzo, I thought you wanted to tell me the details of your imprisonment…why are you telling me these things?"
Each time he answered *"Because those were the most beautiful days of my life."*
And to my great astonishment, I understood that by "beautiful days" he meant not only those after the liberation and before returning to Italy, but all those spent in Germany. "Beautiful days" didn't mean peaceful days to him---periods of time that are filled with the same daily occupations. He meant the days when you lived intensely – and relive in your memory – filled with events that draw the listener's attention.

I think that now Vincenzo's 'liberation' comes from the awareness of having lived and seen, during those four years in Germany, things that not everyone can talk about, not even scholars. "I could teach history to young people," he says.
The emotional tension and the depth of Vincenzo's experiences during his imprisonment left their mark on him. Paradoxically, their memory has become a source of freedom now. A few days ago, he told me:
"When I cannot sleep, when I'm all alone in the mountains and there is no-one to speak to, I start thinking about those years, those people, the friends that I buried…I think about how they were, what they said, how I made their tombs…I think about all these things and it helps me to bear up…"
The meeting with Vincenzo *Scorzone* had an interesting development a few months later. In autumn of 2005, I was involved in a research project to create the documentary base for the Museo delle Scritture in Bassiano, the village in the Leprini area where Aldo Manuzio (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aldo_Manuzio) was born. I was in charge of one of the three rooms, the one dedicated to personal writing and autobiography.
In April 2006, Vincenzo Padiglione and I contacted a group of students of Museum Anthropology and Communication Ethnography at the University "La Sapienza" in Rome. We involved them in a training program to learn the ethnographic practices of reflexive writing, to research experience of local autobiographic writings, and to study the contextualization of relationships between writing and orality in the narration of one's own life.
Along with the authors of autobiographies, we were interested in the elder citizens of the Lepini mountains, who wanted to give the museum a testimony of their life experiences. Their narrative skills make them master storytellers and invaluable carriers of know-how that is implicit in wide-ranging discourse and the oral reporting of experience.
For this reason, I organized a meeting between the students and Vincenzo Scorzone who, in 2006, came to Bassiano and, in the picturesque "graffiti room" (an ex-prison whose walls are covered in graffiti written by the prisoners), donated his memories of imprisonment, captured once and for all in a video diary. On that occasion, he didn't just give the museum his testimony; he also inspired a project of preservation and valorization of oral sources.
It is precisely the ritual and expressive dimension of his personal history donation that revealed the strategic importance of the museum framework as an essential requirement to enable this type of initiative. To be invited to give a precious gift of oneself in a "temple of culture", to be received warmly and with sensitivity, made the "temple" more familiar; an important place, yet one where you can recognize yourself. A museum is a place to record significant experiences, and everyday memories of the 20th century—often wrongly ascribed minor significance
The meeting with Vincenzo and the power of his personal history on video convinced us of the opportunity to create a room in the museum that is not just a collection of autobiographies but a real "Memory Room", as it was called in the project proposed later by Vincenzo Padiglione, Antonio Riccio and myself.
Together with traditional autobiographies (autobiographies, diaries, letters and so on), this Room will collect the memories that are "self narrated" by people who live in prevalently oral contexts. These collections can be considered as true *narrated autobiographies:* voices, images, videos, objects and impressions expressed using alternative modes of traditional personal history and storytelling.
The *Memory Room* is also intended to be a *meeting place* for the narrators and the people who want to listen and learn. Moreover, it is a protected space where it is possible to donate personal histories and individual recollections to the collective memory.

To carry out this initiative, we are building a permanent setting-laboratory of visual anthropology in the museum, that plans monthly meetings during which the local narrators, previously selected and invited to participate in the Project, will be called to give their story in the "Memory Room" where it will be shared, preserved and safeguarded.
The idea of the project arose from the meeting between the need for preserving (historical) memory and the desire to give a voice to this memory.
My meeting with Vincenzo Agnoni called *Scorzone,*86 years old, shepherd, soldier and prisoner found an unexpected but not accidental development in that afternoon when he came to Bassiano to tell us the story of his turbulent war years.
Vincenzo turned out to be a powerful narrator, whose presence captivated all of his listeners for over six hours. He was capable of interlacing episodes from near and far, personal experiences, local contexts as well as national and global historical settings. He gave his narrative a rhythm and force that revealed his inclination to sharing and sociability. I also believe that in telling his story, he healed his own sorrows; in recounting past traumas, he alleviated them. But in particular, his steady dedication, both cognitive (not forgetting) and affective (remembering), reveals a remarkable ethical dimension. It suggests that the memory, explained publicly and leaving its trace (both as performance and as a video registration), could redress the wrongs of the history, make up for the harshness of life, and be a type of justice that denounces the criminals or glorifies the unknown hero.